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“They Make Me Feel Like Me”:  
Doc Martens and the Women Who Wear Them

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## Abstract

Doc Martens have been a part of the fabric of counterculture since their classic 8-up 1460 boots first started rolling off the production line in Woolaston, Northants, in April of 1960. For decades they have been an iconic piece of subcultural clothing, moving through different scenes such as punk, skinhead, indie and metal with ease, but very little has actually been written about these shoes in an academic setting. While studying subcultures for a post-graduate degree in Dress and Textile Histories I became acutely aware of the lack of representation of women in these studies, and as I further developed my interest in this ubiquitous yet unique brand it became apparent that there was almost nothing written about women and Docs, despite the fact that women now make up well over half of their consumer base. In my own life I had become aware of how deeply connected my female friends and colleagues were to their Docs and so decided that this was something that needed further research. As such, this thesis will examine the nature of the relationship between women and their Doc Martens by taking information from in-depth interviews that I conducted with 28 female participants, ranging from teenagers to women in their 60s. Through a new materialist lens and using feminist research praxis I will explore the theory of waveless feminism as a theoretical framework through which to understand the unique community of female Doc Martens wearers, and discuss how three different elements of Docs: History, Empowerment, and Love, combine together to create a truly meaningful user-object relationship that has managed to buck the trend of consumption and disposal that is so prevalent in the post-modern era and situate Doc Martens as emotionally durable objects.

This thesis addresses the gap in scholarship not only of Doc Martens as a whole, but of the unique relationship between women and their Docs. Much has been written on women and shoes, but this mostly focusses on high heels, high fashion, and fetishism – there is far less written about women and their everyday shoes. This is also true of new materialist studies, where there is much written about experimental fashion practices, but not so much on how new materialism can be applied to the everyday. As such, this thesis will contribute to the landscape of fashion studies by using the microcosm of Doc Martens to weave together feminist, new materialist and fashion theory to analyse and understand how women live in and alongside their clothing throughout their lifetime, creating meaningful and profound relationships with non-human actors.

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... To my mum. For more than I could possibly say.

... And to Doc Martens. For remaining so interesting, and so important.

*This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director (Research Ethics), email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz). "*

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## Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the relationship between women and their Doc Martens in which feminist research methodologies combine with a new materialist lens in order to ascertain what it is about Doc Martens that has made them so special to the participants who were interviewed by myself over the course of 2019. I come from an archaeological material culture background and have moved somewhat sideways into fashion studies, and so the pre-occupation of this thesis is coloured by this: I am predominantly interested in the *why* of wearing clothes – why humans choose to wear the things they do. There are two questions that need to be answered to explain the specific motives for this thesis

- 1) Why Docs?
- 2) Why women?

The obvious answer to both questions is that nobody has done research at this intersection before. There is plenty of work on women and shoes, but it is rarely about specific brands, and where it is, it is almost always high fashion brands most well known for their high heels. The context is sex, desire, fetishism – not the everyday. Indeed, at the 2015 blockbuster Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition *Shoes: Pleasure and Pain*, there were only a handful of pairs of shoes listed as women's that were not high heels or ballet shoes. Interestingly, in this exhibition about shoes at the world leading museum dedicated to showcasing (particularly British) fashion design, there was not a single Doc Marten on display. But why the interest in Docs in the first place? I myself came to Doc Martens relatively late, though I had always been envious of the women who I saw as brave enough to wear them. Already conscious about my body, I felt that Docs cut off my legs to make me look even shorter, and that the clumpy boots made me look less 'feminine' than I was comfortable with. To my delight, I came across a pair of oxblood high heeled Docs in 2013, and they became my go-to shoes for conferences. I felt powerful in them. So, when the opportunity arose to do an MPhil in fashion studies, I thought it might be interesting to do some research on the brand and whether my feelings towards my Docs were singular or universal. I had a vague sense that they were associated with subcultures but not a lot of specific knowledge – and was surprised to find that there was actually very little written about Docs full stop, never mind Docs and women. There are 3 books about Doc Martens, all written by the same historian (Martin Roach) specifically for the brand. They are useful as a general history of Docs, but as with any commissioned history, need to be taken with a pinch of salt. There was almost nothing about the *meaning* of Docs – which seemed extraordinary considering how ubiquitous they now are. There are plenty of chunky soled boots out there – so why choose Docs? There are other shoe brands with heritage – so why these ones? I set out to answer these questions by interviewing 28 women who wear, or have worn, Doc Martens at some point in their lives.

And why women? While undertaking preliminary research in the spheres of subcultural studies, it quickly became clear that there remains a lack of research into women in subculture. It is important to state that this thesis is not about subculture specifically, but nevertheless Doc Martens have been associated with subcultures for almost their entire life as a brand. As such it was vital that I understood the landscape of subcultural studies, and with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Angela McRobbie, Sarah Thornton, and Samantha Holland) there remains a comparative lack of space dedicated to researching women in subculture and counterculture. This, along with the lack of attention paid to women and everyday shoes mentioned above, encouraged me to fill that gap with

my own research. So, this project is about women – and I must point out that when looking for research participants it was made clear that ‘women’ included anybody who identified as female.<sup>1</sup>

I began with semiotics as a starting point, which is the way I had been taught to think about fashion: a system with readable signs and signals, starting with Roland Barthes’ *Système de la Mode*. While this way of viewing clothing has been the status quo for decades, it does have its limitations. This fashion system, and the writing that has described it, continues to “look at bodies as surfaces onto which a visual image or immaterial concept is projected – a condition form of aesthetics and taste trained and cultivated at most fashion schools” (Bruggeman 2018, 7). However, the more participants I spoke to the more obvious it became that it would not suffice to say that these women were simply *projecting* meaning on their Doc Martens – rather, the meaning was embodied within them. The answers provided to questions I asked pointed to a much deeper and more profound relationship between Doc Martens and their wearers than I was expecting. I knew that they were popular shoes, but I had not imagined just how influential they had been in so many women’s lives. The intricacies of these unique relationships between object and woman have come to be at the centre of my research findings, and have inspired my one and only research question:

*‘What is the nature of the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them?’*

In answering this question, I hope to pinpoint what exactly it is that makes Docs so special to the women who wear them. Clearly, it is about more than culturally prescribed meanings (though these are still important). It is also about embodied meaning living within the object itself, and unique to the individual. With this in mind I began to apply a new materialist lens to my research using Jonathan Chapman’s 2005 book *Emotionally Durable Design* as a starting point. This gave me the space to consider emotion, meaning, and embodied feeling in the human-object relationship, which can be missed in purely semiotic readings of clothing. This is not to say that semiotics is not still useful in my research – indeed, the historical associations of Doc Martens discussed in this thesis rely almost entirely on semiotics. But it is still important to seek out other ways of interpreting the meaning of clothing, and new materialism has given a further dimension to my understanding of the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them. New materialism will be defined further later on in this chapter, but in brief, it seeks a repositioning of the human among non-human actors and came about as a result of a collective dissatisfaction with the linguistic turn of semiotics as the singular way to address and explain the material reality of existence for humans and non-humans alike (Sanzo 2018). Applied to fashion, I understand this to take the form of an interest in the raw materials of clothing, the tactility and nature of garments, the interplay between those garments and the human body, and the emotion embodied in of clothing. Bruggeman writes that:

*“A new materialist approach to fashion is a way to revalue living, experiential bodies, as well as the materiality of fashion objects – including the interaction between the physical body and material objects. As such, embodiment is an important part of new materialism.”*  
(Bruggeman 2018, 50)

The idea of embodiment is crucial to the research presented here – Every single participant mentioned, in some way, how the physical nature of their Doc Martens impacted them. But, importantly for this thesis, new materialism goes further and holds that matter is *the key component* of lived experience, and that everything – including personality, mental and emotional state, and even consciousness itself – is a direct result of the interaction of humans and things. It is only

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<sup>1</sup> There will be no further discussion of this point because I am not prepared to debate the existence of other human beings. Trans women are women.

recently that new materialism has begun to be applied to fashion, and in most of these examples it is applied to 'high fashion' in the form of either case studies of designer brands (see Bruggeman's 2017 study on Viktor&Rolf) or fashion practitioner's projects at the boundary of art, science and fashion<sup>2</sup>. When it comes to new materialism and the everyday, Maurizia Boscagli's 2014 book *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism* does deal with clothing in one of its chapters, however she uses fiction writing as the vehicle through which to discuss everyday clothing. Though useful for this research, the paradigms are different to that of real life and so are not always applicable. As such, it is my intention that this thesis will address what lies at the intersection of new materialism and everyday clothing for women through the lens of a specific brand.

## Theory

While much of this thesis will be based on the findings from research interviews, a solid grounding in theory is vital in order to analyse and interpret the information uncovered. When deciding on a theoretical framework to structure this research around it was important to me to use theory grounded in researcher transparency, and one that allowed for the use of personal experience in the form of participant responses as embodied knowledge. With these criteria in mind it seemed an obvious choice to use a feminist theoretical framework – but which one to use? There are endless schools of thought on feminist theory, though most can be broadly fit into the 'wave' metaphor for feminism. This describes the idea that feminism has come in waves with different issues at the crux of each wave than the one that went before. Though feminism has long been academically theorised, the foundations of feminist epistemology as we know it today were laid by Alison Jaggar in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1983) and Sandra Harding in *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986), towards the end of the second wave. Both of these texts began the difficult task of classifying feminist thought into distinct taxonomies, in particular Harding's work, which split feminist thought into three categories: feminist empiricism, standpoint epistemology, and post-modernism. The influence of these texts on feminist theory has been immeasurable, however it did not seem prudent to take this categorisation as the basis for my theoretical framework. Written over thirty years ago, the landscape of feminist theory has changed dramatically since Jaggar and Harding published their research, which represents what Iris van der Tuin has called 'a second-wave feminist epistemology' typified by the dialecticism of sequential negation and progress narratives (van der Tuin 2009, 17). In her article *Jumping Generations*, van der Tuin suggests that the third wave of feminism has moved beyond Harding and Jaggar's 'field defining classifications', and moreover has moved beyond the taxonomic approach as a whole. Instead, van der Tuin argues that the third-wave has engendered a cartographical approach of relationality and non-dichotomous thinking, which serves to bridge some of the oppositional gaps that existed in the second-wave (van der Tuin 2009, 18).

For much of the course of my research I felt that third wave feminism was the most natural fit for my theoretical framework. Third-wave theory lends itself to the analysis of women in conversation, which is essentially what the interview process for collecting data was. As will be seen throughout this writing, I have attempted to position myself within my research and in relation to the women interviewed. As well as this, relationality between participants was an important theme: not because any of them knew each other, but because they felt a part of a larger group by virtue of their ownership of Doc Martens. The third-wave approach also made sense because I am of that generation. I grew up surrounded by the pop culture echoes of third wave feminism and I had

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<sup>2</sup> See Hendrickje Schimmel's 'Science and Worms' where she archived the decay of garments (Ahn 2016), or Madeleine Trigg's 2019 performance work 'Felt Me' in which members of the public were invited to turn raw wool into a felt garment whilst it was wrapped around the artist's body (Unknown 2019).

always (perhaps lazily) assumed that this was the place I slotted into. However, as my research went on, third wave theory began to fit less and less with my findings. I looked to the supposed new 'fourth wave' which has a focus on online activism and transgender rights, but this did not seem to belong to me either. Instead, I have decided to forgo the use of the wave metaphor entirely and opted to use what Alison Dahl Crossley has termed 'waveless feminism'. This theory highlights "the persistence of feminism over time, the variations in feminism, and the interaction between feminism and other movements" (Dahl Crossley 2017, 20) as an extension of abeyance theory, which was first coined by Verta Taylor as a way of analysing how social movements survive in hostile climates by focusing more on maintaining themselves than directly confronting the established order (Taylor 1989). Dahl Crossley uses abeyance theory to reassess the usefulness of the wave framework by highlighting the complex architecture of social movements, and the ways in which the wave theory not only fails to capture these complexities, but pits women of different waves against each other by failing to capture the "carry overs and carry ons" between movements (Dahl Crossley 2017, 19-20). As Dahl Crossley states:

*"To be clear, 'waveless does not mean serene or flat. Rather, in keeping with the water analogy, waveless feminism is akin to a river. Sometimes there are rapids, sometimes it is very shallow or deep, sometimes there are rocks or other obstacles that divert its course... Waveless feminism captures the sentiment that 'feminism has been not a series of disconnected upsurges but a continuous flow'."* (Dahl Crossley 2017, 20).

Dahl Crossley is by no means the first person to question the validity of the wave metaphor. As concisely described by R. Claire Snyder, one of the limitations of the wave analogy is the implication of a generational demographic, which then goes on to prop up the idea that the third wave is simply a 'rebellion' against second-wave mothers. Astrid Henry has written extensively on the generational issues of the wave framework, notably in her 2004 book *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third Wave Feminism*. In it, Henry uses Karl Mannheim's generational mapping (the idea that a new generation appears roughly every 30 years) to show that the wave model has only stuck so well throughout the years because it roughly adheres to this pre-existing principle of family, reproduction and the birth cycle: the second wave was born in the 1950s, the third wave in the 1980s, and now, the fourth wave in 2010s. The problem with this is that feminists who came to age in the late 1970s- mid 1980s, or in my case, the 2000s, are left out of the narrative and stuck between the waves (Henry 2004, 4-5). We who exist in-between are neither mothers nor daughters, and thus flounder without the certainty of that familiar (though often tense) generational relationship.

Another problem raised by several wave-sceptic feminist scholars is that the waves follow almost exclusively the work of white women, and that the fictitious cohesive generational unit always leaves out the vital contribution of feminists of colour.<sup>3</sup> The third-wave is often claimed as the beginning of a truly inclusive feminism, however many of the writers often espoused by third wave feminists as inherent to their ideals (such as Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Paula Gunn Allen) were integral to the second-wave as well. Snyder correctly states that the extraction of these authors "makes the second wave whiter than it was" (Snyder 2008, 180), which creates three problems. Firstly, it does a disservice to the second-wave by misrepresenting it; secondly, it does a disservice to the third-wave because this misrepresentation becomes the basis for a false 'rebellion'; thirdly, and by far the most important issue, is that it actively whitewashes the

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<sup>3</sup> With the notable exceptions of *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) and *Colonize This!* (2002), though the fact that both of these are anthologies specifically dedicated to feminists of colour indicates the wider issue of those writers not being given space in the predominant discourse.

history of feminism and makes it even harder for the vital work of feminists of colour to be recognised. In her 2000 book *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval describes this whitewashing of feminism as 'hegemonic feminism' (Sandoval 2000), a term which Becky Thompson has applied to the above chronology of the second wave. Thompson describes the insufficiency of this chronology in allowing for the story of multiracial feminism, which is what she describes as a 'three pronged approach' to the advancement of people of colour through: "working with white-dominated feminist groups; forming women's caucuses in existing mixed-gender organizations; and developing autonomous Black, Latina, Native American, and Asian feminist organisations" (Thompson 2010, 39). The fact that the wave metaphor struggles to accommodate non-white voices within it is reason enough to try and find another way of theorising feminism, regardless of the other issues explored here.

Another important issue raised by Henry about the wave metaphor and its conflation with the natural generational cycle is that the intentionality of feminism as a deliberate political act is lost. The wave metaphor obscures the political nature of feminism by assuming that feminists of a certain age will naturally share an identity because they are that age, rather than because they choose to do so. Henry writes:

*"To paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, one is not born a feminist but rather becomes one. What gets lost in the use of the matraphor is precisely the will behind this identification, for once feminism becomes a mother, the generation that follows her will consist (merely) of her daughters."* (Henry 2004, 7).

Finally, to link back to Dahl Crossley's waveless feminism, Henry warns of the tendency for the generational model to create reductive relationships "between women, between feminisms, and between historical periods" (Henry 2004, 6). Both authors are explicit in their belief that "a cohesive generational unit is always a fiction" (Henry, *ibid*) and thus that the wave metaphor thus cannot help but enforce this fiction, which is not helpful for feminists of any age.

Despite being the predominant discourse of feminism for the last sixty years, the actual generational caricatures that back the body of writing of second and third wave feminists had received little study until Henry's book, other than in writings where they are critiquing each other. For example, in her critique of third-wave feminism, Elizabeth A. Kelly described the caricature of the second-wave feminist thus:

*"Sometime in the 1960s, so the story goes, a bunch of angry, dour, puritanical white women set their underwear on fire in order to get better jobs. Their leaders were Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, who made everyone stop shaving their legs, wearing makeup, and caring about fashion. All the "serious sisters of the sixties and seventies" were white, middle-class, elitist and racist. They lacked the confidence and spirit of today's youth and have grown into crabby, middle aged avatars of political correctness, whose humorless view of the world cannot accommodate the fun-loving and sexy young activists of the rising generation"* (Kelly 2005, 235).

Henry explicitly states that her book would add to a project called upon by Devoney Looser "to examine what are already quite entrenched and perceived feminist generational differences and alliances" which "deserve to be further theorised now, even if they are ultimately cast out of our critical vocabulary" (Looser 1997, 33) and in doing so has paved the way for Dahl Crossley (and myself) to 'cast out' the wave model altogether.

I have found waveless feminism to be particularly applicable to my research because it gives space for the difference amongst the women interviewed but does not force any kind of reductivity in explaining those differences. I deliberately chose to interview women of all ages because I wanted to have a broad representation of female Docs wearers throughout the life of the brand, from 1960 right through to the present day. I interviewed women of different ages, nationalities, backgrounds, and beliefs, but their differences actually served to represent the continuity of the feminist movement rather than the breaks in it. Despite the considerable differences from participant to participant, there were common threads throughout each interview that showed that the meaning of Docs – much like the feminist movement itself – ebbed, flowed and changed within these women's lives, but never completely disappeared.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

In his 2010 book *Stuff*, Daniel Miller describes how many anthropologists respond to being in the difficult position between the particular and the universal by finding a middle ground in 'hypothesis testing', but posits that this leaves research lacking in depth, and actually works to further separate the particular and the universal, rather than bringing them back into conversation with and acknowledgement of one another (Miller 2010, 6-8). Miller writes:

*"The anthropology that I am committed to eschews such hypothesis testing. My problem in seeking research grants is that invariably my only real hypothesis is that I really have very little idea of what I am actually going to find when I go to conduct the fieldwork. This hypothesis has always proved correct. In going to live within another community I assume that the most important findings are going to be about things one didn't even suspect existed before going to live there. If you didn't know they existed, how could you have hypothesised about them? In my experience an inconsistent, opportunistic research student tends to be far more original and productive than consistent research students, who achieve merely what they set out to do."* (Miller 2010, 7).

Reading this helped me realise that the changes in the nature of my research were not a weakness but a strength, and that this 'inconsistent, opportunistic' approach allowed me to be more flexible, thus asking questions that previously would never have been revealed to me. I only came to understand the research question that needed asking after I had conducted my interviews, because I went in not knowing what I was going to find. When conducting and analysing the interviews it was important that these women were given the space and agency to have meaningful conversations about their relationship to Doc Martens, and for me, this meant that the only approach I could take was to employ feminist research methods. This is because feminist research praxis is, in my opinion, the most rigorous and ethically acceptable way of doing research. It has often been a problem in disciplines that use qualitative research that we feel the need to make definitions of 'good' research and thus 'good' data conform to what is usually a quantitative definition. But this research is qualitative, not quantitative, and so it is important to understand why qualitative and quantitative data cannot go by the same definitions of 'rigor'. For research to be rigorous it is usually claimed that it must be unbiased, calculated, mathematical, and able to be measured in some way against similar studies. However, the 2002 work of feminist researchers Deirdre Davis and Jennifer Dodd posits that these definitions are not suitable for evaluating to rigorously of qualitative research such as that presented in this thesis. Their work discusses "the inadequacy of applying a quantitative concept of rigor to evaluate and judge qualitative research" through the three topics of subjectivity, reflexivity and the social interaction of interviewing and claims that by far the best way to make qualitative research rigorous is to be honest about your methods, open about your personal bias and transparent in your situation (Davies and Dodd 2002, 279). Under their definition, the most

important part of conducting rigorous qualitative research is by engaging in ethical research conduct. Davies and Dodd state that:

*“Understanding ethics to involve trustfulness, openness, honesty, respectfulness, carefulness, and constant attentiveness means ethics is not treated as a separate part of our research – a form that is filled in for the ethics committee and forgotten. Ethics are integral to the way we think about rigor and are intertwined in our approach to research, in the way we ask questions, how we respond to answers, and the way we reflect on the material. An implicit part of ethical practice thus involves the acknowledgement and location of the researcher within the research process.” (Ibid 281).*

This is why I chose to engage with the use of open-ended conversational interviewing and with active listening as my conversational analysis, both of which will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. It is also why it is important for me to locate myself within my research. I am very much a part of this process, and of this group: I am a woman, a feminist, and I have worn Doc Martens for the last 6 years. I do not claim objectivity and I would not wish to because it would make the research process opaque and thus, as above, unethical.

Another problem with using quantitative definitions of rigor is the entanglement that all academic research has in what Anne Oakley called “a predominantly masculine model of sociology and society” (Oakley 1992, 31). What Oakley regards as the ‘masculine’ questions asked of interviews (how many were done, how long they lasted, whether they followed a standardised format etc.) are given precedent over the ‘feminine’ questions that might be asked (what are the social/personal characteristics of the interviewer, how did the participants feel about being interviewed, how hospitable were the participants etc.) Oakley lays out her reasons for ignoring the predominant masculine model when she (as a feminist woman) is interviewing other women and as follows:

- 1) *“Use of prescribed interview practice is morally indefensible*
- 2) *General and irreconcilable differences at the heart of the textbook paradigm are exposed*
- 3) *It becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her personal identity in the relationship.” (Ibid, 41)*

Oakley argues, and I agree, that one of the most damaging things an interviewer can do is create a hierarchical relationship in which a participant feels they cannot trust that their words will not be misused for someone else’s gain. We cannot, and should not, take this personal information without giving some of ourselves back. In the course of this research that meant, in a practical sense, honestly answering questions about myself and my opinions when asked, explaining my research as openly as I could, and adhering to the social norms that governed the place where I conducted my research. This in turn means admitting, and being comfortable with, my own subjectivity as a researcher. Nobody exists in a vacuum, and no research does either. This thesis is no exception.

## **Research Methods**

This thesis has been written using a combination of primary data (in the form of participant interviews) and secondary data (in the form of a literature review). The primary data is derived from interviews that were undertaken with 28 different women of different ages, all of whom own, wear or have worn Doc Martens at some point in their life. I did not put any age parameters on the participants (other than that they had to be older than 16 for ethics committee approval) because I

wanted to get as broad a range of life experience as possible, and also to reflect the life of the brand.<sup>4</sup> A call for participants was sent out on social media (my personal one, and several other groups I was part of due to pre-existing networks in the UK and Aotearoa New Zealand), and the interest in participating was huge. 106 women contacted me showing interest in participating, and even after cutting down the responses to just those people located in Aotearoa and the UK, there was still over 80 people. I sent out an email thanking respondents and asking them to fill in a brief survey, and then collated them into age and geographical groups to ensure that different places and ages were represented. This cut down the pool further as some people did not respond to the survey request. From there, respondents were organised into groups, and within those groups a randomiser was used to choose participants. There were originally going to be 30 participants split equally between Aotearoa and the UK, but when I arrived in the UK and got in touch with participants to plan my time in the country, one participant did not respond. 14 interviews had already been completed in New Zealand, and time and geographical constraints unfortunately did not allow me to replace the non-respondent. As such, I got back in touch with the final New Zealand participant (who had yet to be interviewed) and explained the situation. She said that she understood and was fine with not participating in order to keep the numbers even. This is how the final participant count ended up at 28.

The interviews were split between two different countries, half being conducted with participants in the UK and half being conducted with participants in Aotearoa New Zealand. For transparency, it is important to note that this came about more by accident than by design: I had completed my degree in my home country of Scotland, but came to Aotearoa to study in 2018 because there was funding available for an original research project which was hard to come by in the UK. As a result, I wanted to use my pre-existing networks in the UK to my advantage, but also wanted to investigate the role of Doc Martens in the life of women in my newly adopted country.

I asked participants if they were comfortable with me taking photos of them and/or their Doc Martens, and all obliged. I left it up to participants whether they wanted their face included, how they wanted to be posing in the photos, and if they wanted to be wearing their shoes or not. All participants were given first refusal of images and I continued take photos until I got one that each participant was happy with. These photos are included throughout this thesis in order to introduce you to participants, and to show their quotes in the context of who they are and the Docs that they own.

When it came time to choose a venue for the interviews, I essentially left it up to the participants to decide where they wanted to be. As part of the research I requested to take some photos of participants and their Doc Martens, and as such suggested that if they had a particularly large collection that their homes might be the best place to do our interview for practical reasons, though I also made it clear that if they were not comfortable with that and wanted to meet in a public space and just wear their favourite pair then that would also be fine. I interviewed women in flats, in houses, in bars, in cafes, in offices, on beaches, and in parks. One interview took place inside the Treasury Office in London, and one inside the Mitchell Library in Glasgow. We drank coffee, tea, juice, and the occasional glass of wine. We ate ice creams and smoked cigarettes. There was lots of laughter and occasionally tears. Noting these seemingly small things is a vital part of my commitment to rigorous and thus ethical research practise by following Davies and Dodd's directive of truthfulness, openness and honesty.

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<sup>4</sup> Doc Martens have been producing shoes in the UK since the 1st April 1960, making 2020 their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature, with the same questions asked to all participants but with some variation depending on the natural flow of conversation. There was a set of 16 questions that I planned to ask each of my participants but – as you can see in the transcripts – they often differed depending on the participant and our conversation. Sometimes participants went off on (very valuable) tangents, covering things in their relationship to Doc Martens that were not covered by the questions. Sometimes their responses inspired spontaneous questions from me that were relevant specifically to them and not to others. Some participants did not answer questions clearly, or at all. This is the nature of doing collaborative research interviews, or what Marianne Paget has described as a ‘search procedure’, designed to compensate for the imbalance of power between interviewer and interviewee (Paget 1983). If you consider the interviewee to be “not just a source of information, but rather a person who is constructing meaning for the researcher” (Sprague 2016, 167) then it allows the interviewee to have more agency in the process of knowledge creation. While I had my questions as a basis to start from it was made clear to participants that this was a conversation rather than a formal interview. This open-ended style of interviewing is well-established within feminist research methodology and there are countless writings on the advantages and challenges.<sup>5</sup> Reinharz noted that open-ended interviewing “allows researchers to make full use of differences amongst people” (Reinharz 1992, 18-19), and this use of difference is what grounds my research methodology in feminist theory, turning knowledge production into an actively feminist praxis. Black, gay, feminist scholar Audre Lorde was particularly important in her elucidation on the key role of difference in feminism, herself being at the intersection of several layers of oppression under patriarchy. She wrote:

*“As women, we have been taught either to ignore our difference, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean the shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these difference do not exist.”* (Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* 2018, 18).

Acknowledging the difference in participants experiences and encouraging their agency in the research process was far more important to me than all the interviews being technically the same. The aim was never to create identical interview experiences across all 28 participants, rather to create a unique experience in which participants could be actively engaged in the production of similar but distinct knowledge on a subject.

It is important to note, however, that “eliciting useful accounts of women’s experiences is not simply a matter of encouraging women to talk” (M. DeVault 1990, 100). To truly engage in feminist research one must not only ensure that not only the collection of data, but the analysis of that data, is dealt with accordingly. In an effort to embed feminist praxis in this research I decided to undertake a feminist research method called active listening. Active listening is not only about collecting good data, but about power relations between interviewer and interviewee. DeVault and Gross write that:

*“A feminist researcher who takes the work of active listening for granted risks producing data, writing up her or his findings, and responding in ways that are colonising rather than liberating because they reproduce dominant perspectives. For instance, a researcher who enters a research encounter assuming she or he is a naturally good listener, without*

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<sup>5</sup> Reinharz 1992, and DeVault and Gross 2007 are two that were particularly helpful.

*consciously acknowledging the work that active listening entails, may end up hearing only what she or he wants or expects to hear.” (DeVault and Gross 2007, 182).*

When analysing the interviews I listened to pauses, halting speech, and circuitous reasoning with new ears, and began to see where they might represent power dynamics in the interview that may not have previously been recognised. DeVault describes how dominant language and meaning interpretations are overwhelmingly male, and thus women (including, of course, women researchers) will often ‘translate’ their experiences into that dominant language. In this process there are aspects of their lived experience that fall between the cracks and are at risk of being missed by researchers. In order to catch them, DeVault suggests that “researchers must develop methods for listening around and beyond words” (M. DeVault 1990, 101) and that we must actively listen out for those processes that form the ‘translation’:

*“Often, this means using words that are familiar and ‘close enough’ to experience for most purposes, relying on listeners to understand – for example, calling ‘housework’ whatever chores must be done at home. Sometimes, too, translation means trying to develop a more complex meaning, trying to respond more fully to questions that are not quite appropriate. In these cases, it may mean saying part of what is experienced, groping for words, doing the best one can. As an interviewer who is also a woman – who has also learned to translate – I can listen ‘as a woman’, filling in from experience to help me understand the things that are incompletely said. As a researcher, my job is to listen for these translations, and to analyse the disjunctures that give rise to them.” (M. DeVault 1990, 102).*

I noted, as DeVault did, that ‘you know’ and ‘kind of’ were particularly prevalent in the interviews. Having read DeVault’s article before transcribing the interviews I decided to keep in these instances of speech that may seem halting. In DeVault’s words:

*“Studying the transcripts now, I see that these words often occur in places where they are consequential for the joint production of our talk in the interviews. In many instances, ‘you know’ seems to mean something like, ‘OK, this next bit is going to be a little tricky. I can’t say it quite right, but help me out a little; meet me halfway and you’ll understand what I mean’... If this is so, it provides a new way to think about these data. ‘You know’ no longer seems like stumbling inarticulateness, but appears to signal a request for understanding. The request was honoured on the woman-to-woman level, I nodded, ‘um hmm’, making the interview comfortable, doing with my respondent what we women have done for generations – understanding each other.” (M. DeVault 1990, 103).*

Many of the times these ‘disjunctures’ occurred in my interviews were when the participant tried to describe the relationship between gender and Doc Martens. On trying to describe this Janine stated:

*“I don’t... I don’t think we should use adjectives like masculine and feminine for clothing, but then it’s kind of... Weird, I guess, because I would use those words too, because I’ve grown up conditioned to do so, you know?”<sup>6</sup>*

And I did know. There was an acknowledgement without words that it is logically strange to ascribe a gender to an object, but another acknowledgement that she did do this because she didn’t have the vocabulary to do anything else. Just as DeVault had done, I responded to Janine’s statement with ‘mmhmm’. I, too, was bridging that gap in conversation and showing the participant that they were understood. Even fully armed with knowledge of these female transliterations I was still shocked to

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<sup>6</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

see how many times it happened when transcribing. When editing the transcripts, I decided to keep as much of the dialect, pauses, restarts and other conversational quirks as possible. The aim is not to speak on behalf of participants, but to let them speak for themselves, and all those small parts that make up a unique conversational encounter are important for that. However, no conversational analysis is perfect and there will inevitably be things experienced during the interview that were not caught on the recording or remembered when transcribing. You will not be able to hear the accents of my participants, the length of some pauses, or the intonation on certain words. There might be some examples of speech that seem unusual. For example, Janine uses the word 'pure' to mean 'very' which is a distinctive part of Glaswegian dialect – familiar to me, but not many others.

## **Literature Review**

The secondary data has been collected through the following literature review. I have taken an interdisciplinary approach to collecting secondary data, not only because it cultivates a deeper understanding of the issues at play within the thesis, but because there simply was not enough academic material on Doc Martens to undertake a thorough examination of the subject. The existing material on them can essentially be split into two categories: commissioned histories (in which the company themselves have hired a historian to write a history of the brand) and business analysis (in which articles discuss sales figures and stock market value). Whilst this material does have its uses, it is limited in its ability to contribute to a discussion of the *embodied* worth and meaning of Doc Martens. As such, I have taken research from the fields of fashion, marketing, history, subculture, feminist theory, design theory, and gender studies to fill those gaps and inform the research in this thesis. With such a broad review undertaken it would be impossible to write about all of it, and so this literature review will focus on the key texts that have been most influential to me when writing this thesis. These texts are split into three categories: subculture, gender studies, and new materialism.

### **Subculture**

As previously mentioned, this thesis is not specifically about subculture but it is an important aspect of the life of Doc Martens, and thus an important aspect of the background research presented here. To understand the meaning of Docs you really must understand subculture, because the two are so intimately linked: from punk to skinhead to riot grrrl, Docs have moved seamlessly through different subcultures across temporal and geographical space. They might seem ubiquitous and mainstream now, but for decades Doc Martens were the uniform of outcasts and counter-culturalists the world over. The study of subculture is widely regarded to have begun at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s. Whilst many scholars contributed to the output of the CCCS, Dick Hebdige is considered to be one of the most influential and his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* has often been heralded as the origin point of the synthesised study of subculture. Published in 1979, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* discusses Britain's post-war youth subcultures as using their style as a symbolic form of resistance. Hebdige uses overarching political or behavioural systems to explain the style choices of subculturalists and states that whilst the many and varied subcultures of the time have very different styles, they all have the same trajectory which is as follows:

All subcultures are formed through resistance to a dominant ideology or society. This society regards the subculture as radical and thus dangerous which often creates a moral panic. This panic gives the symbols of resistance (such as clothing, music and make up) more power. This power is recognised by companies who then go on to commodify the symbols of resistance, which means they lose their

radicalness and become safe to dominant society. This is the point at which the subculture's power through symbolic resistance ends.

Hebdige's analysis of subcultures relies entirely on the use of semiotics; that is, that clothing is a language of signs and symbols we can read which represent who somebody 'truly is'. Using semiotics to explain clothing choices has been orthodox in the world of subcultural studies and fashion theory for several decades and many academics have set out their store and described what those tools are and how to use them. E. McClung Fleming and later Jules Prown proposed a model for reading artefacts (including clothing) which utilizes two conceptual tools – a fivefold classification of the basic properties of an artefact and a set of four operations to be performed on these properties. (McClung Fleming, 1974). By following this simple process, you can read an item of clothing in its entirety. They were by no means the only people to set out processes like this; both Elliot (1994) and Pearce (1994) have given their own methodologies and Steele (1988) reiterated Prown's model, adding even more about the importance of 'signs and symbols' in clothing. There are many different processes, but they all rely on the same assumption that clothing is, indeed, a language that can be learned. Whilst I do not doubt that an ensemble or an item of clothing can tell us something about its wearer, this is not the *only* truth when it comes to our clothes. Daniel Miller, an anthropologist at University College London, has offered an alternative analysis and states that the semiotic approach to clothing has come to limit our study of it. Below is a quote from Miller who uses the story of The Emperor's New Clothes to explain:

*"The problem with semiotics is that it makes the clothes into mere servants whose task is to represent an Emperor – the human subject. Clothes do our bidding and represent us to the outside world. In themselves, clothes are pretty worthless creatures, superficial, of little consequence, mere inanimate stuff. It is the Emperor, the self, that gives them dignity, glamour and refinement.*

*But what and where is this self that the clothes represent? In both philosophy and everyday life we imagine that there is a real or true self which lies deep within us... It is as though if we peeled off the outer layers we would finally get to the real self within. But what was revealed by the absence of clothes was not the Emperor's inner self but his outward conceit. Actually, as Ibsen's Peer Gynt observed, we are all onions. If you keep peeling off our layers you find – absolutely nothing left. There is no true inner self. We are not Emperor's represented by clothes, because if we remove the clothes there isn't an inner core. The clothes were not superficial, they actually were what made us what we think we are."* (Miller 2010, 13).

Miller called the assumption that the true self inside us is represented by our clothing 'depth ontology' and this is something I have seen throughout almost all subcultural study and research; however, I would like to challenge that view. Like Miller, I believe that clothes themselves have power and agency beyond the human actors who wear them, and this is my main criticism of Hebdige's work: I do not see clothing as 'symbols' of resistance; they *are* resistance. The use of semiotics in subcultural theory has a tendency to reduce clothing to vehicles rather than actors, things that *represent* meaning rather than having meaning themselves. This distinction between *signifier* of identity and *active agent* that contributes to identity is often missed when we use semiotics, meaning that the semiotician's approach not only limits our scope of study but actively silences the voices of those few subculturalists who manage to get their opinions and lived experiences into the world of academia. This is not to say that semiotic readings are not useful, but rather that there are other approaches which can be just as useful – if not more so – depending on the type of research being conducted.

It is vital to recognise the cultural and academic importance of the “once formidable orthodoxy” (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 5) of the CCS but in more recent years their work has been challenged. David Muggleton has claimed that we are now living in a post-subcultural era, bringing into question “the continuing usefulness of the subcultural terminus itself” (ibid) David Muggleton is part of a cohort of post-structuralist, post-modernist researchers who, in his 2000 book *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style*, argues that the analysis of subcultures by the CCCS has outlived its usefulness and that we are now living in a post-subcultural world. Muggleton analysed interviews of 57 punks, rockers, skinheads and mods from Brighton in the mid-1990s and discovered not the same rigid uniform and identity placement that Hebdige described, but instead participants describing themselves as ‘a bit Mod-y’ (Muggleton 2000, 70) and ‘punk-ish’ (ibid, 71). This is reflected by my own experience interviewing participants, only one of whom told me she still considered herself part of a set subculture. All the others described themselves in caveated terms such as ‘a mellow punk’, ‘a bit gothy’, or ‘kind of emo’.

Muggleton is a harsh critic of the grand theories applied to subcultural groups by the CCS, claiming that a framework was imposed on the groups rather than reflecting the lived experience of the subculturalists themselves. He states one of his main aims as being “to uncover the subjective meanings, values and motives of those involved in style subcultures” (ibid, 5) and describes his own approach as ‘Neo-Weberian’, whereby a criterion of validity is based not on the social actors being able to recognise the sociological or subcultural theories in their everyday lives, but by the compatibility of these theories with the lives that are studied. For him, subcultural theory can fit the lives of subculturalists without being consciously seen by them in their enacting of life, and this is still valid. For me, this is dangerous territory: I believe that we should strive to keep the reporting of participants experiences as close to the original as possible. Whilst I accept that there needs to be some academic ‘translation’ (for lack of a better term), I am constantly wary of what Marsh, Harre and Rosser have termed the “interpretive gloss” of the researcher, whereby the insider accounts of the interviewees are overlaid with the academic jargon of the social scientist, thus making the accounts unrecognisable to the people who told them (Marsh, Harre and Rosser 1978, 118-120). To try and counter this interpretive gloss I decided to use feminist data collection and analysis techniques and write my thesis with a feminist theoretical framework, which has been discussed previously in this chapter.

## **Gender Studies**

I called upon a vast array of feminist writers and practitioners when researching this thesis, but there are two who have been particularly influential. The first is Alison Dahl Crossley, whose ‘waveless feminism’ has formed the theoretical backbone of how I have interpreted the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them. While I had been aware of questions of the validity of the wave metaphor to describe feminism, Dahl Crossley’s 2017 book *Finding Feminism: Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution* was the first thing which gave me an alternative. The book offers insight into the contemporary Western feminist movement by offering personal stories of activism and inequality on 3 university campuses across America and weaving those stories into her theory of waveless feminism. Waveless feminism offers an alternative to the wave theory which Crossley states has contributed to the ‘stalled gender revolution’ of the 1990s which still persists today. Crossley claims that “the ‘feminism is everywhere’ trope is a natural progression from the ‘girl power narrative’ instilled early in many girls’ psyches” (Dahl Crossley 2017, 4) which does little to account for the inequality still experienced by women throughout the world, and that this overstating of gender equality has led to the false idea that feminism is dead because it cannot exist outside of the wave metaphor. Each of the previous waves (supposedly) had clear markers, things

that set them apart from the other and moments of high engagement brought about by protest, consciousness raising and organised movements. The claim that 'feminism is dead' or 'feminism is everywhere' is therefore made because we cannot situate the current status of feminist action within a new distinct wave. Dahl Crossley counters this by introducing waveless feminism, an extension of abeyance theory which argues that just because levels of activism may be lower than at previous times, that does not mean that feminism is either nowhere or everywhere. Rather, feminism is a continuous thing, an ebbing and flowing of movement and action characterised by different types of activism and in different communities, which may look different to that which we have experienced previously. Whereas the wave metaphor pits women of different beliefs and generations against each other, waveless feminism allows for all of those women to exist under the same banner with their various actions forming one part of a larger whole.

This is important to this thesis because a common thread through participants, regardless of age, was that they felt Doc Martens were a shoe of activism and action. Not every woman used the word 'feminist' explicitly, but the ideas and concept of womanhood, choice, and empowerment that were discussed are clearly concerns of the feminist movement. Equity in style and movement were also key themes, and a sense that for a woman to wear Docs 'levelled the playing field' in some way. Particularly relevant to waveless feminism was the opinion offered by almost every participant that there was a special connection between women who wear Docs, even in very fleeting moments. Most participants said that they felt another woman in Docs would have similar political leanings to herself and share the feminist value of equality for women, and never once was there an intimation that younger or newer Docs wearers were somehow 'less feminist' than those who had been wearing them for a long time. Under the wave theory, you would expect women of the so called 'second wave generation' to have different opinions about feminism to those of the so called 'third wave generation', because of fundamental differences in the values of the different waves. But this is not what I found. I found a group of women who felt community in their politics, expressed through their clothing, which is far more akin to Dahl Crossley's waveless feminism than to the wave metaphor.

The second influential gender theorist for this thesis is Judith Butler, whose philosophical writing on the learning, displaying, and embodying of gender has been fundamental in my understanding of the links between feminism, femininity and the wearing of Doc Martens. Of Butler's many important publications perhaps the most ground-breaking was *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in which she states that there is no such thing as a 'core' gender but rather that through repeated corporeal acts we inscribe and re-inscribe ourselves and others with a given gender. In this way, she popularised the idea that gender is performative rather than innate. This reinscribing of meaning through corporeal acts is clearly vital to new materialist theories of user-object relationships, and the new materialists owe a great deal to Butler's ground-breaking research – indeed, Bruggeman explicitly mentions her in *Dissolving the Ego of Fashion*. It is important to note, however, that Butler is not saying that this performance is necessarily voluntary; she uses Foucault's theory of regulative discourses to show that what is permissible as natural in any given gender is so strongly embedded in every aspect of life as to make our own performance of gender seem innate. She challenges the notion of binary sex and implores feminists to stop trying for a homogenous and static definition of 'woman' which reinforces the destructive binary system and instead states: "...woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification" (Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (10th Anniversary Edition) 1999, 43).

This concept of ‘woman as process’ is something that came up time and time again in participant interviews. Indeed, ‘We make the shoes, you make the story’ was once a slogan for Doc Martens and the idea that our identity through fashion unfolds as a narrative over time is something that was explored by Jules Marion and Agnes Nairn in their 2011 study of teenage girls’ consumption habits in France, using that slogan as the article title. If you consider gender to be of vital importance to your identity, then it follows that the clothing choices that you make – whether within or outwith the ‘regulative discourses’ of gender – are of vital importance as well; they are a key part of your performance of wherever you sit on the spectrum of gender on any given day. The idea of performing gender in a certain way was a core part of many of the discussions I had with participants, and a fundamental aspect of their relationship to their Docs.

### **New Materialism**

New materialism has come to be a core concept in the writing of this thesis, but it is something that I was new to and came to quite late in the research process. The introduction of new materialism into my sphere of vision has altered the course of this thesis dramatically and given me a new vocabulary with which to explain the intricacies of the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them. The first new materialist author I was introduced to was Daniëlle Bruggeman, whose 2018 manifesto *Dissolving the Ego of Fashion* seeks to redefine the value systems that we live within and position fashion as a tool that we can use to create a more inclusive and sustainable society. Bruggeman posits that the way to do this is by altering our relationship with our things, and the materials that they are made up on, by rethinking the importance of meaning and emotion in our clothing. She states that “human relations, self-expression, social interaction, cultural values and subjective identity are at the heart of fashion – it is about how we live and interact with each other and how we engage with the material resources of the earth” (Bruggeman 2018, 8), and this is one of the concepts of new materialism – that “matter deserves to matter more” (ibid 9). Bruggeman’s research is split into 3 sections: ethico-aesthetics; fashion’s human dimension; and affective materialities, each of which deals with a different pathway on the journey to dissolving the ego of fashion under the capitalist system. This manifesto has been influential in my own research by providing a framework within which to consider the embodied relationship between wearer and shoe, and how this relationship has connections to the wider fashion system and the ecological world at large.

The second new materialist author who has been important to my writing is Kristine H Harper, whose 2018 book *Aesthetic Sustainability* shares a similar vision to Bruggeman but with a slightly different focus. Whereas Bruggeman’s book is mostly theoretical, Harper posits a series of techniques by which designers can build what she terms aesthetic sustainability into our objects, giving them a meaningful life built around both use and aesthetics. She discusses the difference between emotional value and aesthetic value and offers advice to design practitioners in how to create meaningful aesthetic value in our objects. The concept of durability is key in Harper’s work, and while she is mostly focussing on aesthetic durability (i.e. the look of things remaining meaningful to use as they age), she borrows heavily from the work of Jonathan Chapman, a design theorist who coined the term ‘emotionally durable design’ in the early 2000s.

Chapman’s book *Emotionally Durable Design*, written in 2005, is a key building block of both Bruggeman and Harper’s theories. While not often considered purely a new materialist author, Chapman has been influential in this field and much of new materialism can trace its origins to his work. In *Emotionally Durable Design*, Chapman argues that the reason for the huge amounts of waste we see around the world, with landfills filled with perfectly usable objects and creating an ecological disaster for the us and planet, is not because of physical nature of the objects but the

emotional nature of them. Chapman regards waste as a symptom of a failed user-object relationship, and posits that if we can design objects that people become emotionally invested in for the long term rather than the short, then we can massively reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. Vital to this mission is first the acknowledgement that our things do actually matter to us, and that the love that we feel for our stuff is a real and legitimate emotion. When we accept this, we can start to look at what makes those objects so loved, and how we can design objects that have the capacity to be what he terms 'cherishable'. By doing so, we make emotionally durable objects, and ones which we are more likely to keep for longer.

Each of these three authors' work has a strong focus on sustainability through continued use, with human connection being at the heart of the reasons for that use. Whether through aesthetics or emotion, the corporeal relationship between user and object is the centre of new materialism. Clearly, this has been a fundamental aspect of my research – I am looking to unpick the nature of the relationship between human and object on a micro scale, by looking at women and their Docs. Some of these relationships have been sustained over a lifetime, with some only forming very recently, but a new materialist reading of the data I collected has given me the space in which to discuss emotion, corporeality, embodiment and agency in a new light.

## **Chapter Layout**

This research has undergone significant changes since its inception, and the layout is no different. Armed with a new research question to answer, '*What is the nature of the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them?*', I realised that there were three broad subjects under which almost all aspects of the participants' relationship to Doc Martens could be organised: History, Empowerment, and Love. I posit that it is the entanglement of these three aspects of Doc Martens that has led to them becoming an important part of the lives of many women and created a meaningful object-human relationship which other clothing brands have failed to achieve. They are three strands which form a unique thread that ties Docs to their wearers, and they were present in the stories of every participant I interviewed. These three subjects – history, empowerment, and love – will form the three body chapters of this thesis. Each chapter will include an introduction to a participant at the beginning of it, but it is important to note that these introductions are situated *alongside* the content of the chapter rather than being the key feature of it. As previously mentioned, it is vital in feminist research praxis that participants can speak for themselves without being too translated, and so each case study should be read as a glimpse into the kind of conversations that were had and the kind of participants that were involved.

History: In this chapter I will introduce Doc Martens and discuss the brand using Thornton's theory of subcultural capital, and reiterate her important point that, rather than being all-consuming antagonists, media, marketing and culture industries are integral to the formation of subcultural and alternative groups. (Thornton 1995, 117). While subcultural capital has traditionally been applied to people and groups, I will apply it to Doc Martens and use it to frame a discussion of how the marketing of their history alongside organic celebrity endorsement has always been critical in creating a sense of community for Doc Martens wearers without resorting to the more siloed world of traditional subcultures. This in turn has galvanised a sense of belonging for the women who wear Doc Martens because the history of the brand often aligns with the individual history of the person wearing them, thus creating an emotional attachment and value which is embodied in the boots. This sense of belonging will be further explored through a discussion of the kind of people who

participants feel wear Doc Martens, how that might have changed over time, and how they see themselves as fitting into (or not) those groups.

**Empowerment:** This chapter will look at how the physical aspect of wearing Doc Martens contributes to a sense of comfort, safety, confidence, and empowerment. The physicality of Doc Martens is something that every participant mentioned in one way or another and it became clear that their physical presence is deeply intertwined with the empowerment that many participants reported feeling when wearing them. This empowerment will be discussed through the lens of gender and specifically of femininity: the subversion of it, the juxtaposition of it, and the celebration of it. Then, using a new materialist lens, independence 'to buy, to move, and to choose' that participants felt Doc Martens afforded them.

**Love:** This chapter will discuss the ways in which love is an integral part of the relationship between participants and their Doc Martens. I will discuss the new materialist concepts of emotionally durable design and aesthetic sustainability and I will also discuss trust – a crucial part of any successful love – and why the trust placed in Doc Martens by participants both physically and emotionally is so important to the continuing relationship between brand and wearer. Finally, I will look at why it is so important to consider emotion when talking about our things, and how this emotional lens applies to the relationship between participants and their Docs.

### **A Note on Images and Appendices**

Included throughout this thesis are images of participants and their Docs. Where a participant is initially quoted or discussed I have tried to include a photo of them nearby, so that they are embedded as real people in the research, but there is no other particular order to this. Taking my cue from Kate Fletcher in her 2016 book *Craft of Use: Post-Growth Fashion*, "The stories that run through these pages are often chaotic, and I let their unruliness have free rein here" (Fletcher 2016, 17). There is at least one photo and one quote of each participant interviewed included in this thesis. All quotes from participants are taken from interviews conducted by the author during the summer of 2019, in various locations across Aotearoa New Zealand and the UK. The full transcripts are included in alphabetical order in the Appendix of this thesis.

*“You say you work for Doc Martens and people regale you with hours of storytelling about how Doc Martens have empowered them, how they’ve impacted their lives, and what their first pair was.*

***Everyone has a story about their first pair.”<sup>7</sup>***

- Sam, 40, Senior Category Manager of Originals & Kids at Doc Martens

Sam has worked at Doc Martens since she left college in her late teens, but her connection to the brand does not start there. Being from Northampton (the home of Doc Martens) they were a presence all her life. She got her first pair when she was 15 years old – cherry red 1460s that her mother disliked intensely. Sam remembers it taking an entire year to wear her mother down before she would buy them for her.

*“In my GSCE year I did an art project. I drew my boots, all the detail and the laces, did it all in a fine ink pen. I was very proud of my boots.”<sup>8</sup>*

I was introduced to Sam via a childhood friend, who knew someone who had worked for Doc Martens in Australia and had recently moved to their UK office in London. This person then introduced me to Sam – A textbook example of the ‘snowballing’ technique for finding research participants. Sam is an unusual participant in that she not only has a personal relationship with Doc Martens but a professional one as well. She has worked for the brand in various departments for over 20 years, and so has an intimate knowledge of them from a variety of perspectives. Sam undoubtedly has a loyalty to Doc Martens as her employer and is clearly proud to work for them, but when I interviewed her there was a sense that her loyalty was about more than just her employment. Sam has a genuine love of the brand and a true belief in the things they stand for.

*“I definitely think that as a brand we have a connection to our consumer that other brands don’t... What I like about our consumers is that they never cease to take me by surprise. I will see men in what we’ve deemed as women’s product, and women in men’s product, and people wearing product that we never thought they’d wear with their look. Which is everything the brand stands for, so it really shouldn’t take me by surprise, but it does still. After all these years. In a great way, because it reinforces everything we want to do with the brand. We want to involve everyone. No matter what your race is, what your sexuality is, which god you pray to. Everyone can wear Dr Martens and feel something.”<sup>9</sup>*

Sam told me that after 14 years together she has only recently been able to convince her wife of the merits of Doc Martens (a pair of fur-lined Chelsea boots were what clinched it), but their two young daughters happily wear them and are now at an age where they can pick out the ones that they like best. Sam and I have remained in touch, and in a recent Zoom call she told me that they had turned their spare room into a study, necessitated by the COVID 19 pandemic. Sam has put up a large picture of a pair of Doc Martens on the wall.



Figure 1: Sam in her favourite pair of Docs.

<sup>7</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

## History

In this chapter I will give some background to Doc Martens as a company and discuss the brand using Sarah Thornton's theory of subcultural capital, before introducing some participant responses to discussions about subculture, history, and how these impact on their relationship with Doc Martens. Docs have a rich and varied history of associations with subculture, counterculture, and youth culture in general, particularly in the context of music. It is important to make clear here that this is not an entire history of the brand, but rather a select look at some of the things that Doc Martens have lived through and become associated with throughout the years. I will discuss how Doc Martens have survived through tough times in order to thrive in the present day, and how the arc of the brand is reflected in the lives of the women who wear them. Before this discussion begins, however, first we must understand how the history of a brand like Doc Martens can be used to give it a sense of authenticity, and for this we turn to Sarah Thornton's work on subcultural capital.

### **Subcultural Capital**

In her 1995 book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Thornton uses a combination of qualitative data collection (through letters from members of the club scene), ethnographic research (by attending several club nights with seasoned clubbers), and analysis of existing research on culture and subculture in order to formulate her own theory of 'subcultural capital'. According to Thornton, subcultural capital (i.e. the essence of 'hipness' or 'coolness' in a particular scene) consists of:

- The knowledge of that scene through relevant music, geographical spaces and key players in the scene
- The possession of relevant physical objects (in the case of *Club Cultures* this is seen in vast collections of rare or underground vinyl records)
- Having the right style (including clothes, hair, make-up, body modifications, accessories etc.)
- Commitment to the scene i.e. being seen to be positioned at the centre of it, and away from the mainstream.

These four things come together to create 'authenticity' within a scene, which in turns gives you subcultural capital. By analysing these themes of authenticity, media, physical youth spaces, and opposition to the mainstream, Thornton posits that rather than media being merely a reflection of subculture, it is inherent to the production of subculture and the subcultural capital that goes along with it (Thornton 1995, 117). This has proved to be a useful way of understanding how what Thornton might call the 'hipness' of Doc Martens has been produced, and then reflected back, in popular culture, and in the lives of the participants in this study. However, Thornton's theory of subcultural capital has also proved useful as a jumping off point to move further in my research. Thornton's research subcultural capital is applied to people, but in this chapter I will apply it to the brand of Doc Martens and use it to frame a discussion of how the marketing of their history often aligns with the personal nostalgia that participants felt in relation to their own Doc Martens. I believe that this has created a sense of authenticity that does not solely rely on either the brand *or* the person wearing it, but rather an entangled mesh of *both*, which has created – in the case of many participants – a lifelong bond with the brand. I also suggest that the subcultural capital now imbued in Doc Martens as an object means that many of the people wearing them no longer feel it necessary (or even desirable) to belong to any particular subculture.

Another reason that Thornton's work has been particularly useful is because it uses the same combination of tools (qualitative data collection, ethnography, and analysis of existing research) as I

have employed in my own thesis. Thornton also later revisited her theory of subcultural capital and analysed its use as a feminist tool. In this research she talked about how the vilification by the clubbers that she interviewed of a certain type of woman (known as ‘Sharon and Tracy dancing around their handbags’) was evidence that the subcultural objectification of young women is different from the ‘slut or prude’, or ‘mother or pretty waif’ dichotomy. This is because:

*“It is not primarily a vilification or veneration of girls’ sexuality, but a position statement made by youth of both genders about girls who are not culturally ‘one of the boys’.*  
*Subcultural capital is a currency that correlates with and legitimises unequal statuses.”*  
(Thornton 2006, 105).

In this way, Thornton is countering the idea that ‘hip cultures are anything other than happily equal’ (ibid). This sense of perceived ‘equality’ in the wearing of Doc Martens is something that became apparent in my own data collection: Doc Martens were perceived by many to be a ‘masculine’ type of shoe, however most participants considered their wearing of Doc Martens to be a sign of the universal appeal of the shoe itself rather than the universal appeal of masculinity per se. As such, I find Thornton’s analysis of subcultural capital as a feminist tool particularly useful for negotiating the tensions which become apparent when conducting this sort of research.

### **Surviving and Thriving**

Doc Martens are what marketers call a ‘heritage’ brand which means that they have a long history (particularly in the UK) and they often use that history alongside their reputation for quality, durability and ‘Britishness’ to create a sense of authenticity and to sell their products. This tactic has undoubtedly worked for Doc Martens, shown in the fact that these aspects were all mentioned by my participants as being part of their appeal. Many other heritage brands employ these same tactics<sup>10</sup>, however Doc Martens are a heritage brand with a twist: their closest association has been with subcultures and altertnativity for almost all of their sixty-year history of production in the UK, and so their ‘heritage’ is tied up with the concepts of rebellion and difference. This means that Doc Martens have two types of authenticity to call upon when it comes to selling product: they have the authenticity of a heritage brand with a long history of reliable and quality footwear; but they also have the authenticity that Thornton asserts comes with subcultural capital, having been so long associated with alternative scenes. In order to understand how Doc Martens have meshed these two types of authenticity together in the present day I put together a timeline of events which shows how both the ‘heritage’ authenticity and the ‘subcultural’ authenticity of Doc Martens have meshed together to create a brand that has survived – and eventually thrived – as the world around it changed. Below is a deeper dive into two of the great challenges that Doc Martens faced as a brand: one from outwith them, and one from within.

### **Surviving Skinhead**

If there is one subculture that has proved to be the most divisive and enduring of Doc Martens devotees, it is the skinheads. Skinhead is now synonymous with Neo-Nazism, violence, and racism, however skinhead has not always been this way. Now known in subcultural circles as the ‘69ers’ or

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Hunter Wellington boots have a section on their website entitled ‘Hunter Heritage’ which describes them as ‘A British heritage brand founded by American Henry Lee Norris in Scotland in 1856. Renowned for the iconic Original Wellington Boots, all footwear, outerwear and accessories are expertly crafted using the highest quality materials and innovative British design. The brand is worn by those who lead, forging designs to shield pioneers from the elements and the bleakest of landscapes.’ They then go on to tell the story of the brand through World War I and II, and end with examples of celebrities who have worn the boots such as Kate Moss, Alexa Chung, and Lady Diana Spencer (Hunter, n.d.).

'Trojan' skinheads (named for the record label that produced much of the skinhead music at the time), these early adopters were at best anti-racist and at worst apolitical. They were groups of working-class men who found an affinity with each other through music and sartorial style. It was – and still is – important to skinheads to look 'smart', a phenomenon which has been described by other researchers on subculture as a meticulous attention to detail (see (Hebdige 1979), Muggleton 2000, and Roach 2015). While not originally essential to skinhead style, Doc Martens soon became the go-to boot for this group and thus became synonymous with violence. This brought about a change in public image for Doc Martens, and one which did a significant amount of damage to their potential for mainstream popularity. Several participants remembered their parents being particularly anti-Doc Marten because of these associations. Dee recalled:

*"I think I'm not doing her a disservice in saying that boots like this were an embodiment of everything that subculture represented, and very much not what she wanted her daughter to be part of. She wanted me to be pretty and sweet. And you know, have a nice dress on. And I wanted ripped jeans and safety pins holding my t-shirt together, you know... But yeah, they [Doc Martens] were very much part of that culture of youth and rebellion and kind of anarchic behaviour that they didn't want me to know."<sup>11</sup>*

This example indicates how many youth subcultures were often tarred with the same brush. Dee is talking about punk (skinheads would never wear ripped clothes and safety pins) but for her mother it did not matter that punks had never been particularly involved with mass public violence. Doc Martens still represented the kind of anarchy that her parents were afraid of. Michael Atwood, editorial director of *Footwear News*, summed it up when he said 'like any fashion trend, Doc Martens had an iconic look and it gets identified with a particular era, which is both the beauty and the horror of it' (Browne 2004).

Another participant, Sam, remembers her mother having the same negative associations with Doc Martens when she was a young teenager in the 1990's:

*"She's still not that keen on me having them! I think part of it was the association. But it wasn't so much that they were associated with subcultures. Being an adult during the 70s and 80s when all the football violence was going on, she'd seen a lot of thugs – for want of a better word – wearing Dr. Martens. So she associated them with violence."<sup>12</sup>*

Here, Sam has made a distinction between 'subculture' and 'football violence'. However, many skinheads did attend football matches regularly, and indeed some stadiums even banned steel toe capped boots because of the potential for them or their wearers to do real harm (Knight 1982, 10). Some even believe that it was this action by the police that led to skinheads adopting Doc Martens because they could still do a lot of damage, even without the steel toe caps (Roach 1999). Sam has made a distinction between subcultural wearers of Doc Martens and football attendees who wore them, even though they were often the same people. This is evidence of a certain type of cognitive dissonance that I noted with some frequency in participant responses. For example, when I asked Cathy about the associations that she had with Doc Marten when she bought her first pair in the early 1990s, she distanced her own wearing of them from skinheads by making a distinction between the *type* that was worn:

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<sup>11</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>12</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

**Cathy:** *I know with the punk one, and then maybe the hooligans wearing those capped shoes and everything. There was at some point a time where you would think, 'Oh, hang on that brand is maybe going to be owned by a group that I wouldn't associate with.' I think they managed to get out of that.*

**Georgia:** *Yeah. So, you did understand that they had a little bit of an association with subculture. Do you think that that had any impact on your choice to buy them?*

**Cathy:** *With what I would say the positive, alternative thing, yes. Not so much with the white right wing in the 80s, the skinheads and everything. I think at the time, the way we saw it, was that their choice of Doc Martens wasn't our choice of Doc Martens. So they had the steel capped ones, they had big ones that probably we wouldn't have gone for.”<sup>13</sup>*

Cathy describes skinheads as ‘hooligans with capped shoes’ and is careful to position herself and her friends apart from that group: ‘their choice of Doc Martens wasn’t our choice of Doc Martens’. Interestingly, as mentioned above, Doc Martens did not sell steel toe capped boots in the 1980s (or at least not ones that looked like the 1460s) which meant that they *were* allowed in the football terraces. Cathy is by no means the only person I have come across who has this false memory of steel toe capped 1460s, but it is interesting that this physical difference in boot has stood in for the social difference that she sees between herself, her friends, and the ‘hooligans’ of the day.

Despite their renewed success in the last ten years, I have my own anecdotal evidence that Doc Martens are still dealing with the ripples of their long association with skinhead. I undertook my research for my post-grad thesis in 2015/16 which was the final run up to the Brexit referendum in the UK, and as part of that process interviewed the factory manager of the Doc Martens site at Woolaston where their ‘Made In England’ products are manufactured. He shared how dismayed he had been when a campaign poster for Operation Black Vote<sup>14</sup>, designed by Saatchi & Saatchi, appeared on billboards around London and Manchester.<sup>15</sup> The poster (see figure 2 below) was designed to show that supposedly opposing sides of the spectrum had an equal balance of power when it came to voting. However, the character clearly positioned as the ‘villain’ in the storyline is

*Figure 2: Saatchi & Saatchi's 'A Vote is a Vote' campaign.*

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<sup>13</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>14</sup> A non-partisan British charity set up in 1996 to address the deficit of Black British and ethnic minority voters.

<sup>15</sup> He was particularly upset that a billboard had been put up in Camden, a place he described as ‘the spiritual home of subculture.’

dressed as a skinhead – complete with unmistakable cherry red Doc Martens. He said that the whole office had been upset by the advert, feeling that the hard work they had put into positioning Doc Martens' association with skinhead in their past had been undone. Cathy (above) stated that she thought Doc Martens had 'gotten out of' that association. However, there is clearly a strong enough collective memory with Doc Martens and skinhead that Saatchi & Saatchi used both as a shorthand for 'racist thug' as recently as 2016.

### **Surviving Themselves**

In the 1990s Doc Martens were experiencing an unprecedented level of popularity across the world. Due in part to the global success of the grunge music scene, there were suddenly people all over television and magazines wearing Doc Martens. There was also a surge in female musicians wearing Docs: Gwen Stefani, P.J Harvey, and Blessed Ethel were all regularly pictured in them (see figures 2, 3 and 4 below), and it is perhaps this new found visibility which contributed to a spike in the popularity of Docs with female consumers. By 1993 the first pair of high-heeled Doc Martens had been produced and 50% of all sales were to women (Roach 1999). High fashion brands were also starting to pay attention to the popularity of grunge and in 1993 Wayne Hemingway's 'Red or Dead' brand collaborated with Doc Martens on a line of boots and clothing (Muston 2010). Also in 1993, a young Marc Jacobs sent Doc Martens down the runway in his 'Grunge' collection for Perry Ellis, which subsequently ended with him being fired from the brand because the clothing was so controversial (Phelps and Borrelli-Persson 2015). In 1994 they opened a six-storey 'Doc Martens department store' in Covent Garden which not only sold their shoes but belts, watches, pencil cases, backpacks, keyrings, and more. There was a music venue inside the store as well as a café<sup>16</sup>. R. Griggs (at this time still the parent company of Doc Martens) employed 2400 people and were projecting a revenue of 170 million GBP that year, and the managing director of R Griggs told the New York Times that he wanted the store to be "the third largest tourist attraction in London" (Ipsen 1994). By the year 2000 – Doc Martens' 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary – the company had an annual revenue of 250 million GBP from boots alone.

Despite this success, things sharply took a turn for the brand and between 2002 and 2003 they lost 30% of their revenue, only avoiding bankruptcy thanks to some high-end collaborations with Jimmy Choo and Vivienne Westwood (Muston 2010). So, what went wrong for Doc Martens, and how did it happen so quickly? One answer can be found in the words of Stephen Griggs, CEO of R. Griggs in the 1990s and the fifth generation of his family to run the company. When they opened the department store in Covent Garden he admitted that it was "a step into the unknown" (Ipsen 1994) which indicates that they had some understanding of the risk they were taking. But buoyed up by the popularity of the brand at the time, Doc Martens continued to churn out huge amounts of product with their logo on it. Sam, a participant who has worked for Doc Martens for over 20 years, told me that during this time they never engaged with any kind of data or metrics for their marketing, instead 'it was all done on gut feel' with the focus being on 'keeping the brand alive' rather than helping the brand to thrive.

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<sup>16</sup> A friend's mother recalled going to the Doc Martens shop in Covent Garden and being served pie and mash with the logo stamped into it.



*Figure 3: Gwen Stefani on stage in Doc Martens.*

*Figure 4: P.J Harvey in Doc Martens*

*Figure 5: Blessed Ethel in Doc Martens*

This shows that part of the reason for Doc Martens near-catastrophic downturn was because they did not have the expertise to *sustainably* grow their sales. There appears to have been very little understanding that when you are in fashion, you can quite quickly go out of fashion. There is also the fact that, as mentioned previously in this chapter, a substantial amount of the success of Doc Martens is owed to their subcultural capital; so when they began to not only succeed in the mainstream but to so brazenly and actively pursue that success, Doc Martens lost something of the ‘coolness’ that had been their unique appeal in the first place. The combination of this dilution of their coolness and a lack of clear direction in marketing and sales translated into revenue dropping dramatically. In 2002 a new CEO was appointed, and the decision was made to move production overseas. By 2003 all production had moved to China, with 5 factories and 2 shops closing in the UK. Over 1000 people lost their jobs and only 20 people remained, all of them working in the Doc Martens head office in Woolaston (BBC News 2002). Sam remembers this as ‘the shit time’ but acknowledges that it was the right decision to make because otherwise Doc Martens would have gone under. She also credits this time as being the point where the present-day culture of the brand emerges:

*“It was probably the best thing that could have happened because that is where the culture of rolling up your sleeves and getting stuck in came from. It didn’t matter if you were the CEO or a part-timer, if there was a job that needed doing then you got on with it.”<sup>17</sup>*

Sam described the outrage that was stoked by the media who made it seem that Doc Martens had closed their doors without a thought for their workers, but also noted that ‘everyone inside knew that wasn’t the case’. Based on what Sam told me and an assessment of newspaper reports from the time, I believe that Doc Martens’ survival can be attributed to a combination of three things: the hard decisions made by the CEO in 2003 (cutting jobs, closing factories, moving production abroad); the dedication of the remaining staff; and the loyalty of a core consumer base. David Browne, a journalist for the New York Times, described his persistent dedication to the brand:

*“I stuck with Doc Martens when everyone seemed to cast them aside and the shoe stores near my home cut back their stock. Over dinner one night, a friend glanced down at my scuffed pair and made a crack: “Going to check some gas meters later?” I chuckled, but I knew the loss was his. He didn’t understand. Doc Martens were not just a shoe but a symbol of stability in an unstable world. Or so I kept telling myself as I bought one pair after another, enduring the raised eyebrows of friends and family.” (Browne 2004).*

The Cobbs Lane factory in Woolaston reopened a few years after 2003 and began making custom orders. In 2005 Doc Martens won the ‘Turnaround of the Year’ award, and a new store was opened in Soho in 2006 (Muston 2010). The ‘vintage’ line, made to the specifications of the original 1960s production<sup>18</sup>, proved popular and by 2010 they were making 50 pairs a day at Cobbs Lane (Mazein 2010). In 2011 they announced that they were taking on 20 new members of staff and 4 apprentices at Cobbs Lane to keep up with the demand (BBC News 2011), indicating the beginning of the resurgence of Doc Martens as a fashion staple. This is supported by a report from online retailer ASOS which showed a 230% increase in sales of Doc Martens between 2011 and 2012 (Cochrane 2012).

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<sup>17</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>18</sup> This is now the ‘Made in England’ section of product.

## Thriving

How Doc Martens began to thrive again is a more difficult thing to pinpoint. Several of my participants appear to have noticed celebrities – particularly female celebrities – wearing Doc Martens at around the same time as this drastic increase in sales, however, they were a different type of celebrity to the ones who wore Docs in the 1990s. Women in grunge had used a pastiche of femininity to create the ‘kinderwhore’ look, a combination of short dresses and skirts, dirty silk negligees, ripped tights, and large boots, often Doc Martens. Jacki Willson notes that Courtney Love typified this look in ‘a pastiche of glamour with ripped negligees, dirty blonde hair, smudged red lips and a diamante tiara worn askew’ (Willson 2015, 146). However, the new generation of Docs wearers were less interested in the parodying of femininity and more interested in its celebration. This lines up with the focus in feminism at the time on ‘bodily autonomy’, which manifested itself in research and writing suggesting that women should not only be free to choose *not* to engage in the traditional ‘trappings’ of femininity (such as makeup, tight or revealing clothes, and wearing high heels), but free to engage in them *if they want to* without it making them any less of a feminist, and without putting them at risk. Willson’s book *Being Gorgeous* argues for the self-objectification of women as an emancipatory act. In it she writes:

*“This is the evocation of a creative spectacle that brings out the glint and twinkle in our eyes and goods and strokes our anarchic spirits and identities. It pricks the senses and awakens our rebelliousness, sensuality, unfettered thought and raw feeling. We are not passive viewers. These are not didactic images. We feel alive. The surface speaks to us and connects to us on an emotional level.”* (Willson 2015)

This real-world shift in the feminist zeitgeist was, inevitably, reflected and reproduced by popular culture. An example pertinent for this research is the video for ‘Super Bass’ by Nicki Minaj in which she and her dancers are dressed in see-through white vests, neon underwear visible above denim hot pants, pink wigs, and patent Doc Martens in pink, green, and white (see figure 6 below). This look is a far cry from the ripped negligees of the 1990s – it is not a pastiche of femininity, not throwing it back in the male gaze’s face in the same way that kinderwhore did. While this new iteration juxtaposes overt female sexuality with the utilitarian solidness of a Doc Marten in a similar way to kinderwhore, it is done in such a way that it reminds the viewer that the women depicted are not taking back power, but that power is something they never lost.



Figure 6: Screenshots from the video for Super Bass by Nicki Minaj

Young women in particular seemed to respond to this shift, with one participant, Sarah-Mary, noting the importance of seeing these female figures in Doc Martens as being central to her decision to wear them:

*“As well as being a rocker at heart I’m also really into my pop music. In the video for Super Bass by Nicki Minaj she had a line-up of all these dancers. They look sexy as anything, but then they’ve got these patent pink Doc Martens. I think I was trying to look like that when I got my first pair. So yeah, it’s definitely influenced by seeing famous people wearing them.”<sup>19</sup>*

Sarah-Mary is a prime example of the modern Docs wearer. She is interested in and knowledgeable of Doc Martens’ subcultural history, but she does not shy away from their potential to be part of a feminine and more mainstream look and has no issue with these two elements of Doc Martens existing alongside each other. As a child, Sarah-Mary had been bought Doc Martens shoes to wear for school because her mother considered them ‘proper shoes’, but she had disliked them intensely, finding them too clunky and masculine. She recalls being a self-described ‘girly-girl’ as a child, and when she was given a hand-me-down pair of black and white gingham Doc Marten boots, she remembers thinking how ugly they were. Sarah-Mary only came to Doc Martens herself in her early 20s, buying a pair of white patent leather 1460s after seeing Rihanna and Nicki Minaj in them (see above quote). However, these did not stick because they were difficult to break in, and eventually she said she “felt a bit silly in them”. A few years later, Sarah-Mary’s mother bought her a new pair of Doc Martens (the previous ones having been second hand) as a ‘pick me up’ gift after a bad break up,<sup>20</sup> and these are the first pair she remembers really loving. They are black suede slingbacks that she described as “gorgeous” and “pretty”, and she says she always gets compliments on them (see figures 7 and 8 below). Of the slingbacks, Sarah-Mary said:

*“I could go to conferences or job interviews and I’d instantly feel that much better when I put them on. The slingbacks make me look like I’ve got my shit together, and I love that feeling. There’s just that satisfaction of, ‘Yeah, I’m wearing Doc Martens.’”<sup>21</sup>*

This exemplifies a phenomenon that has been mentioned by many other participants, which is the underlying power felt when wearing a pair of Doc Martens. This will be further explored in a later chapter, but I believe it shows a clear link between Doc Martens and all the subcultural capital that the brand entails, and this specific type of power. Many participants described themselves as feeling ‘capable’, ‘powerful’, and most, commonly, ‘kick-ass’, when they wear their Docs<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, Sarah-Mary said of her other pair of Doc Martens (black leather 1460 boots) that she “feels like she could conquer the world” when wearing them, and that they are “proper arse-kicking boots”. Regardless of which pair she is wearing, Sarah-Mary told me that she “feels more put together” when she wears Doc Martens, saying that they add a ‘special something’. Importantly, however, Sarah-Mary recognised that this was less about the shoes themselves and more about her relationship with the brand when she said, ‘even if it’s just in my head, I know I’m wearing them, and I’m feeling good.’ This shows a special kind of internal ballast provided by the external wearing of Doc Martens: it doesn’t matter if anyone else knows what they are, because *she* knows what they are, and the myriad of powerful, transgressive women that they represent.

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<sup>19</sup> In conversation with the author, Brighton, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Sarah-Mary is one of several participants who told me that they bought Doc Martens after a break-up.

<sup>21</sup> In conversation with the author, Brighton, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>22</sup> Seven participants specifically used the word ‘bad-ass’ or ‘kick-ass’, with a further nine saying that Doc Martens made them feel confident.



*Figure 7: Sarah-Mary in her 1460 boots*



*Figure 8: Sarah-Mary's black suede slingbacks and 1460 boots*

Take, for example, two previously mentioned female celebrities who have worn Doc Martens: PJ Harvey and Nicki Minaj. They are very different women with very different styles, the former being famous for her alternative rock sound and 'indie cool' chic, and the latter for her extraordinary rap skills and hyper-feminised appearance. Some may see both women wearing Doc Martens as creating tension for the brand, but I believe that it does the exact opposite: by bringing together different women with different perspectives, Doc Martens create a sense of unity under the banner of difference. In this way, they are a physical manifestation of waveless feminism, bringing together women of all backgrounds, ages and styles. The empowerment of PJ Harvey in her well-worn, plain black, tightly laced 1460s does not negate the empowerment of Nicki Minaj in her neon pink boots with undone laces because waveless feminism not only allows for this difference but celebrates it.

There is no longer any need to pit women against each other or say that one is a 'real' Doc Martens wearer and one is not, because their difference in styles does not negate their viewpoint. Feminist scholar Audre Lorde describes the mere tolerance of difference between women as "the grossest reformism", and states instead that difference is "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* 2018, 18). Lorde believes that finding "common cause with those others identified as outside the structures" is essential for the feminist cause to work (Ibid, 19), and so the example of PJ Jarvey and Nicki Minaj is pertinent: as women they are both 'outside the structures' of their predominantly male music scenes, but they are both, in different ways, using Doc Martens to assert power and transgression within those scenes. Their wearing of Doc Martens binds them together without invalidating their separate points of view.

However, it is not only inter-female difference that is highlighted by Doc Martens, but intra-female difference i.e. the idea that within one woman there can be many versions of the self. An example of this is Miley Cyrus' music video for her 2013 single *Wrecking Ball*, which was the peak of her breakout phase from her Disney Channel contract. During this time Miley Cyrus railed against the 'Hannah Montana' character that had made her famous: she was overtly sexual, she was provocative, and she openly smoked, drank and did drugs. In the video (see figure 9 below) she is seen completely naked save for some red lipstick and a pair of cherry red Doc Martens, but her nudity is not merely a sexual image. During an interview after the video's release Cyrus described how vulnerable she had felt when shooting it, how emotional she had been, and how difficult she found the process (Lee 2013). The use of Doc Martens in this context serves to highlight the many different Miley's that the public has been privy to because she is both sexualised and vulnerable, tough and soft, made-up and laid bare.



Figure 9: Miley Cyrus in the video for 'Wrecking Ball'

Images of the video spread across social media and soon style guides began appearing in magazines and online blogs, encouraging women to 'steal Miley's style' by wearing Docs. Several participants noted that engagement with social media in this way has been important in their relationship with Doc Martens. One of them, Mo, specifically mentioned the Doc Martens Instagram page. She told me that their collaborations with celebrities and the visible wearing of Doc Martens by public figures has started having an influence on people she knew:

*"I suppose a lot of people would say that they're not very feminine but because they've had so many collabs with people like Aygness Deyn, and Fearne Cotton is a brilliant advocate for them, I think people like them. Even a few of my friends that I would never have thought*

*would get a pair have recently purchased them. So something is filtering through. They've bought a pair of Doc Martens as opposed to Converse or Ash, which I feel are more stereotypical middle aged, middle class woman. So maybe it's filtering through that it's okay for women to wear Doc Martens.”<sup>23</sup>*

For Mo, the visibility of famous women in Doc Martens is something which is intimately tied to their revival amongst the general population, not just young women. On the Doc Martens Instagram page, the biography reads: 'If the last six decades have taught us anything, it's this. The only thing tougher than a Docs boot is the person wearing it. #ToughAsYou'. This encapsulates the way in which Doc Martens have successfully woven together their heritage authenticity and subcultural authenticity: 'the last six decades' acts as a reminder to the consumer that they are a brand with history and heritage; the use of the word 'tough' to describe their products brings in their reputation for quality, excellence and durability, whilst also giving a nod to the hard-edge subcultures that are such a part of their brand history; and the comparison of the 'toughness' of the boot to that of the person wearing it brings the consumer into the fold without making them feel like they are being particularly targeted. The 'ToughAsYou' hashtag is a way to engage with the rest of the world – it allows you to seek out and follow other people who consider themselves to be a part of the gang, thus creating more connections between the Doc Martens community across the boundaries of class, race, gender, age, and nationality that might have been less permeable before the advent of social media.

One of the first things that you see upon entering the Doc Martens office in Camden, London, is an almost floor to ceiling decal which describes the values of Doc Martens 'above all else': authenticity, durability, utility, diversity, rebelliousness, empowerment, and music. The Doc Martens Instagram holds a quiet commitment to these values which lends the same sense of community to their online spaces as their physical spaces. A look at the posts made from 26<sup>th</sup> December 2019 to 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 shows a small cross section of a broader trend (see figure 10 below). Of the 30 people shown in their posts over this time there was real diversity to be seen in the images of people shown wearing Docs: 17 were female and 15 were people of colour; there was 1 hijabi woman; two plus-size people; 1 older woman; and 5 images of kids in Doc Martens. The images that are focused entirely on shoes and boots also show a diversity in product. They ranged from waterproof 1460's, to Jadon Hi boots, to Chelsea boots, kids' shoes, new colour ways, vegan leather, and collaborations with other brands such as CBGB (the subcultural New York music venue) and Bathing Ape (an iconic streetwear brand). Words such as 'empower', 'individual', 'rebels', 'subculture', 'freethinkers', 'music', and 'nonconformist' appear regularly in their image captions, and many of the advertisement posts place their product on drum kits, stages, or in settings associated with music.

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<sup>23</sup> In conversation with the author, Milton Keynes, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

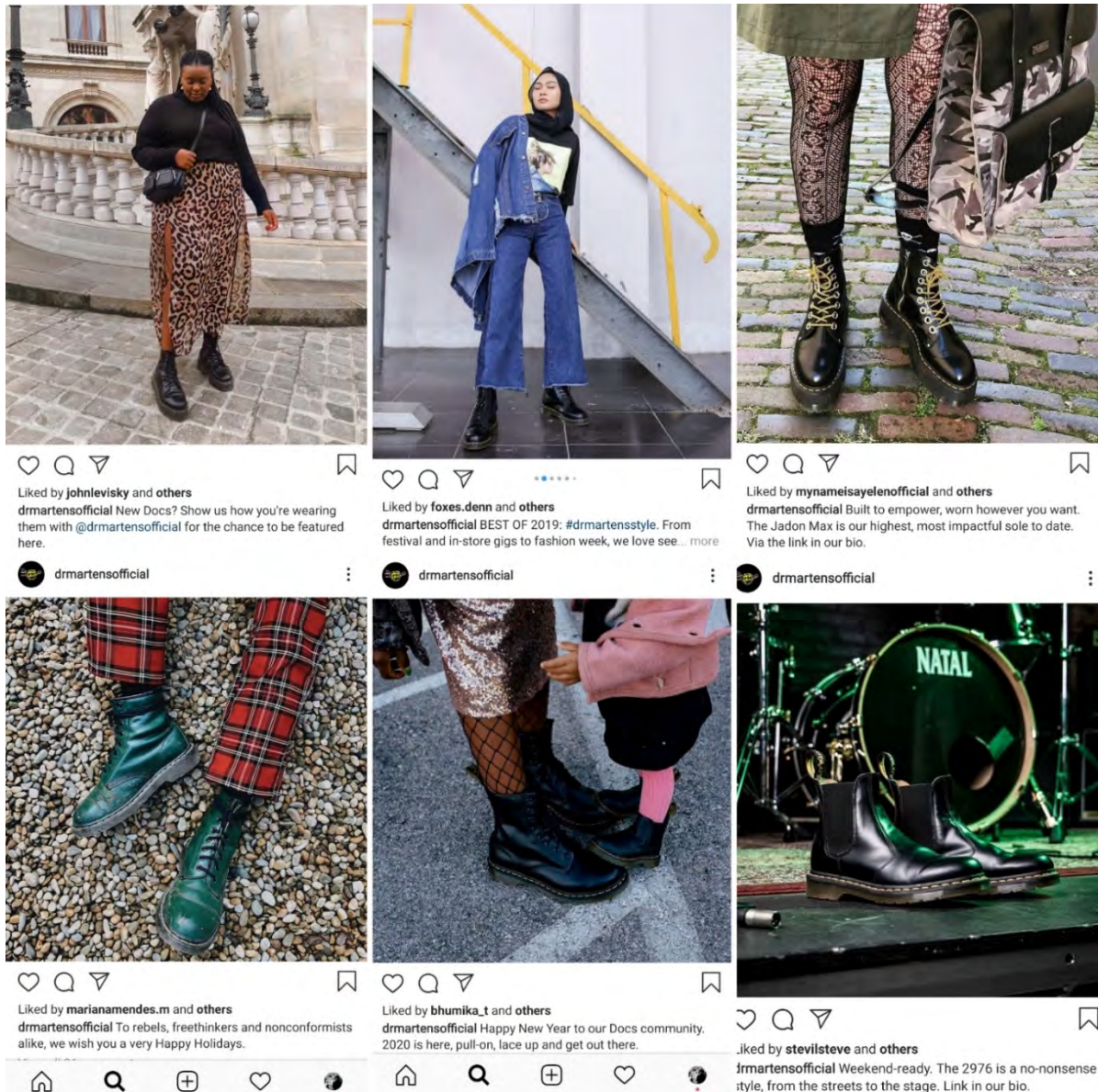


Figure 10: Some examples of the content on the Doc Martens Instagram.

When it comes to marketing fashion there has often (and quite rightly) been a critique that women are used as pornographic props to sell things, images of their bodies cut up and disassembled to focus on sexualised aspects of their bodies. However, as Iris Marion Young has written, “clothing images are not always the authoritative mirror that tells who’s the fairest of them all, but the entrance to a wonderland of characters and situations” (Young, *Women Recovering Our Clothes* 2005, 70). The Doc Martens Instagram feed is a prime example of this, and by inviting women to get involved in the creation of their own media Doc Martens has successfully navigated a way to advertise their shoes to women while maintaining a connection with those women that feels authentic.

The marketing of Doc Martens has come a long way from the ‘step into the unknown’ approach of the 1990s. Above everything else, it is this change in approach that Sam attributes the continued successful resurgence of Doc Martens to. R. Griggs (still Doc Martens’ parent company at the time) was bought by the private equity firm Permira in 2013 for 300 million GBP (BBC News 2013) and with

that buy out came resources that had been unattainable previously. According to Sam the headcount tripled, office and retail space was given priority, and a large design consultancy came on board to help with branding and marketing. Sam described this as 'pivotal' and noted that with this change "we were able to sit back and take stock of the situation. Up until then we had just been fighting fires. You were never able to be proactive or forward thinking, which we are now... It feels like there's longevity in the brand again now."

As was seen Doc Martens' downturn in the early 2000s, it is not enough for a brand to simply have subcultural capital – they must also understand how to use it. But with this assertion comes an important question when considering the brand of Doc Martens: Does the marketing of their subcultural history damage their authenticity?

### **History and Community**

One of the important claims Thornton makes in *Club Cultures* is that the media are not separate from the production and distribution of the insider knowledge that creates subcultural capital, but crucial to it. Thornton writes:

*"Contrary to youth subcultural ideologies, 'subcultures' do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious 'movements' only to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather, media and other culture industries are there and effective right from the start." (Thornton 1995, 117).*

This remains true today, however the landscape of what makes up the 'culture industries' is very different now than it was 25 years ago. While Thornton acknowledges that there are some occupations and incomes that can be associated with subcultural capital, these are limited to 'DJ's, club organizers, clothes designers, music and style journalists, and various record industry professionals' (Thornton 1995, 12). Under these definitions, Thornton asserts that subcultural capital does not as readily convert into economic capital, and while this may have been true when Thornton wrote *Club Cultures*, it cannot be said to be true anymore. In 1995 there was no such thing as Facebook, YouTube or Twitter; there were no trending hashtags or Instagram influencers. Now, however, people who are not models, designers, or DJ's have begun making incredibly lucrative careers out of being seen to be wearing something – i.e. from their 'coolness'. Fame is now accessible to anyone with a smart phone, and while many decry these influencers as a reflection of what they see as the vapidness of late stage capitalism, Doc Martens have remained relatively unscathed by this same criticism. Indeed, as we have seen, Doc Martens actively engage with social media (particularly Instagram) as a way of continuing to develop their subcultural capital and have made a success of curating an online presence which reflects their values.

Doc Martens appear to be being careful not to make the same mistakes as before because they are not over-saturating the market with their advertising or their branding. There are no television adverts for Doc Martens, and it is rare to see them advertised in magazines or on billboards. Instead, Doc Martens sponsor stages or feature new bands and musicians on their social media channels. They now only offer a small capsule collection of clothing (including socks specifically designed to be worn with their shoes and boots), along with leather backpacks and satchels, and officially branded laces. This not only helps to keep their public profile under control, but it fosters a sense of community by engaging followers with new content which is targeted at people 'like them' who also wear Doc Martens. This community remains strong, but without the exclusivity and boundary policing that has long been associated with subculture, and which was described by Thornton in *Club*

*Cultures*. Sam confirmed this when she said that wearing Doc Martens “makes you feel empowered, but it also makes you feel part of something. Not necessarily a subculture, but more of a community.”<sup>24</sup>

One participant, Claire, discussed this ‘community’ of intergenerational Docs wearing women when she said:

*“I’m 50. and I wear Doc Martens. I see my neighbour, Mary, her little daughter, she’s eight now and she’s starting to wear Doc Martens. My son’s partners, they have Doc Martens. Older people I know, they have Doc Martens. It’s an intergenerational kind of shoe. You don’t have to be a certain age to wear them.”<sup>25</sup>*

This sense of community is integral to why so many participants felt connected to the brand through history – not just the history of Doc Martens, but their own. In many interviews conducted there was a sense that Doc Martens had been present throughout the life of participants, even if they were not wearing them at that time. One participant, Briar, said that if she sees someone wearing Doc Martens then “I already know there’s one good thing about you.”<sup>26</sup> Another, Hannah, said that when she sees kids wearing them, she thinks “your parents are probably cool.”<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, Hannah spoke at length of how her relationship with Doc Martens had waxed and waned, but that this had only made her recent rediscovering of them more poignant. Hannah first wore Doc Martens at school in the early 1990s, and she describes them as part of the ‘tribal uniform’ that her and her friends wore at the time – indeed, Hannah told me “I don’t remember anyone ever considering wearing anything other than DMs. And it’s quite funny now coming back to them many years later, and I kind of look at the equivalent now and think: Why would I not wear them?”<sup>28</sup>

When describing her relationship with Doc Martens as a woman, Hannah linked the political and social landscape that she grew up in with her memories of wearing them:

*“Well I always think our group definitely identified as strong, independent women. Without a doubt. We’ve always carried that kind of attitude. We went to a school where we were basically told: ‘Whatever you want to do in life, you can do it.’ And I think it was a period of time where stuff was kind of rumbling... I mean, we were heading into a Labour government, heading into an unprecedented amount of female MPs, the Spice Girls were doing ‘girl power’ and all that sort of stuff. That was the wave that we were riding. A lot of the bands that we were listening to were what was called Riot Grrl, bands like L7, Breeders, a lot of it coming out of America on the coat tails of the grunge scene. Also a lot of British bands as well. I’ve still got a lot of vinyl singles that occasionally I put on and think, ‘Oh why did we listen to them? They were terrible!’ But there definitely was that kind of scene at the time and it absolutely fitted with... Again, whether we fitted the scene or the scene fitted us because that’s how we felt about ourselves, I’m not sure. I guess we would have seen our brothers and the front men of indie bands wearing DMs. So if we can do anything in the world, why can’t we do that too?”<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>25</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>26</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>27</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 11: Close up of Hannah's 'sensible' Docs*



*Figure 12: Hannah in her Docs*

This shows that it is not just the brand history of Doc Martens that makes their relationship to the women who wear them so special – it would not be enough to rely on that. It is the meshing of that history with the personal history of the women who wear Docs that means an enduring and meaningful relationship to this item of clothing. Hannah described how there was a period of nearly 20 years where she did not wear Doc Martens, which she says was a “fashion dictated thing” rather than a “conscious choice to move away from them”. But then, in 2008, she found a pair of Doc Martens shoes in a shop: “They just really spoke to me. I had to have them then and there.” She was so excited about this purchase that she immediately put a picture of them on Facebook (“And I don’t put anything on Facebook, ever”), and wanted to share it with her friends, specifically those who also used to wear Docs. Hannah said: “I think I was so excited on behalf of me and all of my friends that ever used to own a pair that I immediately shared it with all of those people.” Despite this, Hannah never really wears this pair of Docs because she has never been able to break them in, but she cannot bear to get rid of them either. She went on to buy another pair of Docs (see figures 11 and 12 above) that are sneaker style, which are more comfortable and practical for everyday use.

Hannah was realistic about Doc Martens as a multinational brand, but honest about the fact that she still considers them to be a little bit different:

*“I think they’re quite alternative, and that’s something that’s quite important. I do remember the days of the massive Doc Martens store in Covent Garden – I remember going there when I was a teenager and just being in awe and wonder. And when you think of it now you realise it was this massive corporate space, so they weren’t very alternative, were they? But I do still look at them as... I recognise that they are a massive brand, but they still aren’t all that mainstream?... What do I think of them now? I quite like the innovation now. I quite like the fact that there are sandals and all sorts of weird and wonderful boots and shoes. One of the reasons I like that is that as an older person... well, getting older! I don’t want to be dressing in the same way that I did when I was a teenager, but I still want to be able to tap into some of those same brands.”<sup>30</sup>*

This shows that Doc Martens are effectively using their subcultural capital to create authenticity in a way that is suitable for the post-subcultural world, and that successfully navigating the delicate tightrope between nostalgia and pastiche is one part of how Doc Martens has created lasting and successful relationships with women. They cannot just rely on their historical association with subculture because subcultures have ceased to be the oppositional forces that they once were – we are now ‘post subculture’ (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). As such, Doc Martens have been forced to invest in a new sense of community that does not rely on outside groups, but that encourages those disparate groups who have had Doc Martens as part of their life in one way or another to come together under one banner. You can still recognise the four essential tenets of the production of subcultural capital as described by Thornton at the beginning of this chapter, but they have been transformed to become so easy as to be accessible by almost anyone. The ‘knowledge of the scene’ now no longer relies as much on physical spaces, but rather on digital spaces. For example, you can watch live streams of musicians playing at ‘The Boot Room’ (the music venue in the Doc Martens Camden shop) without even being in the country. The ‘possession of relevant physical objects’ is reduced to simply owning a pair of Docs rather than a variety of ever changing, different fashions. This makes it easy to remain a member of the community even when not actively engaging with it. Having ‘the right style’ means having *your own* style. Individuality is celebrated and encouraged in the Doc Martens community (seen in the Docs ‘Wear Them Your Way’ hashtag and campaign).

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

'Commitment to the scene' is as easy as liking an Instagram post or owning a pair of Docs. Intense involvement and 'collecting' of Docs is still celebrated, but nobody is ostracised for being new to the community or sitting at its edges.

This change was reflected in participant interviews during data collection. Unlike the descriptions of subcultural capital in *Club Cultures* and other studies who questioned the authenticity of new recruits to alternative style (see particularly Holland 2004 and her follow up research in 2018), the women who I spoke to in the Doc Martens community seemed to almost unanimously agree that new recruits were a good thing, and that they felt a sense of solidarity when they saw other women wearing Doc Martens. For example, when I asked Claire if she noticed when other women wear Doc Martens and if that impacts what she thinks of them, she replied:

*"Yes. I always notice. Yes, it does impact on what I think of them... If they are very, very new and they are on a young person I go all warm and fuzzy about it. If they're proper worn and on an older person I have a tendency to warm to that person, I feel I've found a kindred spirit. I think it does foster an approving appreciative glance between women, whereas sometimes women can do the whole 'scanning them up and down' thing. But I think Docs are different."*<sup>31</sup>

This encapsulates the sentiment of many participants that young people discovering Docs were to be encouraged, and that older people who had long worn them were 'kindred spirits' who you automatically had something in common with. This is, once again, evidence of waveless feminism applied to Doc Martens: it does not matter if the person wearing Docs is different to you because the commonality created by the brand alone is enough for you to feel some solidarity with that person, thus making the difference no longer the threat that it might have been in a traditional subculture, or indeed in the traditional feminist wave metaphor.

## Conclusion

In this way, Doc Martens can act as a bridge: between mainstream and subculture; between younger women and older women; and even between one woman and a previous iteration of herself. This reflects the post-subcultural turn – which allows for the mix-and-match of identities – but can also be taken further into post-modernism. We no longer only have subcultures to choose from for our patchwork identities because mainstream influencers such as Miley Cyrus and Nicki Minaj are perfectly acceptable routes into wearing Doc Martens. The world has changed unrecognisably in the last 60 years, but Doc Martens has changed with it. Chameleon-like, the brand has used their subcultural capital and history to almost seamlessly find a home in every decade they have lived through by finding homes with different kinds of people. This year they are celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1460 by releasing a new collaboration each month in a collection called '1460 Remastered'. The diversity of Doc Martens' appeal is clear for all to see in these products, with designer collaborators including: Yohji Yamamoto, CBGB, A Bathing Ape, and Raf Simons. Alongside these designer collaborations there have also been new collections with Hello Kitty and The Sex Pistols. This year of throwback collaborations really encapsulates how the disparate history of Doc Martens is one of their most potent weapons in the fight for authenticity in the post-modern era, and why they matter so much to the women who wear them. The unique subcultural history of Docs, then, is the first strand in the thread that binds them to their female wearers. As one participant, Megan, said: "These same boots but not Doc Martens wouldn't be the same. I might still love them, but I would love them in a different way".

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<sup>31</sup> In conversation with the author, Derby, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

## ***“They look like they were made for me.”<sup>32</sup>***

- Sharon, 49, University Lecturer.

When it comes to shoes we all have favourites, but Sharon’s connection to her chosen pair is not just external – it’s inked onto her skin. Sharon has always had an affinity with the blue and white ‘willow pattern’. Developed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by ceramicists copying the Chinese style, the pattern has become one of the most recognisable forms of ceramic design in the world. Sharon got a full sleeve tattoo of the design when she turned 40, and when Doc Martens released their Pascal 8 ups with the Willow pattern she says she knew she had to have them:

*“When they were first released, I had so many friends messaging me... I have a blue and white sleeve, a tattoo. So my friends were like 'Oh my god, Sharon. Look at these Docs! You wear Docs, they're blue and white, you have to buy them!' So I guess they were the one pair that I knew I had to buy or I would have non-buyers regret for the rest of my life. And they say 'Sharon'. Blue and white says 'Sharon' to my friends. I collect the china, I've got the tattoo, so you know, there's sort of an association there. It would have been really dumb to not buy them.”<sup>33</sup>*

Sharon’s relationship with Doc Martens began in 1989 when she bought her first pair at the age of 19, just as she was going to university. They were cherry red shoes which she wore with charity chop clothes; a style which she said was universally worn by her peers at the art school she attended. That pair lasted Sharon for 19 years, but there was a period of time where she did not wear Docs as much. When Sharon went back to university as a mature student in 2013, she knew that it was the right time to buy another pair and she said to herself:

*“I’m going back to university, I’m going to wear Docs!”<sup>34</sup>*

Sharon told me that she feels that wearing Docs makes a statement about not caring about societal rules. She considers wearing her Docs a protest against what is often considered ‘normal’ for a professional woman in her 40s, and a rejection of what the world expects from her. In Sharon’s words:

***“You have to take me as I come. I'm professional, highly educated, with lots of experience. This is what I wear.”<sup>35</sup>***



Figure 13: Sharon in her willow pattern Docs

<sup>32</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## **Empowerment**

This chapter will discuss how the physical of wearing Doc Martens embodies a sense of comfort, safety, confidence, and empowerment. Indeed, one participant, Cathy, told me of her Docs, “they're my power boots.”<sup>36</sup> Fashion can be seen as the embodiment of power struggle between binaries (Lynch and Medvedev 2018, 2); be it upper class vs. working class, young vs. old, or mainstream vs. alternative, there is always a negotiation of power and thus the potential for empowerment in the way we dress. But for the purposes of this research, empowerment will be discussed through the lens of gender and specifically of femininity: the subversion of it, the juxtaposition of it, and the celebration of it. At this juncture it is important to define what I mean by femininity, and rather than reinvent the wheel I include here a definition from Iris Marion Young which perfectly captures my own understanding of the word. Young has formed her definition by taking the key aspects of Simone de Beauvoir’s understanding of femininity and combining them with her own research on the experience of the female body in physical space. She writes:

*“I take ‘femininity’ to designate not a mysterious quality or essence that all women have by virtue of their being biologically female. It is, rather, a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves” (Young, Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality 2005, 30).*

With this definition of femininity in mind, we will then move on to assess the different types of empowerment – to buy, to choose, and to move – that participants felt Doc Martens afforded them, and link this to a broader discussion of gender, clothing, and physical space through new materialism.

## **Consumption**

Before any of these discussions can occur, it is first important to tackle the question of whether female empowerment can be achieved by consumption. There are many that say that empowerment cannot be bought, and to an extent, I would agree: grabbing something off the shelf that was worn by your favourite celebrity will not give you their looks or their talents. But then, I do not believe that any woman truly thinks this to be the case. The trope of the ‘duped woman’, coerced into buying things she does not need or really want, is one that has long plagued any discussion of women and fashion:

*“Women, it is argued, buy and embody the meanings associated with clothes and thus transfer the created meanings to themselves as wearer. In this way, women become the dupes in a system of manufactured meanings and an interest in beauty, fashion and clothes-consciousness becomes associated with less healthy dimensions of functioning – i.e., to be interested in fashion is seen as feminine obsession with trivia.” (Banim, Green and Guy 2001, 7)*

This is in itself a sexist view of why clothing matters to women, but that is not to say that it does not happen. Of course, we are influenced by the people we admire: If I think Billie Eilish is cool, might I not want to copy her hairstyle? If I admire Jacinda Ardern, might I not want to wear the same earrings as her? This ‘top down’ way of looking at fashion (from the cultural world to the clothes) can be restrictive and destructive. But it also has the potential to empower:

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<sup>36</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

*“...women can and do re-appropriate and subvert the meanings imbued in clothes. Women may be surrounded by dominant images of ‘normal’ womanhood which they are encouraged to consume but they are also presented with opportunities to contest, create and transform themselves through playing with the images on offer.” (Ibid)*

‘Consumption’ has become something of a dirty word in the last decade or so. It conjures up images of mindless buying, propping up an indifferent capitalist system, and tying us into yet more consumption – a vicious cycle of excess. However, some have argued that consumption need not be seen as the enemy, and that there are ways to consume mindfully. Some (like Bernard Cova, Robert Kozinets and Avi Shankar in their 2007 book *Consumer Tribes*) argue that the work of the consumer creates a more meaningful mode of consumption. They describe how the traditional concept of consumers as individuals does not allow for inherently social nature of humanity to be explored within consumer culture, and make the point that the social links formed through the consumption of things often become more important than the things themselves. Referring to the groups formed through this social consumption as ‘consumer tribes’, they assert:

*“Active and enthusiastic in their consumption, sometimes in the extreme, tribes produce a range of identities, practices, rituals, meanings, and even material culture itself. They re-script roles, twist meanings, and shout back to producers and other groups of people while they fashion their own differentiation strategies. They both absorb and resist the pre-packaged, off-the-shelf, brand-and-product meanings of marketers.” (Shankar, Cova and Kozinets 2007, 4)*

They also make the distinction that “consumer tribes rarely consume brands and products – even the most mundane ones – without adding to them, grappling with them, bleeding them with their own lives and altering them” (ibid). New materialist scholars have also discussed this idea, particularly Dr Kate Fletcher, who in her 2016 book *Craft of Use: Post-Growth Fashion* writes:

*“Brands control fashion chains assiduously; but downstream, after a garment is sold, the user is in charge. A user’s subsequent actions can uphold a brand’s values, be incurious about them or defy them in a range of direct or subtle ways.” (Fletcher, Craft of Use: Post-Grown Fashion 2016, 10).*

This was reflected by Sam when we discussed the nature of marketing within Doc Martens, and the role that she sees it playing in the brand:

*“I am very much an advocate of not putting our consumers into boxes but sometimes we need to in order to know what to design next... What I like about our consumers is that they never cease to take me by surprise. I will see men in what we’ve deemed as women’s product, and women in men’s product, and people wearing product that we never thought they’d wear with their look.”<sup>37</sup>*

This indicates that the Doc Martens community do alter the things they consume in such a profound way as to continually change the way in which they are marketed to: indeed, it is Sam’s job to look for these changes, and account for them in the direction of the brand. One example is the ‘#WearThemYourWay’ social media campaign run by Doc Martens which empowers members of the community to share their own style. This shows that Doc Martens are engaging with their ‘consumer tribe’ on their own terms, rather than forcing them into marketing models that do not suit them.

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<sup>37</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

Others still have argued that there is no way to live in a world without consumption, and that the best way to get people to consume more mindfully is to start at the very beginning of the process and design objects that consumers will really care about – not just temporarily, but forever. Jonathan Chapman’s 2005 book *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences, and Empathy* takes an in-depth look at the role of the designer in creating human-object relationships that last by fostering a sense of empathy between us and our things. Chapman’s work will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter on Love, but briefly, he argues that “consumption is natural” (Chapman, *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences and Empathy* 2005, 29) and that the material wastefulness we see around us is not evidence of an undesirable human trait, but rather of a “failed user/object relationship, where insufficient empathy led to the perfunctory dumping of one by the other” (ibid, 20). Chapman asserts that the problem lies not in consumption itself, but the way in which we are encouraged to consume: products are advertised to us as silver bullets to all of our problems, and when they fail to meet these impossibly high standards we stop caring about them and throw them away. The answer, then, is to design and make products that do not claim to change your life or make you a better person, but rather products that can sit alongside you on your journey through life. Quoting E Manzini, Chapman states that “it is time for a new generation of products that can age slowly and in a dignified way... [to] become our partners in life and support our memories” (ibid, 24).

I believe that both pathways of change – at the design end, and at the consumer end – show that consumption can be empowering. If, as Chapman says, “consumption is not just a way of life, it is life” (ibid 29) then it is important for us to not treat it as a problem to be solved. This does not mean consumption should not be interrogated – to be sure, there are plenty of examples of the broken relationship between consumer and object leading to huge amounts of waste and destruction. This is, in fact, a key element of new materialism. There too there is an acknowledgement that the system of consumption under capitalism is broken, but never a claim that consumption itself is wrong. Indeed, Bruggeman talks of contemporary critical fashion practices as being ‘rhizomatic’:

*“In a biological sense, rhizomes are underground stems of plants, which are capable of producing intricate and horizontal networks of roots, which shoot off new stems in all directions for new plants... Non-linear and non-hierarchical systems with no beginning, middle or end, and no point of origin. Any point can and will continuously be connected to any other. This is different from a tree or root, which have more hierarchical and centred systems... It is thus within – or at the margins of – hierarchical, centred systems like capitalism that new rhizomes may arise... Rhizomes, therefore, open up the system by creating movements” (Bruggeman 2018, 14-15).*

These small movements offer ways to rebuild our troubled relationships with our things by encouraging us to think critically about what we want, what we need, and how we should obtain it. Thus, the consumption of things can lead to empowerment, even within the capitalist system. Of course, Doc Martens live in the logic of capitalism – but their owners can create rhizomatic systems, events, objects, and experiences by taking that thing from the logic of capitalism (in this case a pair of shoes) and transforming it. It could be a physical transformation, or it could be an emotional one. But regardless of how it was done, every participant took something mass produced and turned it into something emotionally durable through the physical act of wearing it. Indeed, some participants stated that they had Doc Martens that they could not wear anymore, but they could not bear to throw them away. Ashleigh, for example, said, “even the ones that I’ve bust, I still have them. I love

them so much.”<sup>38</sup> This shows just how emotionally durable Doc Martens are because they are kept not only through a long life of wear, but beyond their life of usefulness. This phenomenon will be discussed further in the chapter on love, but for now we return to empowerment.

### **Empowerment and Femininity: Subversion, Juxtaposition, and Celebration**

This section will discuss how gender and empowerment are linked in the wearing of Doc Martens by looking at three different ways that femininity was discussed by participants: the subversion of it, the juxtaposition of it, and the celebration of it. The aim here is to show that all participants felt that wearing Doc Martens made them feel empowered, but that there were different types of empowerment within that commonality. This ties the empowering potential of Doc Martens to waveless feminism: I too am seeking to highlight the variations within a group, not to show that one iteration is right and another is wrong, but to show that the diversity in the formation of that feeling is what makes the collective feeling of empowerment so strong. Dahl-Crossley has written that, considering the often espoused view that different waves of feminists are hostile to each other, she was surprised by how much positive affirmation she found between feminists when conducting her research (Dahl Crossley 2017, 11). I have found the exact same thing in my research: there was very little denigration of different types of empowerment from participants, and several (particularly Ashleigh, Briar and Hannah) spoke about how they enjoyed using their clothing to play with small aspects of gender expectations, depending on what kind of mood they were in. Even where participants did discuss other women not wearing Docs or ‘sensible shoes’, there was never any nastiness in the sentiment, but rather pity – for example, Gaye calling women in stilettos “slaves to fashion”. There was a sense of wanting to bring those women who had yet to discover Docs into the fold, rather than the kind of exclusivity or snobbishness that popularly characterises women when discussing fashion choices.

#### **Subversion**

Doc Martens, by virtue of their history, have become empowering for women to wear. Almost all participants acknowledged that Doc Martens had historically been (working) men’s boots and said that this fact alone made the wearing of them by women feel edgy. Even now, when the predominant consumer base of Doc Martens is women<sup>39</sup>, the act of simply wearing something that had once belonged to men feels like a victory. One participant, Ashleigh, said:

*“They think you’re hard as nails if you wear Doc Martens but you’re not. You’re subverting the stereotype of that box that you should fit into. I think also maybe because they were work boots and they are sturdy and strong, that some people think a woman can’t wear that because women shouldn’t be sturdy and strong.”<sup>40</sup>*

So, for Ashleigh, the subversion of gender expectations through her wearing of Doc Martens is what empowers her. There were several other participants who echoed this view: Lydia told me “considering they were traditionally workingmen’s shoes... It’s not delicate, and I like that.”<sup>41</sup> This sense of Doc Martens not being ‘delicate’ or ‘girly’ is something that came up time and time again, usually in the context of the physical feeling of wearing them. One participant, Destiny, an early childhood teacher in her early 20s, said:

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<sup>38</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>39</sup> Sam, a participant who has worked for Docs for over 20 years, told me this during our interview.

<sup>40</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

*“I suppose I have an association of looking more tough because of the style of the boot. I think maybe that might come across when I’m wearing them. Because I’m not super girly in how I dress... I like that idea. I like the idea of being tougher.”<sup>42</sup>*

Destiny went on to say that she felt more confident wearing her Doc Martens than other shoes that she owned. She used the words ‘sturdy’, ‘practical’, and ‘long-lasting’ as a contrast to what she saw as ‘girly’ – something that Destiny was not so keen to be associated with.



Figure 14: Destiny in her Docs



Figure 15: Close up of Destiny's Docs - Black 1460s

Destiny was by no means the only participant to distance herself from ‘girlyness’, with another participant, Gaye, saying:

*“I look at some of the shoes today, some of the ridiculous stilettos. Man, the damage that’s doing to your back, your hips, and your feet. They’ll be going through absolute pain and discomfort in the name of fashion. And then they end up with big bunions. Slaves to fashion, y’know?”<sup>43</sup>*

At the time of interview Gaye was turning 50 years old and had been wearing Docs since she was a young teenager, when she was a part of the punk scene. She described herself as an ‘old age punk’ and, interestingly, despite her statement that people who wore stilettos were ‘slaves to fashion’, Gaye (and her grown up daughter, who also wears Docs) were keen to let me know that she had dents in her legs from wearing 1460s her entire life. Gaye said, “it’s like Chinese foot binding or something, after years and years of wearing them.”<sup>44</sup> In stark contrast to the concern Gaye showed for stiletto wearers, she wore her own Doc Marten scars with pride. She even told me a story about being at an Anti-Nowhere League gig when she was younger and ending up with a Doc Martens heel print bruise on her arm after she had fallen in the mosh-pit.

<sup>42</sup> In conversation with the author, Cambridge (NZ), 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>43</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 16: Gaye and her collection of Docs*

This is important because it highlights that the way we speak about items of clothing is always gendered, and that those subconscious gendered meanings take on lives of their own that are very difficult to pin down. Destiny saw her wearing of Doc Martens – sturdy and practical shoes – as being a direct contrast to ‘girlyness’, indicating that to be girly or feminine is to be delicate, weak, and impractical. I have no doubt that this is not what Destiny believes – but the only language that she has available to her to describe how empowering it feels to be in shoes that will not let her down is so gendered as to render her own speech counterintuitive. She same goes for Gaye, who said her Docs made her feel “ready to take on the day, ready to do battle”<sup>45</sup>, and who wore the physical marks of those shoes so proudly. And yet when discussing stilettos, the ultimate cultural indicator that beauty is suffering, Gaye was so worried about the physical impact of those shoes on their wearers. I am highlighting these paradoxes not to say that Destiny and Gaye are wrong in their assertions, but simply to show that the gendered way in which we discuss clothing is so normalised

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

as to become invisible. Pat Kirkham and Judy Attfield talk about this in the introduction to *The Gendered Object* when they write:

*“...we sometimes fail to appreciate the effects that particular notions of femininity and masculinity have on the conception, design, advertising, purchase, giving and uses of objects, as well as on their critical and popular reception. Objects are highly, though differentially, affective and amongst the strongest bearers of meaning in our society. However, because Modernist thought has undervalued the non-rational, the ways in which objects inflect gender through human experience as collective and personal memories, the giving and receiving of gifts, to say nothing of our dream world, remain under-explored.”* (Kirkham and Attfield 1996, 1-2)

When picked apart and scrutinised, the assertion that ‘girly’ is the opposite of ‘sturdy’ seems non-sensical – of course we know that women can be sturdy, strong and practical. But in the moment of the conversation it was a language that we both understood. I knew what Destiny was trying to say: that the wearing of an object so solid, so very *there*, made her feel grounded, empowered and confident. In part due to the physical nature of the object, but also because the wearing of objects like that had been unavailable to women for so long, and so the very notion of a women in strong, sturdy boots was in itself an act of rebellion against a world that said she had no claim to that feeling or that object. But for Destiny, getting to the point where she felt she could subvert those gender norms did not seem like it had been a great trial, or a particularly long personal journey. “It’s not a big thing for me to wear them”, she told me. “To me, they’re universal.”<sup>46</sup>

For others, however, the journey to accepting the empowerment offered by the subversion of gender stereotypes was longer and more fraught. Janine, a science communicator in her late 20s, told me that Doc Martens had almost been a dirty little secret for her as a teenager:

*“I always thought they were really cool and a bit edgy, and I always wanted to be that, but I was a bit of a sheep in school. I ran with the pure popular crowd in school but then I’d go home and be a completely different person. I didn’t wear them out with everybody else, they were always something I wore with my family. I didn’t want to be associated with being goth or emo or whatever, I just wanted an easy life and I didn’t want anybody to give me any hassle. So they were part of a pure split personality... I’d be at home listening to Morrissey with dad and then be in school listening to dance music. It was mental, but I truly didn’t realise it. I was just trying to fit in. I was so scared of being bullied.”<sup>47</sup>*

Eventually, as indie and alternative began to become cool again in the late-2000s, Janine started edging more towards the part of her identity that had been private for so long. She began to wear band t shirts and skinny jeans, and eventually started wearing Docs in public. Of this time, Janine said:

*“I started to feel a bit more free, not worrying quite so much about what other people thought of me. I would never, ever think for a minute ‘I’m not going to wear Docs because somebody might think something’ now. That definitely disappeared. So it has impacted on my identity. They just made me feel a bit better because I was wearing something that I*

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<sup>46</sup> In conversation with the author, Cambridge (NZ), 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>47</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

*really liked, and that I knew was a controversial piece of clothing at one time. I just started to feel like I could really do what I wanted.”<sup>48</sup>*

This shows that wearing Docs in public was a big part of Janine accepting parts of herself that she previously had felt ashamed of. As she got a bit older, she began to feel more able to be herself, and the self that she wanted to show was the one that wore Docs. Janine – and several other participants – mentioned how this created a cycle of positive reinforcement. She wore her Docs and felt confident because of their familiarity. This familiarity bolstered her confidence further, and when the world failed to end as a result of her wearing Docs and letting go of that small piece of traditional femininity, she felt able to do it more. This contributed to a shedding of the image that she had constructed when she was younger as a shield against bullying, and the eventual negotiation of a presentation of self that she felt was both comfortable and authentic.



Figure 17: Janine in her Docs

Janine went on to explicitly discuss her own thoughts on the gendered history of Doc Martens, and how we speak about our clothing:

*“For a long time they were probably just associated with men. They are chunky, they’re sturdy, they’re made for durability, and I feel like women’s fashion has never been made to*

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

*last. Our shoes are really flimsy – for a long time we were all walking about wearing those little ballet flats... More girls are wearing them now, but I think it's considered more of an edgy thing for girls to do whereas for a guy, he's just wearing a pair of boots. Maybe other people think you're trying to make a statement, but they wouldn't think that about a man because it's not as bold a choice... I don't personally think it's a bold choice, but other people might do. As is the case with feminist issues. I don't think we should use adjectives like masculine and feminine for clothing, but then it's weird because I would use those words too, because I've been conditioned to do so. It's always 'bold' things that are masculine, and feminine stuff is always flimsy and light.”<sup>49</sup>*

Clearly, Janine is familiar with the pitfalls and paradoxes of assigning material objects with human concepts such as gender. But that does not stop her from feeling empowered by the subversion of her own wearing of Doc Martens – shoes that were, in her own words, “associated with men”. Her openness about her own identity struggle in her teens, and then her new found confidence through the wearing of this gender ‘taboo’ item in her early 20s, shows the real world impact that allowing yourself to play with gender concepts can have, but also highlights the terror that can be induced when confronting the possibility of gender non conformity – however slight that non conformity is. The gender theorist Judith Butler has written extensively on this subject, and posits gender rather than a passive state of being as “an active style of living one’s body in the world” (Butler, Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault (1987) 2004, 26). She suggests that if this ‘style of living in the world’ is threatened then it can create a very real identity crisis for people, as seen above in Janine’s example. Butler writes:

*“If human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one’s very existence into question. In these moments of gender dislocation in which we realise that it is hardly necessary that we be the genders we have become, we confront the burden of choice intrinsic to living as a man or woman or some other gender identity, a freedom made burdensome through social constraint... This kind of questioning often engenders vertigo and terror over the possibility of losing social sanctions, of leaving a solid social station and place. (ibid, 27)*

Basically, when we choose to do something not traditionally ascribed to our gender (like women wearing masculine boots) then we suddenly realise that that choice existed all along. Once awake to that knowledge, we begin to realise the myriad of choices that we make every day in order to conform to gender expectations, and that knowledge becomes burdensome as we begin to question our real motivation for making those choices. One participant, Fenella, described this process in relation to returning to Docs after a decade of not wearing them:

*“I love a feminine shoe. I love a pointy toe, I love a witchy shoe with a square toe, I love a kitten heel because it’s trashy... All of that stuff, I love it. I used to struggle to wear them out on the dancefloor. They looked great, but I just couldn’t get anywhere, and I couldn’t move. Your actual sense of trying to get around in them. And I was just constantly uncomfortable. And it’s like, why am I in pain through this choice? Why am I putting myself through this? And when I was younger, I’d suffer through it a bit more. But now I don’t want to. So I feel like it’s a bit of a rejection of fashion and style over comfort, which isn’t something I’d normally do.”<sup>50</sup>*

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<sup>49</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>50</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

So for Fenella, much like Janine, wearing Doc Martens is not only a rejection and subversion of gender norms, but a rejection and subversion of *her own previous manifestation* of those gender norms. We all live in our bodies all the time but becoming and displaying gender is an ongoing process that is constantly engaged with and re-evaluated. As Butler writes:

*“That one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman does not imply that this ‘becoming’ traverses a path from disembodied freedom to cultural embodiment. Indeed, one is one’s body from the start, and only thereafter becomes one’s gender.”* (Butler 2004, 25).

### Juxtaposition

Interestingly, Fenella also said that she enjoyed the juxtaposition of wearing big, heavy Doc Martens with more feminine coded clothing<sup>51</sup>, but that this was a recent return to something she had done as a child when she used to wear Doc Martens with a leopard print coat. Fenella described how, during her 20s, her style was “a bit more glamorous” and that she “didn’t know how to match Docs up with that particular kind of glamour.” At that time, she struggled to see how heavy boots could be glamorous and feminine, so she would forgo them in favour of the aforementioned kitten heels. Fenella said to me:

*“In terms of femininity and figuring out my place in the world as a woman, I spent a lot of time feeling like the sort of woman I was was kind of wrong in some way. I wasn’t able to perform femininity as was expected of me. My mother will say things like, ‘You’ve got a lot of masculine energy, haven’t you?’... I associate them with the Riot Grrl inflected looks that I was putting together. It was about a feminist awakening... I guess Doc Martens were a way of articulating that... Even the dress that I put on today, wearing them with a slip dress, it just looks cool, and it’s something that’s a bit different. I’ve been aware that I could never perform femininity in that way and it doesn’t feel right, so what’s the point? I think that Docs are a way of saying something that feels right.”*<sup>52</sup>

When Fenella told me this, I was surprised by how moving I found it. I too had always felt unable to perform femininity as was expected of me and had found comfort in the wearing of more masculine coded clothing. But, like Fenella, I still love a lot of those feminine things and have enjoyed reintroducing them to my life as I have gotten older. Fenella told me that her Doc Martens represent a sense of acceptance of her herself that she is now very unwilling to let go of. They have anchored her to a version of herself that, she said, “feels a bit more honest. A bit more myself.” When I asked Fenella if there were any situations where she would not wear her Docs, she said:

*“I might not if I was invited to a wedding, depending on what the vibe was. But I would probably try. Because if you pair them with the sorts of dresses that you have to wear [Fenella moved her hands to indicate the shape of an A-line dress], I would feel a bit more like I wasn’t putting on a costume, which I’ve definitely felt before at formal events. So that would help me retain a sense of self.”*<sup>53</sup>

Once again showing how the juxtaposition of masculine and feminine that wearing a pair of Docs can provide is important to Fenella’s confidence and empowerment, because it allowed her to retain a piece of herself while still performing the societal expectations dictated by an event such as a wedding.

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<sup>51</sup> This also shows that more than one type of empowerment can live within one person.

<sup>52</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



Figure 18: Fenella holding her 1460s

Fenella was far from the only participant to mention wearing Docs at formal events. Cathy, a university lecturer in her 50s, explained that part of what made the juxtaposition of masculine and feminine so powerful for her was how unacceptable it was (and, she said, still is) in her native France. Cathy said her French mother “really cannot reconcile a pair of Doc Martens, as girly as they could be, with being a woman”, and that her own insistence on wearing Doc Martens was “a reaction to the French way.” When I asked Cathy about gender and identity in relation to Doc Martens she said:

*“I think you make a statement that to be a woman, or to be feminine, the femininity might not necessarily be just on the outside. To me, if you decide to wear a really pretty or fluffy dress or whatever, having a pair of Doc Martens makes you different and therefore more feminine, more interesting, more quirky.”<sup>54</sup>*

So for Cathy, the empowerment she feels in juxtaposing her Docs with dresses and skirts is bound up in national ideals of gender, and her want to continue to rebel against them. As Samantha Holland as written in her research on aging alternative women, “sometimes the option is to remake one’s own concept of femininity, but set it apart from traditional femininity” (Holland 2018, 197). Cathy told me a story about attending a French wedding which illustrates this perfectly:

**Georgia:** *And are there any situations where you wouldn’t wear your Doc Martens?*

**Cathy:** *Frankly? No. I’ve worn them in all situations. I’ve worn them at wedding. French weddings! I did that on purpose at my brother’s wedding, just to see everyone’s face.*

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<sup>54</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

**Georgia:** Was it as you expected?

**Cathy:** God, yeah! Because I had a black dress with a petticoat and Doc Martens. And they said, 'She does look British, doesn't she?' And I remember, I took my youngest son, he was wearing a suit with red Converse. And again, you know, the perception was 'British'.

**Georgia:** [laughing] Yeah. Was that sense of like, 'Oh that's very British' used in a negative way?

**Cathy:** I don't think it's always very positive!<sup>55</sup>

Cathy was proud to be seen as 'British' by her French relatives because, to Cathy, Britain has always represented a society that is far more accepting of difference and alternativity than her native France. Cathy told me she was drawn to Britain in her early 20s because of the music and style scenes, and that Doc Martens had a lot to do with that. She said:

*"We were all kind of getting into British culture. We were looking at what they were wearing and how they were dressing and it was so much freer and far less 'You are a woman and therefore you have to wear those shoes.' You can mix and match the skirt with Doc Martens... So that's when it really kicked in."*<sup>56</sup>



Figure 19: Cathy with some of her Doc Martens collection

<sup>55</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Interestingly, Cathy was not the only European participant to note this. Silvia, a museum worker in her 30s, explained to me that her wearing of Docs was inextricably tied to a rejection of the gender ideals she grew up with in Italy:

*“It’s one of the big reasons why I love Glasgow, because no one cares. No one judges you. You can just be whatever you want to be and just be yourself without being judged for what you wear... In Italy, it’s totally different. I think my obsession with being comfortable has something to do with all the pressure from Italy of being nice, and feminine, and thin, and all that bullshit.”<sup>57</sup>*

Despite this, Silvia told me that when she returns to Italy she still feels the need to ‘accommodate’ and ‘try not to create fights’ with her choice of clothing. Silvia told me, “I don’t buy a new wardrobe, I’m not a different person, but I maybe adjust a bit”, and this raises a very important point at this juncture in our discussion about gender: Doc Martens are not a silver bullet to patriarchal gender norms. No single thing is. But for both Silvia and Cathy, they work to juxtapose the national ideals of ‘what a woman looks like’ with who they are as women living abroad. Silvia summed it up best when she said:

*“When I moved here they made me feel part of this culture, part of Glasgow. They make me feel like myself here.”<sup>58</sup>*



Figure 20: Silvia in her Docs - Chelsea boot style



Figure 21: Close up of Silvia's Docs



Figure 22: Close up of Silvia's Docs

<sup>57</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Doc Martens, then, can be seen as a sort of ‘bridging’ item – a way to connect with oneself even if the current environment is not conducive to it. Several other participants talked about feeling empowered to wear their Docs with elegant, formal dresses because they had come to a point in their life where they were no longer afraid of the juxtaposition, or the potential ‘loss of femininity’ that it might engender. For example, Hannah told me:

*“I’ve been to two weddings recently where I’ve worn a really beautiful dress, it’s a long, billowy sleeved dress, black, with passion flowers printed down the sleeves. And I wore nice shoes for the photos, but the minute they were done I put my DMs on. And at both weddings there was a lot of appreciation for the combo of extremely elegant dress on the top and chunky boots on the bottom.”<sup>59</sup>*

And Ashleigh, an archaeologist in her 20s, had a similar story:

*“The other day I was at a wedding and I told my boyfriend to go back and get me my Doc Martens, because I was wearing heels and I just didn’t want them anymore! They were much more comfy, I could do a ceilidh in them, and I couldn’t do that in my tiny, strappy heels.”<sup>60</sup>*

These examples show how that the juxtaposition of masculine with feminine through the wearing of Doc Martens is not necessarily always an outright rejection of the feminine, but rather a coming to terms with it. As Hannah told me, “there is a place for more feminine shoes”, and many participants talked about how much they enjoyed playing with the notions of femininity through their wearing of Docs. Once the ‘vertigo and terror’ that Butler describes has been overcome, the freedom of choice becomes apparent, and can become empowering. But for many, it is also a scary new reality. As Butler writes on gender as choice:

*“Not wholly conscious, but nevertheless accessible to consciousness, it is the kind of choice we make and only later realise that we have made... The choice to assume a certain kind of body, to live or wear one’s body a certain way, implies a world of already established corporeal styles. To choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that reproduces and organises them anew. Less a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew a cultural history in one’s own corporeal terms. This is not a prescriptive task we must endeavour to do, but one in which we have been endeavouring all along.”* (Butler, *Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault* (1987) 2004, 26).

For many of the participants in this study, the choosing and wearing of Doc Martens was a big part of this ‘tacit project’, and they have acted as a vehicle through which to visually display pieces of masculinity and/or femininity that they may not otherwise have had the vocabulary to explain.

## **Celebration**

Finally, we come to the celebration of femininity through Doc Martens. When you think Doc Martens, it is almost certain that you will think of the classic 1460 silhouette, or maybe the low shoe. But always leather, always thick soled, and always flat heeled. However, Doc Martens have been making high-heeled versions of their shoes since the 1990s, and they now come in a dizzying array of shapes, sizes, colours, fabrics and heel heights. Whether the celebration of femininity through Doc Martens is via the traditional trappings (pink, glitter, ribbons) or not, there is certainly room for them to be used as a vehicle for celebrating femininity in all guises. For decades the gender and subcultural theorist Angela McRobbie was the only voice discussing gender and youth culture. That is

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<sup>59</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>60</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

(thankfully) no longer the case, but her work is still vital for this discussion. In her book *Feminism and Youth Culture*, McRobbie writes:

*“There have also been overlaps between the nuances of punk style and feminist style which are more than just coincidental. Although the stiletto heels, mini-skirts and suspenders will, despite their debunking connotations, remain unpalatable to many feminists, both punk girls and feminists want to overturn accepted ideas about what constitutes femininity. And they often end up using similar stylish devices to upset notions of ‘public propriety’.” (McRobbie 1991, 32)*

Doc Martens have also been a part of this ‘overturning’ of what constitutes femininity. As one participant, Mhorag, a freelance human resources manager in her 50s, told me, “I’ve always thought that Doc Martens belong to the girls.”<sup>61</sup> Another participant, Megan, an employee of Radio New Zealand in her 40s, talked about her love of glitter and sequins, and why her Doc Martens are a celebration of the feminine aspects of herself that she had been afraid to show for decades. She had bought a pair of Docs in her late teens and loved them but told me that she feels like she was wearing ‘a costume of the person [she] wanted to be.’ Now, however, it’s a very different story:

*“When I bought these ones, the gold glittery Doc Martens, I had been wanting to buy some for ages. There was a range, maybe two seasons ago, that was black patent with flowers, and I couldn’t justify spending the money. And then when I saw these I was like, I don’t care how much, I am buying them. As I’ve gotten older, in the last 7 or 8 years, I’ve really grown into myself. The joy of being in your late 30s/early 40s is that you figure out who you are, which is a delightful thing. And so I’ve really come into who I am. So now I have tattoos, and I wear ridiculous clothes, and I have dumb 50s glasses, and I have bright pink hair... I was now the person I wanted to be when I was 16. So buying the Docs was kind of a big deal because it was like, I wasn’t the person I wanted to be then. I was pretending to be her because I was 16, and didn’t know who I was yet. And so now it’s like, I am the person that should own these. But I shouldn’t own just a black pair or just a navy blue pair. Because the person I am now owns glittery gold Docs, she doesn’t own black ones.”<sup>62</sup>*



Figure 23: Megan in her glittery gold Docs

<sup>61</sup> In conversation with the author, Milton Keynes, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>62</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

For Megan, the purchasing and wearing of glittery gold Docs has been a part of finding empowerment through femininity. She said that despite having the same 1460 shape, she sees her Docs as “definitely feminine presenting” and told me that she would not wear black or blue ones because they are “butch as hell”. While Megan did discuss a love and appreciation for the strength and solidness of her Docs and she was certainly aware of the subcultural connotations of the brand, our conversation indicated that it was really the surface of the thing – the aesthetic appeal of this particular glittery pair – that had attracted her to them and had pushed her to finally return to Doc Martens after an absence of more than 20 years. Empowerment through the surface has been explored by Jacki Willson in her book *Being Gorgeous*, in which she writes:

*“The surface speaks to us and connects to us on an emotional level. This book champions these aesthetic, sensual surfaces. It may seem to be flighty and frivolous with its narration of false eyelashes and shoes, cakes and powder puffs, and to some extent it is. But this does not make the imagery unimportant or insignificant.”* (Willson 2015, 6)

While Willson’s work focuses on what she describes as the ‘flighty and frivolous’ aspects of the surface which may seem more like temporary expressions of aesthetic appeal, new materialist designers have considered the surface as an essential part of creating successful human object relationships with longevity. Kristine Harper’s concept of ‘aesthetic sustainability’ will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 3 but briefly, it states that the way an item looks is the most important factor in deciding whether or not it will become an active part of our life. Of items inherited from her grandmothers, Harper writes:

*“I keep them because of the emotional bond between my grandmothers and me, but I don’t feel like decorating my home with them, and I don’t feel like wearing them. They just don’t work for me, aesthetically.”* (Harper 2018, 1).

She acknowledges that sometimes emotional bonds are enough for us to keep an item, but for us to use an item, it must fit in with our aesthetic sensibilities.

Megan was not the only participant who indicated an appreciation of the surface aesthetic of Doc Martens to me. Another, Julie, has a huge collection of Doc Martens (over 70 pairs) and it is the variety in colour, style and shape that she most enjoys. Julie was a goth when she was younger and while she said she still considers herself a goth on the inside, she is “much more colourful these days!”. When I met Julie for our interview, she had pastel blue and purple hair, and she was eager to show me her collection which included every colour available of the glitter 1460s. She also had a vast collection of Doc Martens laces (classic and ribbon), as well as many brightly coloured, metallic, rainbow, and even ‘oil slick’ coloured pairs of boots, shoes and sandals. While at first it seemed that Julie simply had a maximalist approach to home décor, the more you looked, the more you realised that the vast majority of what you were seeing was Doc Martens and their associated ephemera. Cupboards were packed with shoeboxes, shelves with Docs lined up neatly, drawers filled with laces and socks. While Julie was not as verbose in her explanations of how her Doc Martens empowered her compared to other participants, she said something short and sweet which really summed up her relationship with these bright, sparkly shoes. When I asked her how wearing them made her feel, she said, “I guess I feel like me.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> In conversation with the author, Derby, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.



Figure 24: Julie with some of her collection



Figure 25: Docs in one of Julie's cupboards



Figure 26: One of Julie's drawers full of Doc Martens laces



Figure 27: More of Julie's collection

It is in this way that Doc Martens can be a celebration of femininity, by simply existing as an item worn by women. As Cathy said previously, “the femininity might not necessarily be just on the outside.” One participant, J, told me that wearing her Docs had been an integral part of boosting her confidence before she got married. J told me that she hates being photographed but wanted to feel more comfortable with it on the big day, so she booked a boudoir photoshoot to help lift her self-esteem and show her that she could be feminine, beautiful and sexy. The photographer told her to bring high heels, but the closest thing she had were her beloved ‘slightly heeled’ Docs. She proceeded to do her boudoir photoshoot in ‘nice undies, fishnets’ and her black Doc Martens boots. J later emailed me to say that despite her hatred of photos of herself, she actually loved those photos, and she shared her favourite one with me (see figure 28 below). There is no doubt – it is a beautiful image, and I think that it captures how Docs can be a celebration of empowered femininity, with or without glitter and ribbons. These are plain, black boots, but despite what many have said about Docs being masculine, this image is anything but. They do not stand in contrast to the soft lighting and lingerie, but blend into them, making the boots softer too. There are no hard edges to this image, only an empowered woman making the choice to let her femininity be celebrated – in all of its guises.



*Figure 28: One of J's boudoir photos*

## **Empowerment: to Buy, to Choose, to Move**

Now that we have discussed how Doc Martens have empowered women, we come to talk about what they have empowered women to do. Throughout the interviews I noted that the actions tied to the empowerment spoken of by participants could be split into three categories: to buy, to choose, and to move, which are discussed below.

### **To Buy**

The debate surrounding consumption and empowerment was considered at the beginning of this chapter, and the research cited there is supported by my own research, having had several participants tell me how empowering it was for them to buy their first pair of Doc Martens themselves. One participant, K, spoke at length of the complicated relationship she had with her Doc Martens due to how expensive they were for her to buy:

*“Um, so yeah, growing up, we didn’t have any money. I was raised by a single parent. You know, my mum was on the benefit a lot of the time, she’s working multiple jobs, and I had a lot of siblings growing up. It was just like... You just wouldn’t... We just didn’t have the money to spend. And anytime we did buy shoes or clothes or anything like that, they were second hand or stuff that had been given to us or whatever. And so when I bought them, I was almost horrified at myself as well like, oh my god, how can I spend so much money? Like, it was almost, whether I deserved them or not? I felt like I didn’t deserve them.”<sup>64</sup>*

K bought her first pair when she was 17 having left high school, started university, and earning money for herself for the first time. She says before this point she had no exposure to Doc Martens and did not know what they were, but she used to walk past a shoe shop in Auckland every day on her way to work and saw them in the window. Eventually, after a lot of debate with herself, she bought her first pair: black 1460s, which she wore every day until they were completely worn out. K spoke honestly about the initial shame she had felt as spending so much on something for herself, but went on to describe how glad she was that she had done it, and how proud she was of herself for having earned the money to buy them. K told me:

*“That’s sort of a weird thing to say and a bit vain to say, but I was definitely walking around a bit like, I bought these, with my own money, these are my shoes!”<sup>65</sup>*

K also said that buying those Doc Martens had opened up a new kind of independence that she had never experienced before and said, “when I think about that time in my life and being at uni and feeling really free and confident, you know, yeah, the shoes are just so intertwined with that as well.”<sup>66</sup> K recalled that before she bought her first pair of Docs, she was trying to figure out what her life would look like outside of her family and the situation that she had grown up in. For her, the ability to buy those Docs with her own money was a turning point in her life which allowed her to begin to start making financial choices for herself without feeling the shame or guilt that she may have done before. She told me that she was grateful to her Docs for having done that for her, and, tellingly, K said of her choice to buy Docs rather than other shoes that “it wouldn’t have been the same if I’d spent \$300 on a pair of designer heels.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



Figure 29: K's 1460s - Complete with holes from wear.

## To Choose

The ability to buy a pair of shoes for oneself is linked to the ability to choose: to choose to spend money how you like, on whatever you like. But, as K's above quote shows, to be empowered to choose is not just about the buying of the thing, but about the thing that you choose to buy. For several participants (including K) the choice to have Doc Martens over other types of shoes was part of the process of understanding that you do not have to be constrained to what we, as women, are told we should be wearing. This became particularly apparent when talking about women in the work environment, and the trade-offs that are made every day between comfort, style, and professionalism. Some participants, such as Jo, noted that her choice to wear Doc Martens was about wanting to upend expectations of what a woman in her field 'looks like'. Jo is a professional embroiderer, trained at the Royal School of Needlework at Hampton Court Palace in London, who told me:

*"I wear Doc Martens because of what I do for a living. I like the fact that I don't look like an embroiderer. So the Dr. Martens kind of help with that whole... Well, I don't think 'edgy' is the right word, but 'edginess' of me as a person. As opposed to what I do for a living... So I intentionally don't look like people expect me to look."<sup>68</sup>*

Jo enjoys the freedom that Doc Martens give her to express her personality, and she has passed the love of them onto her daughter Morgan (16) who I also interviewed. Morgan had slightly different ideas about the choice to wear Docs than Jo: while Jo felt that wearing her Docs gave her the choice to both be different from what people expect but to also belong in the "Doc Martens club", Morgan said, "I feel like it was just kind of me anyway".<sup>69</sup> She sees her Doc Martens as a natural extension of herself, rather than a way to show or prove anything. At the time of interview, Morgan told me that she was deciding whether or not to wear her Doc Martens to her school prom. Morgan said that if it was up to her, then she would choose to wear them, but that "other people can be shitty" and she

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<sup>68</sup> In conversation with the author, Helensville, 2019. See Appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

was worried about the reaction from her peers. As it turns out, Jo emailed to let me know that Morgan had chosen to wear her Docs to prom (see figure 33 below).



Figure 30: Morgan and Jo in their Docs



Figure 31: Jo in her rainbow 1460s



Figure 32: Morgan in her red 1460s



Figure 33: Morgan in her prom dress and black Doc Marten shoes

Another way in which wearing Doc Martens empowers choice for women is through their versatility. Several participants mentioned that they felt Doc Martens could be worn with pretty much anything, and this is undoubtedly a part of why they have remained so popular. While most participants were speaking about the 1460s specifically, some did mention that they enjoyed the variety and range of Docs that are now available to them because it meant that they no longer had to choose between wearing Doc Martens or wearing feminine shoes – as in Megan’s case discussed previously, they could have both. One participant, Mo, told me that she loved the variety now available to her, and that the vast array of styles had given her so much choice that she was able to wear different Docs and feel different things:

*“I always feel dressed when I have them on. I feel a bit different to other people, especially in certain ones. I’ve got a lovely pair of velour burgundy ones which are slightly higher, and Helen bought me some studs when she was in America that you just put in the eyelets at the top. They are just so pretty. I’ve got a pair of black and white ones that have studs all over them and I feel feisty in them.”<sup>70</sup>*

This idea that the variety of Docs available now gives people the option to be who they want to be on any given occasion was echoed by Sarah-Mary who, when asked what her favourite pair of Docs was, told me she could not choose between her 1460s and her blue suede slingbacks:

*“Both of them mean different things to me in different ways. They’re such different pairs of shoes, the shoes and the boots, they serve different purposes and I feel different when I’m wearing them.”<sup>71</sup>*

She told me that her slingbacks were her “pretty” and “professional” shoes, and her 1460s were her “arse kicking boots”. The choice to wear different types of shoes while still wearing Docs gave her the comfort of the familiar, while still allowing her fluidity in how she wanted to present herself. And this is no accident. When I spoke to Sam about the variety of Docs Martens now available, she told me:

*“Now there’s so many looks, so many different trends, no one needs to stick to one thing. And you don’t need to stick to one thing yourself: today you might dress like an indie kid but tomorrow you could be a goth, or an emo kid, it doesn’t really matter. But Dr. Martens can fit with all of that... It’s not that subcultures don’t exist anymore, it’s just that there’s blurred lines now. You don’t have to exist in one subculture, you can exist in several.”<sup>72</sup>*

Or, indeed, in no subculture at all. The freedom to pick and choose bits and pieces from a variety of spheres and form them into an identity unique to us is a kind of bricolage; a post-modern way of constructing the self which does not rely on only one way of being. Bricolage is a French word which, in its original context, describes someone who does a large variety of manual tasks and relies on a diverse range of materials that happen to be at hand in order to complete that task. It was first applied as a philosophical concept by Levi-Strauss in his 1962 book *The Savage Mind* to describe how mythical thought is created. Bricolage has gone on to be applied in almost every sphere of academic writing, but it is particularly relevant in cultural studies where it has been used to describe the ways in which subcultures have taken objects and images and reworked them to give them new meaning. Originally subcultures were the ones doing the work of bricolage, but in the post-modern, post-subcultural era, this has been turned on its head. Now, aspects of subcultures are picked and chosen

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<sup>70</sup> In conversation with the author, Milton Keynes, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>71</sup> In conversation with the author, Brighton, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>72</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

to create new meanings for modern dressers. Doc Martens are the perfect symbol of this post-modern pick and mix because they seamlessly move through scenes, subcultures, catwalks, high streets and offices all over the world while still managing to retain their meaning for both wearer and observer. In their work on teenage girls' experiences of fashion, Gilles Marion and Agnes Nairn write that bricolage is "opportunistic and creative, re-defining the task at hand in the light of the meanings attributed to the available resources. Most of the time consumers are sophisticated enough not only to receive the dominant meanings but also to examine them, and create a bricolage of their own" (Marion and Nairn 2011), and this is exactly what we have seen happen with Doc Martens. Indeed, they used the 2011 Doc Martens slogan "We Make the Shoes, You Make the Story" as the title of their paper, which indicates that Doc Martens have become the ultimate symbol of choice for women when it comes to the negotiation of identity through clothing.

### To Move

Finally, we come to the discussion of movement. The physical feel of wearing Doc Martens was one of the most frequently discussed aspects of participants' relationships to their shoes, and was inextricably tied with a sense of empowerment, confidence, and safety. How Doc Martens physically interact with the body of the female wearer is clearly important, and that physical interaction between material and wearer is also a vital aspect of new materialism. Bruggeman writes that "in a new materialist sense, fashion can be viewed in numerous transformative encounters between physical bodies, hands, and material objects. Fashion is about the intimate relationship between body and materiality" (Bruggeman 2018, 50-51). Importantly though, new materialism does not see matter as "a blank state... passively awaiting signification" (Barad 2003, 821) but rather as something that has a vitality all of its own. Jane Bennett has written extensively about this and seeks to "highlight the active role of non-human materials in public life" (Bennett 2009, 2) by engaging with 'vibrant matter' and its associated 'thing-power', which she describes as "the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness" (ibid, xvi). This 'thing-power' was described in one of the few pieces of academic writing I have found on Doc Martens, in which Todd Lyon recounts the purchase of her first pair:

*"I myself resisted buying Doc Martens for years and years, because I wasn't a squatter and didn't own a skateboard. I thought I didn't have enough piercings to pull them off. And anyway, I'm over forty and figured I'd need a fake ID to buy them. But then, in a funky little store, I spotted a pair that I couldn't resist trying on. They were dead black, with shining red flames climbing up the toes. The shaved-headed she-clerk brought them to me in a box so big it could have held the hearts of a dozen enemies. The boots were heavy and smelled darkly of rubber and leather. I fit them over my size ten dogs, laced 'em up, and planted myself in front of a mirror. Because the mirror was on the floor, tilted back in a worshipful pose, it made my feet look twice as big as my head. The mirror told me I was the most powerful and grounded woman in the land. In these indestructible boots I could ride motorcycles, jump over mountains, pound sidewalks, hike the tundra, kick anybody that got in my way. I could dance all night and, at the stroke of midnight, run down the stairs. No matter how long that staircase of how fast I ran down those steps, these shoes would stay on my feets, protecting and empowering me, happily ever after. I bought them with my credit card, and now I get the sense that, when I'm not looking, they make my high heels feel bad about themselves."* (Lyon 2001, 294-295)

This description of Lyon’s first experience with Docs is heavy with affect, and full of description of the feel, weight and smell of them. These physical aspects are linked to the emotional: her sense of power, groundedness, and safety. She is also explicit in her belief that her Docs have a life outside of her, and one where they have to ability to make other things feel something themselves, which is testament to just how much ‘thing-power’ Docs contain. For many participants in this research, just like Lyon, that thing-power was transferred to them and transformed into personal empowerment through the wearing of their Docs. Every participant noted that the physical nature of their Docs made them feel safe, confident, or free to move as they pleased, and there were frequent discussions of the particular nature of this sense of safety in relation to being a woman. One participant, Yana, said that her mother was quite pleased that she had decided to start wearing heavy boots because she saw them as a “self-defence mechanism”, and Yana described them as a “physical barrier”. Yana remembers doing a lot of moshing when she was younger and says that despite “being assaulted pretty much every single time” her Docs kept her toes safe, and she felt more confident being in the mosh pit because of it. <sup>73</sup>



*Figure 34: Yana and her collection of Docs*

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<sup>73</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

Another participant, Claire, noted the difference in associations of violence and safety between men and women in relation to Docs Martens when she said:

*“I feel very safe when I’m wearing a pair of Doc Martens. I don’t know why. It’s the heavy-duty nature of them. You’re really connected to the ground, aren’t you? Which I think is important. I could run away from somebody. I think my partner’s association with them is that they were used to kick people’s heads in. So whether that historical male association with them is the violence attached to them, I don’t know.”<sup>74</sup>*

Claire’s partner had originally objected to her buying Docs because he was afraid that she would “look like a skinhead.” For him, the violence that was a part of the thing power of Docs – that slight undertone of fights and riots – was a negative thing. But for Claire, that aspect of their thing-power gave her confidence in their ability to protect her. This was entangled with their physical feeling, the ‘heavy-duty’ nature of the boots, and is something that made her feel secure both physically and emotionally.



Figure 35: Claire in her favourite pair of Docs



Figure 36: Claire's collection of Docs



Figure 37: Close up of Claire's favourite pair of Docs

<sup>74</sup> In conversation with the author, Derby, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

When I asked another participant, K, how wearing her Docs makes her feel, she told me they made her feel more confident and that they had shaped how she felt about herself and her position in relation to others. K said:

*“I used to feel quite fearful in a lot of public situations, because I had like, a couple of traumatising experiences, you know, as a teenager, so I would always get scared about going out at night. And you know, being in the crowds, that sort of thing. Then I had the shoes on, I don’t know what it is but it just... Maybe it’s because it feels slightly like a weapon or something, so if someone’s going to come up to me then I’m able to like, I don’t know, kick them out of my way or something like that. Yeah, not that I would actually do that. But just having the weight of them like, you feel grounded.”<sup>75</sup>*

K was emphatic about how the physical nature of wearing her Docs had changed her relationship with the physical space she inhabited. Despite her assertion that she would ‘never actually’ kick someone out of the way with her Docs, just the knowledge that she could made her feel more confident in taking up public space. Young has discussed the threat of the invasion of physical space that K describes here in relation to her studies on female body comportment, and suggests that “the enclosed space that has been described as a modality of feminine spatiality is in part a defence against such invasion... The woman lives her space as confined and closed around her; at least in part as projecting some small area in which she can exist as a free subject” (Young, *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality* 2005, 40). K said that her Docs made her feel “strong in herself” and safe in the knowledge that “nobody is going to get in your space because you’re wearing these big heavy shoes”<sup>76</sup>, and I posit that this shows that Doc Martens can act as a way to extend the ‘small area’ in which women can exist as free subjects. They are a kind of lead in to allowing yourself to take up more space, and while they may start out as a sort of ‘prop’ to stand in for that confidence that you may feel you lack, eventually that confidence starts to become a part of you, even when you aren’t wearing Docs. K told me that the “big scary boots” reputation was something that she quite enjoyed about wearing her Docs, because as someone who had previously been shy, sometimes even fearful, of being noticed by other people, her relationship with the world began to change and she took pride in the reputation that preceded her by dint of wearing these particular boots.

This is supported by the fact that the specific words ‘badass’ and ‘kickass’ were used by 7 different participants to describe how wearing their Docs made them feel, and one of those participants, Morgan, noted that her other shoes now felt flimsy and unreliable in comparison. She said, “when I’m not wearing Doc Martens I feel worried that my shoes are going to break, the sole always feels a bit dodgy”, and her mum, Jo, echoed this when she said that wearing Docs “makes you feel like you can do anything because you’ve got comfy shoes on and you don’t have to worry about your shoes. You know you’re not gunna sink into the ground or break your neck.”<sup>77</sup>

Another participant, Hannah, talked about how Docs had given her the freedom to move as a child, and how this sense that she should be able to physically do whatever the boys were doing had stayed with her. She told me:

*“When we were kids and we were on the common in Tonbridge Wells, there were natural outcrops of rock. You’re not gunna be scrambling up and down rock in a pair of stupid*

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<sup>75</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> In conversation with the author, Helensville, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

*stilettoes, are you? So I think that kind of footwear enabled us to keep up with the boys and be doing the same kind of stuff that they were.”<sup>78</sup>*

Hannah’s choice of Doc Martens as an adult has also been influenced by this feeling that she should be comfortable and able to move. Her most worn pair are a soft high-top sneaker style, “a bit lighter weight, good for festivals and stuff in the summer” but she was clear with me that “if there was an identical boot that didn’t have that [pointing to the Doc Martens label] and didn’t have that [pointing to the stitching], then I wouldn’t buy it.” Clearly, then, there remains something special about Doc Martens, even when using a “practical head” rather than a “fashion head”, as Hannah put it. She could have bought any pair of light fabric high-tops – but she chose Doc Martens. This indicates to me that even if the actual shoes chosen are not the traditional heavy, ‘kick-ass’ 1460s, the meaning of the Doc Martens label is still embedded in those shoes – regardless of their form.

Hannah’s choice to wear shoes that she can actually move in is interesting when considering Young’s phenomenology of female body comportment, in which she surveys previous study on the subject and combines Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the lived body with Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of the situation of women. In this, Young writes that reflection on female body comportment studies reveals that women are characterised by “a failure to make full use of the body’s spatial and lateral potentialities” and that “women are generally not as open with their bodies as are men in their gait and stride” (Young, *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality* 2005, 31). Young suggests this is because women have a fundamental lack of trust in their own bodies, and because women are constantly viewing their physical movement as looked upon by someone else – the all-encompassing ‘male gaze’. Because of this, attention is split between doing the task at hand (which they may feel they are incapable of doing) and imagining what the body will look like doing that task. Certainly, I have often eyed a route through tables in a restaurant based on whether or not I feel my hips will be able to get past another diners chair with ease, or have sat a certain way at a bar that is physically uncomfortable because I know it will be more aesthetically pleasing. Doc Martens, then, can act as an antidote to this self-policing in physical space that is so prevalent in women’s lives. The physical nature of a Doc Marten, the simple square footage of their boots and shoes, means that you will inevitably take up more space than if you were wearing, say, a ballet flat. But even if you opt for one of their sleeker styles, a brogue or a sneaker, for example, the thing-power of Doc Martens and the embodiment of movement, power choice and freedom in the shoe, means that those attributes are transferred to you in your body comportment, effecting and affecting the way that you move through physical space. It was clear that one participant, Ashleigh (see figures 38 and 39 below), had been particularly affected by the impact that Doc Martens had had on her ability to move when she told me:

*“I’ve never had a bad moment with them. They totally change your life. Once you buy your first pair, that’s it. They’re the only shoe you’ll ever want. They’re just so great. They’re lovely and comfy.”<sup>79</sup>*

The transformative power of actually being able to move for the first time cannot be underestimated and is something that is rarely discussed. Most conversations that involve women and shoes are about of stilettoes, sex appeal, and high fashion brands. But what about when the stiletto comes off? When you realise that, as Judith Butler said, the choice to *not* has existed all along? For Ashleigh, this realisation was life changing, and was facilitated by her Docs.

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<sup>78</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>79</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.



*Figure 38: Close up of Ashleigh's Docs*



*Figure 39: Ashleigh's collection of Docs*

In his research on boots, Matthew McCormack writes that “shoes can be a source of comfort or pain, of warmth or exposure, of dryness or damp, and can support or distort the motions of the body” (McCormack 2017, 464), and this unique space that shoes inhabit on our body is no doubt one reason for why shoes are so important and their meanings so varied. They are the way through which we mediate the earth and navigate our surroundings, and so it follows that if you are confident in your footwear, you will be more confident in your ability to traverse the path you are travelling – physically and emotionally. One participant, Laura, expressed this when she said:

*“Because of the physicality of Doc Martens, when I was young and still learning my new identity and I wasn’t feeling very confident, I used them as a way to remind and reassure myself, and reassure others that I was queer and a feminist but also feminine, but now I know that is inherently a part of who I am, and I know I don’t need their weight in a way in the same way that I did when I was first starting out. But I still love them and use them to reinforce that sometimes.”<sup>80</sup>*

For Laura, the physical nature of her Docs allowed them to act as a kind of prop, a stand in for the confidence that felt she was lacking. Now, she does not need them to do that for her, but she still finds comfort and empowerment in knowing that they can. She went on to say:

*“They symbolise body acceptance to me. The fact that my body can take up space and should take up space. I’m not trying to reduce myself when I wear them, because I can’t. They symbolise a time of personal growth and change for me. They played a huge part in allowing me to be the person I am now. They were a security blanket of a kind. And when I put them on now, they remind me of that.”<sup>81</sup>*



Figure 40: Laura's two pairs of Docs

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<sup>80</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

Laura's words represent the deeply entangled relationship between female identity and empowerment and the physicality of wearing Docs. But the corporeal power of Docs is not only about the wearing of them: as Sarah-Mary recalled being taught how to buff and polish her Docs properly by a colleague, I could smell the scent of the polish and hear the scrape of the brush against leather. Sarah-Mary's own memories of this process conjured up images for me of my father, standing in our utility room, buffing and polishing the shoes of my family lined up on the side of the sink in size order. He is whistling a song through his teeth, Mark Knopffler's "Quality Shoe", moving the brush in time with the rhythm. In this way, individual memories from both of us came together to create a connection which not only bonded us as interviewer and interviewee, but as female Docs wearers. Another participant, Megan, was telling me the story of buying her first pair of Docs when she said, "I can remember holding them in my hands." Megan placed her hands out flat, looking at the place where the boots would have been, and there was a reverence in that moment. We were in a busy bar, with loud music blaring and conversations rattling around us, but there was the briefest moment of peace in watching her remember what it felt like to hold her Docs for the first time.

## Conclusion

These snapshots of entanglement between physical thing, memory, and emotion show the importance of affect when discussing our relationship with our clothes. In a new materialist sense, affect is "about being moved, being touched. It is the initial moment of intensity before we are able to give a name to an emotion that might arise" (Bruggeman 2018, 55), and it is the affective nature of our relationship with our clothes that gives rise to such strong emotional attachments and clear memories. By empowering women to buy, to choose, and to move, Doc Martens have cemented their place alongside the participants in this study, even if their actual wearing of them waxes and wanes. As Fenella told me when I asked about the changing nature of her relationship with Docs:

*My hippy friends would say it was my Saturn returned. I don't believe in astrology, but I do think at certain points in your life you do return to certain things. I feel like they're symbolic of that. I already know that even if I stop wearing them again in the future, which I might, they will be the thing that symbolises this point in my life and my particular attitude towards the world... I'm glad that I have a relationship with them, because they've solved all of my footwear problems in a way that's never happened before."<sup>82</sup>*

In *Emotionally Durable Design*, Chapman warns against products making claims about being 'life changing' because they are sure to disappoint. Docs have never claimed to be life changing in their advertising – indeed, as will be discussed in the following chapter, Doc Martens have always employed relatively low-key advertising techniques. But despite this, Fenella has touched upon a common theme in the interviews: that when you discover Docs, other shoes pale in comparison. Ashleigh said that they "totally change your life" and, as mentioned previously, Morgan said that other shoes felt flimsy in comparison. In total, 16 participants mentioned the physical sturdiness of Docs as a reason for wearing them. The empowerment afforded to the participants in this study by Doc Martens – to be empowered to buy, to choose, and to move – is clearly a vital aspect of what made them so special to women, and a fundamental reason for the longevity of their success. Empowerment, therefore, is the second strand in the unique thread that binds Docs to the women who wear them.

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<sup>82</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

***“I love the brand. I love the shoes. I can’t get enough of them.”<sup>83</sup>***

- Mo (Mhorag), freelance human resources manager, 57.

Mhorag – or Mo as she prefers to be called – has a beautiful collection of Docs. She’s one of the most stylish ladies I think I’ve ever met, and lives in Buckinghamshire, past the green belt north of London. Mo has been wearing Docs since she was a teenager and discovered them when she went to university in Aberdeen in 1980. Her first pair were 1460s oxblood boots. When asked by her friend how to keep them clean, she replied that she kept a pot of ox blood in the fridge. Two years after, she became a vegetarian.

Mo is very engaged with the social media of Doc Martens, saying that it “makes me feel like I’m a part of a little gang.” At the time of interview she had recently gotten rid of about 6 pairs of Docs because she was undertaking an Instagram challenge where you had to wear something different every day that you already owned and not buy any new clothes, in an effort to be more environmentally aware. This has made her realise that she didn’t really wear them that much, and so she found new homes for them. Despite this she still had 10 pairs left to choose from. Her favourite pair are red leather patent and deeply personal:

*“I’ve got a pair of red patent tartan ones which are literally falling to bits, but they were the last thing that my dad bought me before he very suddenly passed away, which is nearly 10 years ago now. I just love them because of that – every time I put them on, I think of him. They’re so tatty now, they’re completely trashed. I deliberated about wearing them to his funeral but then I thought, ‘Sod it, he loved them.’ So I strutted up with them on.”<sup>84</sup>*



Figure 41: Mo in her Jaden Docs

Mo said that she enjoys wearing her Docs because they make her feel “different to your average middle-aged mother” and that she enjoys being able to play with aspects of femininity and masculinity:

*“I quite like looking quite delicate and pretty but having my clumpy boots on. So I’ll often wear a party dress but have my DMs on.”<sup>85</sup>*

Despite living in England for much of her life, Mo still has a thick Scottish accent and a charm that made me feel immediately at home. She revels in being different, telling me that she “has always liked to try and not fit in with the mould.” Her collection of Docs ranges from pink to black, leather to fabric, with studs, tartan, velvet, ribbon and most things in between. When I interviewed her it was the height of the 2019 heat wave and we sat in her garden, with her dog and cat lazing in the sun, talking about Doc Martens. It was apparent how much they meant to her when she said:

*“I just love them. I love wearing them. I can’t get enough of them.”<sup>86</sup>*

<sup>83</sup> In conversation with the author, Milton Keynes, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

## Love

To define love seems like an almost futile task – there is surely no definition that can fully capture the multiplicity of meanings within that word. Each dictionary has its own definition with various subsets within; poets and writers have grappled with the subject for as long as we have been literate; researchers and scholars have tried (and failed) to come up with a satisfactory definition; and yet, the world over, each of thinks we know what love is. In 2010 TJ Oord added to the milieu, stating that “to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being” (Oord 2010, 15). But this definition, and many others like it, fail to recognise that love is not a purely human endeavour, but one that can and should be applied to non-human actors as well. The anthropocentric nature of the discussion around love – and even emotions in general – has, until recently, left a gap in scholarship where we should be considering love and emotion in relation to things. The concept of the emotional bond between consumer and product is a key part of new materialist discussions on fashion and is explored by Chapman (2005), Bruggeman (2018), and Harper (2018). All three have written on how important it is to design, use, and explore objects that we can love in order to create a more sustainable future, and consider emotion to be “an essential part of our human engagement with material objects” (Bruggeman 2018, 38).

In the book *Love Objects*, which has brought together writers from a variety of disciplines to specifically discuss material objects and love, Victor Margolin writes:

*“Love is an emotion to which countless treatises, tracts, and works of art have been dedicated from time immemorial. It is an emotion that human beings care deeply about because it touches the core of our being where the need to be regarded, accepted, or desired resides. It is an emotion that takes many forms and, in the end, most often eludes comprehension. We have no cultural consensus for what love is and consequently the word is freely appropriated as a floating signifier, available for attachment to a multitude of feelings and the acts that follow from them.”* (Margolin 2014, 1).

With this in mind, and without any ‘cultural consensus’ for what love is, I have decided to leave love undefined here. As this chapter will show, the ways, means, and manifestations of love in participant relationships with their Doc Martens are themselves so varied that any definition would be unsuitable, and end up not doing the strength and depth of feeling justice. Instead, this chapter will discuss how integral a part of the relationship between participants and their Doc Martens love – in all its guises – is. First, I will discuss the two new materialist concepts of emotionally durable design and aesthetic sustainability and will apply them to Doc Martens using examples from participant interviews. Then, I will talk about trust – a crucial part of any successful love – and why the trust placed in Doc Martens by participants is so important to the continuing relationship between shoe and wearer. Finally, I will look at the cruciality of discussing emotion when considering the human relationships to objects, as well examples of how that emotion has manifested in the lives of participants interviewed for this research, with a case study of one participant, Dee.

### **Emotionally Durable Design & Aesthetic Sustainability**

Emotionally durable design is a term that was coined by Jonathan Chapman in his 2005 book of the same name. It is a school of design which is concerned with solving the problem of material waste and its associated environmental impact by creating objects that are emotionally durable i.e that users really care about, are empathetic with, and even love, for the duration of their life. Chapman argues that waste is a symptom of the ‘failed relationship’ between user and thing, and points to the

piles of perfectly serviceable clothes, technology, and furniture etc. currently rotting in landfills around the world. These things, while having technically nothing wrong with them, have failed in their relationship with us not because they did not function, but because they did not fulfil. As consumers, we are sold the idea that this coffee maker, this car, this pair of shoes, will solve all your problems. When this miracle fails to manifest, we are disillusioned and disappointed with the product, and throw it away in favour of the next life-altering thing. As Chapman writes, “today, subject-object relationships are less marriage, more one-night stand” (Chapman 2005, 63). He argues that by designing and creating products that can emotionally ‘keep up’ with us, rather than products that promise everything and let us down, we can reduce the amount of products going to landfill and create object-user relationships that are long and fulfilling. One of the key concepts of emotionally durable design is ‘cherishability’ which “means numerous things, including unpredictable, symbolic, sentimental, adaptive, enduring, personal and dependent, to name but a few... Cherishability is a powerful signifier of an object’s capacity to be cherished, loved and cared for by whatever means” (ibid 76). Indeed, object love is something that Chapman says needs to be taken far more seriously if we are to tackle the problem of the waste piling up around us. He writes:

*“Today, most people are comfortable in the misguided belief that love is an emotion exclusive to the human species. However, love is an intrinsic facet of mainstream material culture and has been for some time. Love interlaces the material fabric of one’s life; whether it is the love of a Renaissance painting, stewed apples and custard, a compact disc reminiscent of old friends, or even the love of your new G5 Mac, love abounds in both the made and unmade world”* (Chapman 2005, 68).

Nowhere has this been more evident to me than when conducting the work for this thesis. Participants *loved* their Doc Martens: 8 specifically mentioned the word ‘love, but even with those who did not, huge smiles appeared when they reminisced on buying them or thought about holidays, gigs, and other adventures they had taken them on; some participants held their Docs out to me, reverent, basking in their aura; some others clutched them tight to their chest, like a child with a favourite teddy bear. One participant, when showing me her collection pre-interview, pointed to her newest pair and sighed, “aren’t they just beautiful?”, as if talking about a new-born. Others were less gushing in their adoration, but still resolute: “Only ever Docs”, said Gaye, when asked if she wore other shoes.<sup>87</sup> There was a note of surprise in her voice, as if she could not imagine why anyone would wear anything else; the certainty of a lifetime of monogamous object love. Recognising these declarations of love without necessarily hearing the word was only possible by employing DeVault’s active listening, and the latter application of this type of conversational analysis galvanised in me the assertion that love is the third fundamental aspect of the relationship between Docs and the women who wear them. However, whilst Doc Martens may now be well aware of the emotional bond created by their products and the consumers of those products, the original design of Doc Martens – that iconic 1460 shape – was not created for that purpose. For that reason, I posit that Doc Martens are an example of *accidental* emotionally durable design but one that other designers can learn from, nonetheless. When the first 1460s rolled off the production line in Northamptonshire in 1960, there was no way to have known the influence they would have on the world. But looking at them now, it is clear to see that there is something about Doc Martens – a unique combination of their design and their history – that makes them emotionally durable; cherishable; lovable. Chapman asserts that ‘experiential layers’ are at the heart of what makes an object emotionally durable. He writes:

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<sup>87</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

*“Material consumption operates on a variety of experiential layers, from the rational and the tangible to the profound and the numinous. Consumers mine these layers, unearthing meaningful content as they steadily excavate deeper into the semiotic core of an object. If any one of these layers should fail to stimulate, the relationship between user and object immediately falls under threat... At present, most objects are designed without this understanding, leading to a wasteful culture built on the fragile foundation of anonymous interactions with fairly meaningless objects. In contrast, it may be said that consumers will continue to mine the experiential layers of an objects just as long as there are further layers to be mined” (ibid 36).*

Doc Martens have an almost unlimited number of experiential layers to mine, so that anyone can find something meaningful in them. With such a long and varied history of use, from punks to police officers, skinheads to Riot Grrrls, The Who to Beyoncé, and the British Prime Minister to the Pope, there is barely a sphere of interest or part of life that Doc Martens have not made some sort of appearance in. They also have the physical advantage of being such a distinct shoe to see and wear: the yellow tag and stitching make them easy to recognise, creating new, minute connections with other wearers that add a new experiential layer every time; the physical weight of them, the comfort and safety they provide, make your first time wearing them an experience you are sure to remember (especially when contrasted with a life of ballets flats or high heels). And with use comes a further strengthening of that bond – you become familiar with a pair of Docs, and they become familiar with you, moulding to suit your feet and wearing in ways that are completely unique.

This was an aspect of the relationship between shoe and wearer that was spoken about frequently in participant interviews – the ‘wearing in’ of a pair of Docs. This process is notorious for being painful<sup>88</sup> and yet was most often cited when discussing a participant’s love for their Docs or a sense of belonging. Ashley told me, “I’ve cut my feet up bad. But I love them so much, so I just keep doing it.”<sup>89</sup> One participant, J, described it as a “rite of passage” and said that there was pride in enduring the suffering they caused: “my feet are bleeding and I earned these Docs!”<sup>90</sup> But the attachment created in the ‘wearing in’ process was not just between object and person – it also serves to create a sense of community between women. In much the same way that any woman who was worn high heels can understand the pain of another woman hobbling down the high street, anyone who was worn Docs can appreciate the suffering of wearing in a new pair. This ritual has created an economy of knowledge between Docs wearers, and several participants shared with me their techniques for wearing in Docs. Holly said that she gets her Docs stretched by a cobbler; Gaye told me that she used to physically throw her boots around to soften the leather; Ashleigh uses baby oil on the leather, and her flatmate puts bags of water in the boots and then puts them in the freezer; and Destiny got a tip from a YouTube video that involved using the soft cups from padded bras as blister cushions for the first week or so. These tips and tricks were freely shared, and I shared my own technique with them in exchange, creating a further sense of community between us as female Docs wearers.<sup>91</sup>

This corporeal element – the physical experiential layers – are undoubtedly some of the most important when it comes to creating loving, lasting relationships with our things. The embodied aspect of our emotional link to objects is a key concern of new materialism: Bruggeman’s mantra

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<sup>88</sup> Fenella said she had permanent scars from wearing hers in as a teenager.

<sup>89</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>90</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>91</sup> 3 layers of socks worn with your new Docs while you do chores around your house for the first week or so. I too learned the hard way that it’s a mistake to wear your brand new Docs for a full day out – and have the scars to prove it.

that “matter deserves to matter more” echoes Chapman’s call for emotional durability, but some new materialists have taken emotionally durable design and developed related, but distinct, schools of thought on how to tackle the problem of object waste. Kristine Harper (Associate Professor in Sustainable Fashion at Copenhagen School of Design and Technology) wrote her 2018 book *Aesthetic Sustainability* in an effort to “establish guidelines for reducing, rethinking, and reforming patterns of consumption with the overall goal of stopping overconsumption through design” (Harper 2018, 2). While Harper agrees that emotionally durable design is vital, she goes one step further and posits that not only the product itself must be emotionally durable, but the *aesthetics* of that product must be as well. Harper uses examples from a project called Local Wisdom by Dr Kate Fletcher in which people from around the world were asked to present an item of clothing and explain why it was special to them. Fletcher is herself a key figure in discussion of slow fashion and emotional design, and her 2016 book *Craft of Use: Post-Growth Fashion* documents some of the Local Wisdom project participants and their stories. Fletcher posits use as the ultimate form of sustainability, writing:

*“Use imagines sustainability as coming not from separate component parts, but from synthesis, from the joy and love of fashion and from clothes in the context of cluttered, unpredictable real lives. Its stories are those of engagement, satisfaction, responsibility, capabilities, material reverence, vital materialism, skilled fingers, tacit knowledge, of acting as if ‘stuff’ is properly ours.”* (Fletcher, *Craft of Use: Post-Grown Fashion* 2016, 35).

This description of use is strikingly relevant to the research I conducted. When I read it, it put me in mind of the interviews that were done in participant’s homes. I was always invited in warmly, offered coffee, tea, biscuits, sometimes even dinner. Sitting in the context of these women with their collections of Docs – be it one pair or one hundred – gave me insight into the use of their shoes, of ‘cluttered, unpredictable real lives’.

Taking from the Local Wisdom project, Harper lists seven key characteristics and states than an object should have (or have the potential to contain) one or more of these characteristics to be considered aesthetically sustainable. Doc Martens could be said to contain all these characteristics. Below is a rundown of Harper’s criteria for an item of clothing to be considered aesthetically sustainable, the ways in which Doc Martens meet these criteria, and examples of them doing so from participant interviews.

Aesthetic Sustainability Criteria	Explanatory Quote from <i>Aesthetic Sustainability</i>	Example from Participants
Worn often and do not need washing	“...would mean including signs of wear and tear—and the kind of “dirt” that would naturally result from not subjecting the item to cleaning—into the aesthetic expression of the product.” (p.78)	<p>“A lot of the time I think of me walking somewhere or going somewhere in them. One of my first jobs was a tour guide and I wore Docs all the time there. Silly things like I dropped a piece of chicken on my Doc Martens, and it stained it forever! They were really nice snakeskin boots as well.” – Ashleigh<sup>92</sup></p> <p>“As you wear your boots and shoes more, the suede is designed to develop a worn in appearance. This doesn’t affect the quality of the footwear and gives you a</p>

<sup>92</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

		totally unique pair of shoes or boots – your own personal expression of individual style.” – Label from one of Laura’s Doc Martens which explains how they will wear.
Heirlooms or used things	“Second-hand or vintage objects, as well as heirlooms, have the specific quality of containing many innate stories and “traces” that can be difficult to imitate when designing new objects. Often, these traces of use establish a special bond connection with the recipient or user. Additionally, the type of aesthetic value associated with used objects has the effect of seeming unique, one-of-a-kind.” (p.78)	“I work in the library and I was sitting on the help desk with a colleague on a quiet day, and she gazes over and I’ve got the Doc Martens website up and she’s like, ‘Oh don’t buy them without telling me!’ She got really invested in my search for a pair. I was planning which ones to get and how many weeks it would take me to save. And then I went on a charity shopping day with my boyfriend and just happen to find a perfect pair that fit me in a charity shop for like 20 quid. When I walked in the next day, my co-worker came in, she did a double take and was like, ‘Oh my god, you got them! You’re wearing them!... I was so happy to have found a pair for cheap and second hand. And I think I was just beaming the first day I wore them to work.” – Sarah-Mary <sup>93</sup>
Repairable	“If it is not possible to repair an object, it is of course not possible to keep using it should it fall into disrepair. For this reason, it is crucial that repairing it is an actual possibility... Designers must fundamentally consider how recipients can easily maintain and repair products, perhaps in a fun, or even joyous, way.” (p. 79)	[On a pair of new Docs that had started peeling] “I contacted the company and they said cut out the tongues and send them back and we’ll refund your money. Rather than returning the whole boot. So I cut out the tongues which was where almost all of the peeling was, and went to a shoe repair place, and paid 50 bucks to get new tongues put in. And they’re still good, I’m still wearing them.” – J <sup>94</sup>
Surprising	“Objects that appear surprising every time they are used—and which because of this innate potential to surprise must be considered durable, as recipients will want to return to them again and again—possess the “ability” to provide recipients with a particular kind of aesthetic pleasure, that is the Pleasure of the Unfamiliar.” (p. 79)	“With the slingbacks I get so many compliments from across the board, from all kinds of people. It’s not necessarily people who I’d associate with wearing Doc Martens. They might be like, older ladies or just some of the people I work in the office with. And then when I saw they’re Doc Martens, they’re really quite surprised by it.” – Sarah-Mary <sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> In conversation with the author, Brighton, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>94</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>95</sup> In conversation with the author, Brighton, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

		<p>"I will see men in what we've deemed as women's product, and women in men's product, and people wearing product that we never thought they'd wear with their look. Which is everything the brand stands for so it really shouldn't take me by surprise but it still does, after all these years." – Sam<sup>96</sup></p>
Flexible	<p>"...the focus is on ways of incorporating multifunctionality into the object and on how to provide consumers with the possibility of using the product in unique and individual ways, in order to customize it. Additionally, the idea is to create clothing pieces that are neutral, but still flattering, so as to make them flexible in the sense that they can be used in a number of different contexts and can be paired with a wealth of accessories to change their expression (dressing them up or down, so to speak)." (p. 80)</p>	<p>"...outside of school everyone customised their DMs, spray-painted them, different laces of different colours, toecaps and everything, you name it. It was a uniform but it was customized individually." – Hannah<sup>97</sup></p> <p>"I like the look of them and how they go with whatever I'm wearing." – Destiny<sup>98</sup></p> <p>"They are amazing. They last years, they go with everything, and they're just amazing." – Silvia<sup>99</sup></p> <p>"I just find they go with anything and everything and my lifestyle. They make me feel good. I feel a little bit strange in other shoes sometimes. I don't feel myself." – Cathy<sup>100</sup></p> <p>One participant, Holly, told me about her first pair of Docs that she shared with her mum. They are too worn out to wear now, but her mum is using them as plant pots in her garden<sup>101</sup> – a whole other kind of 'multifunctionality'.</p>
Able to accommodate changing needs	<p>"...objects that have been designed to accommodate changing needs are things that endure in terms of touching, using, looking at, and combining with other things over the course of many years; they are objects one would want to move with and keep throughout life; they</p>	<p>"I think it's a combination of they... embody part of my youth, my history and my rebellious teenage years, which I love. And they do represent some of the feminist principles that I've tried to... Or that I do live by, I think. They've been to some great places with me. Really good</p>

<sup>96</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> In conversation with the author, Cambridge (NZ), 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>99</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>100</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>101</sup> In conversation with the author, Nelson, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

	are an endless source of aesthetic pleasure and nourishment.” (p. 80)	travel buddies.” <sup>102</sup> – Dee, who has had the same pair of Docs since 1976.
Innate story of use	“Decay can be aesthetic; it can add value to an object and thus a kind of beauty, characterized by being “imperfect,” unpolished and random, due to the ravages of time. This “ravaging” will in some cases embellish the object, making it more interesting, fascinating, and attractive... The wear and tear of an object tells the story of its use and the time that has passed.” (p. 86)	“I was working in Edinburgh a couple of years ago and we got snowed off for a couple of days. I was with some people from the Science Festival and we went and climbed Arthur’s Seat. These were the only shoes I had: it was these or trainers! It was obviously freezing, so my boots got pure rigid and frozen over which I hadn’t really realised, so I took them off to dry in the house and they heated up so fast that the rubber just split. I did ask Doc Martens to replace them, but they said no! So now I just have to love them with a backstory.” – Janine.

If aesthetic sustainability is key to emotional durability, and emotional durability is all about objects being loved, then there can be few other objects as aesthetically sustainable and emotionally durable as a well-worn pair of Doc Martens. Indeed, several participants told me that they could not bring themselves to throw away some Docs, even though they could no longer be worn. K admitted that she should buy a new pair because hers were so worn that they had holes in and she would “have to start fresh and it’s just different having brand new Docs that haven’t been worn in, they’re still plasticky and shiny, they haven’t moulded to the shape of your feet, versus having shoes that you’ve known and have worn for years. It’s quite weird, but I’m just wearing these shoes that are just falling apart.”<sup>103</sup> Another, Briar, said of a well-loved pair of Docs: “I still have a soft spot for those black 20-ups but the zips died and they’re gonna be way too expensive to replace. So I haven’t been able to quite part with them, they’re gathering dust in my mum’s garage.”<sup>104</sup> Docs, then, are so emotionally durable that they outlive even their useful life – existing in stasis as an object so charged with emotion that it cannot be thrown away, but no longer able to fulfil the purpose it was intended for.

### Trust

As any good self-help book will tell you, the key to a successful relationship is trust, and this is no different when considering what makes a successful human-object relationship. In his book *Emotional Design*, Donald A. Norman says that trust “implies several qualities: reliance, confidence, and integrity” (Norman 2004, 142). But, according to Norman, trust in an object is not just about the object having or engendering these emotions, but about the object living up to expectations that we have gathered from “the advertisements and recommendations that led us to buy the item in the

<sup>102</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>103</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>104</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

first place; the reliability with which it has been performing since we got it; and, perhaps most important of all, the conceptual model we have of the item” (ibid).

It was noted by several participants that they did not remember seeing adverts for Doc Martens in mainstream media. I had originally thought that this may have been on purpose, but Sam informed me that it was more by accident than by design. Sam told me that “even though we’ve always been a fairly big brand, we’ve never really been a big company until now”<sup>105</sup>, and so there simply had not been the resources to do that kind of marketing, let alone understand it. She said that up until Permira took over the company “we had just been fighting fires. You were never able to be proactive or forward thinking, which we are now. So that was probably the most pivotal moment for me.”<sup>106</sup> Doc Martens still choose to avoid mainstream marketing, but they do advertise in other ways: they sponsor stages at festivals, put on shows in their shops, and ask artists to collaborate on customisation tours – all things that are more in line with the brand’s ‘alternative spirit’ than an advert on TV. This technique is also about building trust, because consumers trust Doc Martens to not go down the ‘traditional’ route for anything. Shiny, polished ad campaigns might seem inauthentic, and would damage the subcultural capital that Docs have built up over the years (as happened during the downturn of the late 90s/early 2000s). They appear to have learned from their mistakes, and Sam told me that Doc Martens have never paid for a collaboration – even during the downturn, there were still people who liked and respected the brand enough to want to work with them for nothing.

The most common way in which participants learned to trust Doc Martens was through word of mouth recommendations or seeing people that they themselves trusted and respected wearing Docs. This could be family members, friends, or celebrities, but it is unquestionable that the interpersonal relationships of participants have been a key factor in their decision to wear, love, and trust Docs. Participants Jo and Morgan are mother and daughter respectively, and they both talked at length about how they physically trust Docs to last. Jo thinks that she was attracted to them because of their associations with punk, but Morgan said, “I think it’s because my mum and dad had them as well. It was just kind of a family thing I guess.” Jo described how delighted she was that Morgan had gotten into Docs, and said that their trip to buy her first pair in Auckland was like “a rite of passage.”<sup>107</sup> Another participant, Holly, shared her first pair with her mum because they could not afford to buy a pair each, and others still said that they have passed on pairs to friends and family, and had pairs passed on to them. It has become clear to me that this ‘passing on’ of Docs, either physically or the knowledge of them, is one of the clearest signs that participants really trusted them. When you hand on something to a beloved friend or family member, you do so because you think it will bring them joy or help them in some way. To make that decision you must trust the thing to do it, or you would perhaps be more reticent. Several participants said that their Docs were active agents in the building and maintaining of relationships, particularly between themselves and other women. Fenella, for example, told me:

*“So part of the reason I bought the most recent pair was a recommendation from my friend, George. She was telling me about the soft leather so they’re not going to cut your feet anymore... So that was on her recommendation. And we wear them together sometimes... I like that you would have that seal of approval from someone else. In terms of quality or value for money or whatever. So now I think that I pay more attention to that. And I kind of like it*

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<sup>105</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> In conversation with the author, Helensville, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

*because I don't see George all that often. And we'll text each other when we've got them on... So they've kind of become a bonding thing and I like that we have the same ones.*"<sup>108</sup>

For Fenella, Docs are not just a symbol of her relationship with George – they are an active participant. They have helped to cement their bond through the exchange of knowledge and are a piece of the other when they cannot be together. Another participant, Briar, said that the exchange of Docs had been an important part of building and maintaining bonds with other women in her life. She told me:

*"I do quite like that aspect of swapping and trading. There's been at least one pair that I'd ordered from somewhere and they sent me the wrong size. But my friend had been talking about needing some so I gave them as a gift to her. And whenever she wears them she sends me a picture of them on Instagram. Actually, I was sort of on the receiving end of a similar thing years ago, when someone from my previous work got the wrong size I like that sort of connection with other people as well. I've got a couple of cousins who are quite a bit older than me who I didn't even know that well when I was growing up. But when I was posting a picture of my then collection of probably about seven or eight pairs, one of the cousins commented saying, 'Oh my gosh, that's almost as good as my collection was when I was your age!' So those moments are always nice."*<sup>109</sup>



Figure 42: Briar in one of her pairs of Docs



Figure 43: Briar's collection of Docs

<sup>108</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>109</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

This transfer of ownership is a fundamental aspect of the story of use in our garments, one of the key attributes that makes an item emotionally durable. Fletcher writes that “giving a garment to someone else is sometimes a straightforward and spontaneous act. At other times a transfer of ownership is more circuitous. Periods of overlapping ownership often intensify resource use and stud a garment’s story with memories” (Fletcher, *Craft of Use: Post-Grown Fashion* 2016, 36), as with Briar above. Other participants talked about shared use of Docs as well. Silvia distinctly remembers her first pair, bought when she was 15 in her native Italy:

*“I bought a pair of purple boots and my best friend bought a pair of green boots, and then we’d exchange them, so I had a pair of purple and a pair of green and so did she. And I think I wore them until I was maybe 17 or 18, I was wearing them so much that they got destroyed.”<sup>110</sup>*

Silvia lamented that her mother had not let her keep those Docs once they were broken because they had been such a fundamental part of the relationship between her and her best friend. Another participant, Claire, noted that even though she now followed a vegan diet, she could not bring herself to give up leather because of her love of Docs. She justified this to herself by saying:

*“I went on the Docs website and saw they had sustainable factories, and they might have fed me a load of lies, but I trust them. I trust the Doc Martens brand.”*

However, in contrast to these stories of attachment and community building trust, another participant, Destiny, was unusual in her burgeoning relationship with Doc Martens because she had known almost nothing about them before she bought them except for their reputation for durability. Destiny undertook a long period of researching Docs before she bought them, saying:

*“I don’t have any strong attachment to the brand. I don’t know them that well, only from hearing that they’re really popular and last a long time. I watched a few YouTube videos when I was still thinking about getting them, looking at reviews and stuff.”<sup>111</sup>*

Destiny was the only participant who told me that she had actually gone out and researched Doc Martens – everyone else had bought them on the basis of word of mouth reputation, rather than seeking out reviews. Destiny told me that she had only learned about Doc Martens’ affinity with subcultures when she began doing this research, and after this happened she started asking other people in her life about Docs and then learned of their interest in subculture through that conversation. Destiny only learned that her dad had worn Docs himself when he was younger after she bought her first pair. Interestingly, this backs up an assertion that another participant, Kathleen, made when she said:

*“I can’t recall at what stage I became aware of the punk thing, particularly with the cherry Docs. I think I might have only become aware of that sort of association when I came to the UK. Because I don’t think I was close enough to it or paying enough attention. I think if I was that age now, because I’d be on YouTube and watching the videos, I would be really aware of it.”<sup>112</sup>*

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<sup>110</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>111</sup> In conversation with the author, Cambridge (NZ), 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>112</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.



*Figure 44: Kathleen wearing her Docs*



*Figure 45: Close up of Kathleen's Docs*

And it seems that Kathleen was right. As shown by Destiny, new wearers of Docs are learning about their affinity with subcultures through different types of media such as YouTube and Instagram. This demonstrates that the ways in which Docs wearers are coming across information that may lead to an understanding of reputation and a trust of the brand is changing. But, regardless of whether through reviews on YouTube or recommendations from friends, Doc Martens clearly do have a reputation for quality, reliability, and authenticity which has engendered a sense of trust in both the product and the brand. This is important to both building and maintaining the relationship between wearer and shoe, because as Chapman has asserted, if our products let us down then we stop caring for them and are more likely to throw them away. There were even some examples of this in participant responses: J's shoes started peeling and she had to get the tongues replaced, and several participants noted that they felt the quality of Docs had gone down when their production moved overseas. Whether or not this is actually the case is difficult to say, because Sam informed me that there is absolutely nothing different about the production that happens abroad – it is the same technique with the same materials. But that did not seem to matter because an integral part of the

authenticity of Doc Martens – their Britishness – was now under threat. I posit that this assertion that Docs became less reliable when they moved production overseas is more to do with a threat to the ‘conceptual model’ of Doc Martens than to the shoes themselves. Of a pair made overseas Yana said, “something about them just doesn't feel right... All I knew was that when I got them, they were just not the same. Not what I was expecting from Docs. Not the way I imagine Docs to be, even though in appearance they are pretty much the same. But they just don't feel the same.”<sup>113</sup> Gaye echoed this sentiment when she said, “I do prefer them to be made in England because I know the quality is going to be better, right?”<sup>114</sup> Despite this, both women owned and wore Docs that were not made in England but appreciated the fact that the option was available to them. Jo said the same when she noted, “I really like the fact that you can still get some that are Made in England. I like that about them, that they champion that Made in England thing.”<sup>115</sup> It seems that just the fact that there is the option to buy into that Britishness was enough to stop the user-object relationship from deteriorating when that trust was initially knocked, even if, perhaps, it was a little more strained.

### **Dee and her Docs: A Case Study of Object Love**

When I began to analyse participant interviews the word ‘love’ was the first word that started jumping out at me. However, as Chapman has written, “in this oversaturated world of people and things, durable attachments with objects are seldom witnessed... Although emotional attachments are not extinct just yet, durable connections between users and their mass manufactured counterparts are very rarely forged” (Chapman 2005, 61). Doc Martens are one such rarity. They are mass produced, but their experiential layers, the depth of meaning they can contain, and the way in which they age, combine to make a unique and (in some cases seemingly unbreakable) bond. It is important that we recognise the reality of the feelings we have for our things, because to deny them simply continues on the myth that “we are more superficial, and that we are more materialistic, our relationship to things coming at the expense of our relationships to people” (Miller, *The Comfort of Things* 2008, 1). But this is simply not the case, as I will demonstrate with a case study of Dee and her Docs.

Dee owns one pair of Doc Martens and they are same pair she has owned since she bought them as a teenager in 1976. Her relationship with these shoes was so clearly meaningful to me that I was struck by it straight away. She welcomed me into her warm, cosy house in Auckland and we sat down on her sofa, with her golden retriever by our feet, to talk about it. She asked for them for her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, “the only thing my little heart desired”, and after a lot of persuasion her mother agreed to get them for her. Dee’s Docs are in extraordinarily good condition for their age, which I remarked upon, and she replied, “They’ve been oiled and polished. They are my one pair. I love them.”<sup>116</sup> Dee smiled as she emphasised the word love.

For Dee, her Doc Martens embody punk, rebellion, and in her mother’s eyes, “boots like this were an embodiment of everything that that subculture represented, and very much not what she wanted her daughter to be part of.”<sup>117</sup> They also tie Dee to the deep love that she has for a great auntie who she described as “very precious”, despite the fact that her great aunt was born and lived long before Docs had even began being produced. The story of Dee’s great aunt is a long one, but it is important

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<sup>113</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>114</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>115</sup> In conversation with the author, Helensville, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>116</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

in understanding how deeply felt the love of her Docs is, and all the things that they represent to her, so it has been included here in its entirety:

*"I have a very precious... Oh, gosh, I've got quite emotional thinking about it. I have a very precious great aunt who was totally dyed-in-the-wool West Yorkshire. Very interesting life story. But her message to me as I got older was always: have your own money. Always have your own bank account. No matter what. For money, my dear, is power. Never relinquish it. And I can remember when I got married she prodded me in the middle of my chest and said 'Don't give him your money.' Her life had been quite hard. She was, imagine this, a single parent in the late 1930s. And she kept her child. And she kept her child because she earned huge money. She was a weaver and she was especially good at the job. She could weave four looms, which won't mean a thing to you, but what it means is she earned four times what a full time worker could. So she earned huge money and her family weren't wealthy. She lived in the family home, and her parents needed her income to survive and to raise the younger ones. So she had economic power. And therefore she had that choice of keeping her daughter and her daughter being well treated. Because if she chose to lift that child and to go, they would have been in poverty. And she knew that and they knew that. So this earning ability had allowed her to keep her child, had allowed her to live her best life. She was independent financially. And that's what she wanted for me. She wanted me to never relinquish that financial independence because for her, it had been her only way to control what happened to her. Because many women in her circumstances would have had that child taken away, they'd have never seen it again. She only had the power to make those decisions herself because of her earning capacity. And she was very, very keen to see all the girls in the family succeed educationally and succeed in the workplace, because she saw it as the route to keeping your options open. Having a voice I think. So I think she was probably the beginning of my awareness that I shouldn't be subsumed by a relationship or be at somebody else's... Not control, but rather, that I should strive for my own independence. And independence was something that I was criticized for. 'You're so independent', you know? I think I frustrated my immediate family greatly by some of the things that I did and tried to do. Going out and having my own place when I was just 18 and trying to do ridiculous things like replace wiring. But I can remember being... I think my parents, particularly mum, but both to some extent, were a bit bemused by this nutcase daughter. This child who just insisted on going out and doing it on her own. So that was the start of my feminist attitude I suppose... And one set of my grandparents actually used to say to me, 'You're Harriet Parker, you're just like her.' And I would say 'Good!' Because I was a bit bolshy, and fiery tempered, and wouldn't be told no because I was a girl."<sup>118</sup>*

Dee told me explicitly that her Docs were a link to this attitude through her love of punk music, and thus a link to her auntie:

*"... recognising that even being into punk music at all was quite a feminist action. And recognizing that, and liking that within myself, and aligning that to some of the behaviours that I had been brought up to respect by my great auntie. That's why I'm fond of them now, because they are part of that feminism. The ability to be who you want to be."<sup>119</sup>*

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.



Figure 46: Dee wearing her Docs



Figure 47: Close up of Dee's Docs with original metal



Figure 48: Close up of Dee's Docs

A core part of Dee is tied to her auntie through her Docs Martens. Her relationship with this object has not weakened, but strengthened, her bond with this relative, and they have also been a big part in the parenting of her own daughter. Dee's daughter used to be embarrassed by her choice to wear Docs because it was "not very mum at the school gates", but Dee used this as an opportunity to discuss issues of choice, identity, and feminism with her. She described her Docs as "a great vehicle to use to explain aspects of feminism and independent thought and the rights of women to be who they are", and credits them as being a big part of her relationship with her daughter.<sup>120</sup> Dee teared up when she told me the story about her auntie – she laughed as she did so, waving away the tears, but it was clear that the lessons she inherited from this precious relative were intimately tied to the issues of choice, freedom and feminism that were embodied within her one pair of Docs.

### **Why Love Matter(s)?**

Interestingly, Dee was one of only a few participants who had no hesitation in admitting her love without a qualifier. Others said they loved their Docs but prefaced these emotions with, "it sounds stupid, but..." or, "this makes me sound silly". Indeed, these phrases were uttered by 5 participants (Jess, Destiny, K, Dee and Robyn). There was a sense that it was absurd for a grown woman to be so attached to shoes. One participant, Robyn, was particularly at odds with these feelings. She said:

*"I mean, it's funny, because I'm a grown up and I'm quite comfortable with who I am. I'm very comfortable with who I am. But if I put my kickers [Doc Martens] on, I'm in a way better headspace. It shouldn't be that way."<sup>121</sup>*

The sense that 'it shouldn't be that way' is pervasive. Robyn admitted, "Docs are who I am", but followed up immediately with "which is weird to say, but it's true." When I asked how wearing her Docs makes her feel she said:

*"It's so funny, isn't it? Probably just a bit more assertive. I'm naturally a quiet person. So yeah... confident. Yeah, I hate saying this kind of thing about clothing. Because you should be more than that. But it's Docs, y'know?"<sup>122</sup>*

At this point I felt that I had to let Robyn know that I understood what she was saying and that it was a valid way to feel. This is a part of active listening, the feminist conversational analysis technique that I tried to employ when collecting data, but it also just felt like the right thing to do:

**Georgia:** *I don't know. It's an interesting one. Because as somebody who studies clothing, my whole academic life I've had people say that to me. But if doing this has taught me anything, it's that I think clothes are one of the single most important things that we do...*

**Robyn:** *Yeah, that's true. I'm just kind of coming from the angle that I should be more than my clothes. But actually, I'm not.*

**Georgia:** *Well if you take away clothes, there's nothing. There's no visual sign of your identity really, they're a really important part of how we show who we are. So you should not feel silly talking about your clothes and how much you love them.*

**Robyn:** *I do love them, they are a part of me. Everyone knows I wear Docs.<sup>123</sup>*

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<sup>120</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>121</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 49: Robyn in her Docs*



*Figure 50: Robyn's collection of Docs*

Once I explained to Robyn that I did not see her admittance of how meaningful her Docs were to her as a silly or frivolous thing, she was more willing to declare her love for them without any qualifiers. But I understand her reluctance to do so. As mentioned previously in this thesis, consumption is a dirty word, and any association of genuine feeling with the consumption of objects, of physical matter, is often dismissed as evidence of shallowness and materialism. But, in the words of Daniel Miller, “possessions often remain profound, and usually the closer our relationships are with objects, the closer our relationships are with people” (Miller, *The Comfort of Things* 2008, 1). The recognition that *our stuff matters* is vital to our relationships with ourselves and with others. Once it is widely acceptable for us to love our stuff we do so boundlessly, and the connections that are formed through that love can be profound. Whether it is through the fanaticism of collection (as shown in Julie’s 70+ pairs) or a monogamous lifetime of wear (as shown in Dee’s single pair, bought over 40 years ago), the many and varied ways in which participants loved their Docs was astonishing. J even got married in her Docs and designed her wedding dress around them: “shorter at the front and then longer at the back. Because I’m like, why would you have such fabulous boots if no-one’s going to see them?!”<sup>124</sup> This adds another layer of love to her Docs – a quite literal interpretation where Docs have been an active agent in the cementing of her loving relationship with her husband. As if to really make hammer the point home, J’s wedding Docs had bright red hearts on them (see figure 51 below).



Figure 51: J's wedding dress and Docs

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<sup>124</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

Juliet Ash has written that “it is important to relocate *feeling* within design history, particularly within fashion history – not least because clothes are *of* human beings as much as *the property of* human beings” (Ash 1996, 219) and this assertion has proven true throughout participant interviews. There is a sense that Doc Martens have lived alongside these women, formed bonds with them, and become unique containers for their stories. Sometimes these stories are visible on the outside, a life of love and use shown through wear and tear. Harper describes this as aesthetic decay, a process by which the wear of an object makes it more beautiful by inscribing emotion through everyday use. Harper writes:

*“Decay is renewal—a perhaps contradictory sentence that nevertheless characterizes the aesthetically sustainable product, which ages gracefully and which possesses the germ of aesthetic decay as process. Decay equals renewal in the sense that aesthetic decay ensures the continued interest and fascination of the recipient. Decay spells renewal to the degree that decay changes an object over time and thus creates variation and dynamic range”* (Harper 2018, 72).

Aesthetic decay, then, is key to emotionally durable objects. Several participants noted that the softening of the leather through wear had moulded their Docs to them perfectly, and that they now felt ‘part of them’. One participant, Claire, even went so far as to say:

*“It's the only thing I won't buy second hand. I think shoes are really personal and I can't do that. I wouldn't want to give mine away, they've got all my story in them. It's weird, all my clothes are second hand, but I just can't do shoes.”<sup>125</sup>*

Despite Claire’s deep environmental convictions and otherwise almost entirely second-hand and vintage wardrobe, she simply cannot tolerate the idea of wearing someone else’s Docs because they “have all her story in them”. Another participant, Lydia, echoed this:

*“I find Docs quite hard second hand wise. They can be quite hard to wear in, and once they have I feel like they're quite personal. And I feel like the wear in them is quite personal. You almost want to make that mark yourself. So the creases that always happen on Docs across the front, I'd much rather that at least I made that mark than someone else. I think they are quite personal.”<sup>126</sup>*

For Lydia, the creases across her Docs are evidence of a life of use that is unique to her (see figures 52 and 53 below). For someone else to be wearing those shoes – or for her to be wearing someone else – feels like an invasion of privacy, a kind of intrusion on a personal relationship. This is evidence from my research that supports Harper’s assertion that the decay of a loved object makes it more meaningful, not less. This means that the durability that Docs are so famous for – the design, materials and construction of the physical item – is a key aspect of what makes them emotionally durable. This is because they are built to be used and the creases, scuffs and patina that adorn a pair of Docs from that use make them personal and unique to each wearer – as Claire said above, they end up containing all of your story. But all of these relationships begin with that first meeting, the first point at which you see an object and know that it is right. As Claire told me: “from the very first moment, I remember distinctly getting them out the box. And I just fell in love with them.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> In conversation with the author, Derby, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>126</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>127</sup> In conversation with the author, Derby, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.



*Figure 51: Lydia in her Docs shoes*



*Figure 52: Close up of Lydia's Docs shoes – complete with scuffs and creases*

## Conclusion

From the very first meeting to a lifetime of use, any successful user-object relationship relies on emotional connection. Whatever form that connection takes – be it an appreciation of comfort, aesthetics, or an embodiment of a precious relationship – Docs Martens’ have it in abundance, and their capacity to be loved is the third and final strand that makes up the unique thread that ties them to their wearers. In this chapter I have explored the new materialist concepts of emotionally durable design and aesthetic sustainability, and combined participant examples with these theories to show that Doc Martens are a universally ‘cherishable’ item with both emotional durability and aesthetic sustainability potential. Docs are often kept for decades, as shown in the case study of Dee, but other participants had a similar notion of both the physical and emotional longevity of their boots. As one participant, Cathy, told me, “I think you buy a pair of Docs and you keep it for life.”<sup>128</sup>

When discussing new materialism and the emotional embodiment of clothing it is important to keep in mind that these concepts – even the very idea that the emotion of clothing is worth talking about – are indebted to the feminist researcher theorists that I discussed in the introduction to this thesis. By abandoning the predominantly male model of studying society and employing Oakley’s feminist research method I have been privy to knowledge that may otherwise have been hidden, and I have been able to seek out the subjective, the messy, and the often unquantifiable. As shown by Robyn’s reticence in admitting her feelings for her Docs, this was not always easy. But by actively engaging with feminist research praxis – with open conversation, researcher transparency, and active listening – I have been able to find love in the most unlikely of places. In dusty cupboards, stacked on shelves, placed neatly by doorways or packed away in shoe boxes, love was revealed to me in a giddy array of colours, shapes and sizes. Creases on leather, cracks in soles, stains on laces; each of them a new stage of a continually evolving relationship through use. Because while the emotional bonds formed between a woman and her Docs have the capacity to be incredibly strong it is not to say that these bonds are static. Mo, who was introduced at the beginning of this chapter, has a pair of fabric tartan Docs that are in her words “literally falling apart” (see figure 54 below) but her dad bought them for her just before he suddenly died so she will not throw them away. Even though the active relationship with her father that these boots are so entangled in has now ended, they continue to have a life beyond him, but still involving him. Mo wore them to his funeral, and now she wears them whenever she watches Scotland play rugby – a favourite pastime of her father’s. Her relationship with these Docs has evolved beyond that of simply being a gift from her father; as Miller says, “People exist for us in and through their material presence” (Miller 2008, 286).

These scuffed, broken, tartan Docs are now a part of Mo’s dad that she gets to keep, a piece of the relationship that continually reinscribes meaning and emotion into her life through their use. Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose have described this as an “emotional feedback loop for the wearer”, whereby emotionally durable items allow us to continually reassess our relationship to them and “contemplate notions of use, ownership and need” (Fletcher and Grose 2012, 87). As emotionally durable items, Docs are *active agents* in the creation and maintenance of a successful human-object relationship. Their capacity to love and be loved gives us the impetus to treat them as such and to consider them as something that needs care and attention. That care can come in many forms: regular buffing and polishing (as with Sarah-Mary); sharing them with friends and family (as with Silvia and Holly); a lifetime of monogamous wear (as with Dee); or even getting married in them (as with J). But regardless of how it manifests this profound love has been plain for me to see, and is a cornerstone of the relationship formed between Doc Martens and the women who wear them.

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<sup>128</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.



*Figure 54: Mo's tartan 1460s*

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the question:

*'What is the nature of the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them?'*

By interviewing a variety of women who wear Docs and using feminist research praxis to collect and analyse the quantitative data given to me in those interviews, I have identified three different strands – history, empowerment, and love – that weave together to create a thread, unique to each woman, that ties her to her Docs. Using a new materialist lens, I have posited that it is these three strands and the thread that they form that forms of the crux of the relationship between Docs and the women who wear them. The nature of the relationship is unique and multifaceted, full of meaning and affect, and unique to each wearer. But the common strands that exist in all these relationships serve to create a sense of community and belonging for female Docs wearers without the strict rules and exclusionary tactics that a traditional subculture might enforce.

In the first chapter I discussed how the history of Doc Martens and their use of subcultural capital has given them a unique position as a heritage brand with a difference. Their history of use by subcultures has given them an authenticity in the present day, which is carried on through their shoes, even if those subcultures are no longer as visible as they once were. Several participants identified as having been at the edge of subcultures (e.g. Sylvia, Ashleigh, Dee, Mo). One participant, Katherine, summed up the general feeling of liminality that other participants noted feeling when she said:

*"I tend to dip in and out. I wouldn't say I go particularly far into any of them, but I'm usually kind of on the periphery of those scenes. I went to a lot of mod and ska and skinhead nights when I was younger, so I flirted with that a bit, but I wouldn't say I ever prescribed to one in particular."<sup>129</sup>*



Figure 55: Katherine in her Docs



Figure 56: Katherine's two pairs of Docs

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<sup>129</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

Only one (Gaye) still considered herself a subculturalist – she called herself an “old-age punk”. Despite this, every participant had some knowledge of Doc Martens’ associations with subculture, and 12 participants said that this influenced their choice to buy them. Clearly, the unique position that Doc Martens have in the cultural consciousness of the world has contributed to a kind of authenticity that has served them well, helping them to survive even the strongest of downturns. The visibility of women in the public eye wearing Docs has also contributed to this history, even if those women may no longer conform to a traditional depiction of subculturalist. Nicki Minaj, Miley Cyrus, Rihanna, Beyoncé and Agyness Deyn were all mentioned by participants as inspiration to wear Docs, showing that while the form of the female rebel may have changed from Courtney Love’s kinderwhore, the attitude of strong, successful, independent women choosing to wear Doc Martens remains. The cultural meaning of the Doc Martens brand is relatively universal and was regularly discussed by participants, but there is a different kind of history that also makes up the first of the three strands within the thread, and this is personal history. Cultural meaning can be read semiotically on Docs, but personal history is embodied in each individual pair and unique to the wearer, requiring a new materialist understanding of use. The history of a garment continues after the point of purchase – indeed, it has only just started – and Fletcher writes that we must consider this use history as an influential part of the fashion system: “our experiences of products, like garments, as we use them deeply affect our satisfaction with them” (Fletcher 2016, 18). When objects are used corporeally, they become a part of us, and Docs are no different – the individual histories of the women interviewed are contained in their shoes. Dee told me that her Docs had been “really good travel buddies” throughout her life and that “they’ve been to some cool places and some great concerts. There’s that whole memory wound up in them.”<sup>130</sup> These personal histories embedded in the object combine with the collective history projected onto the object to create the first strand of the thread that ties Docs to the women who wear them. It also shows a trend that continues throughout the other two strands – the personal and the universal together. This gives Docs a unique personality whereby they can be charged with individual meaning, but still carry a sense of community throughout for the people who wear them because of the common aspects of wearing Docs that everybody experiences.

In the second chapter I discussed how wearing Docs has contributed to feelings of empowerment and confidence in the women interviewed by assessing the relationships between Doc Martens and femininity: the subversion of it, the juxtaposition of it, and the celebration of it. This showed the diversity of ways in which women were able to situate femininity within their clothing choices while wearing Docs, and how empowering even small acts of rebellion against gender expectations have the capacity to be. I then dove deeper into what participants have felt empowered to do because of their relationship with Doc Martens: to buy, to choose, and to move. Several participants discussed the cost of Doc Martens (they are, undoubtedly, expensive) but, as K talked about at length, the initial cost of buying them meant that she was more invested in getting use out of them. She remembers feeling guilty for spending so much money on an item of clothing for herself but credits this initial purchase as being the beginning of her financial independence. Docs were the start of K feeling like she had a right to spend money on herself, and they empowered her to continue to do so as she has gotten older. In being empowered to choose, I used participant responses to show that the ‘vertigo and terror’ that Judith Butler speaks of when faced with the knowledge of choice in how you negotiate with gender is very real but can ultimately be a rewarding experience. Fenella shared with me how long it took for her to accept that she was never going to be able to “perform femininity” in the way expected of her, and that a return to Doc Martens after an almost decade

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<sup>130</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

long hiatus was a part of this acceptance of herself. Other participants talked of the relief of being able to choose to wear sturdy, strong, reliable shoes, which brings us onto being empowered to move. This was perhaps the most commonly mentioned attribute of Docs amongst participants: 16 of the women interviewed talked about Doc Martens' reputation for quality, 15 talked about their comfort, and 11 said that the physicality of their Docs had a direct impact on their confidence. For others, though, it seemed to be more of a cyclical relationship: Holly, a hospitality worker in her late 20s, told me:

*"I do feel like I am a strong, powerful, kind of bad-arse woman. I feel quite empowered as a woman and I really like that about myself. And I feel like maybe that fits my whole persona and my look, having those shoes."<sup>131</sup>*



Figure 57: Holly in her Docs - oxblood Chelsea boots

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<sup>131</sup> In conversation with the author, Nelson, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview

There is a tacit admittance here that Docs are the shoes that empowered women wear. This brings the entire discussion full circle: if you are an empowered woman then you wear Docs, and if you want to be the kind of woman who is empowered, then a way to become that way is to wear Docs. Of course, this is vastly oversimplified, but it is representative of the kind of logic that often settles into even the most enlightened of brains. This kind of ‘fake it ‘til you make it’ attitude was more common than I anticipated, though perhaps I should not have been surprised because I myself had spent years wishing I could wear Docs but thinking I would never get away with it because I was not cool enough. To learn that this was not unique to me (Claire, Sarah-Mary and Ashleigh both spoke at length about feeling this way) was something of a relief on a personal level, but also proves a point that Daniel Miller has argued: “material culture matters because objects create subjects much more than the other way around” (Miller 2010, 287). The unique nature of Doc Martens – their history, the design, their weight and physical feeling – contribute to an experience of wearing that is empowering for women. These women continue wearing Docs, and other women see them doing so, and the cycle continues. This is an example of how, using Bruggeman’s concept of ‘rhizomes’ discussed in Chapter 2, the consumption of objects under the logic of capitalism can be empowering when you look at the life of that object past the point of purchase. It is emotionally durable objects such as Doc Martens – the ones we empathise with, grow with, and love – that are far more likely to empower us in this way, leading to successful and long-lasting human-object relationships. The empowerment that wearing Docs can afford to women is the second strand in the thread that ties Docs to their female wearers, but it builds on the first: a long history of seeing strong, fierce, talented women wearing Docs in the public eye has embedded in their shoes some of the confidence that those women exude. Laura discussed this at length, the sense that her Docs could act as a ‘prop’ when she was not feeling very good about herself, showing that the strands of history and empowerment bind together to form two thirds of the unique Docs Martens thread.

The third and final strand, love, was discussed in Chapter 3. This was the most difficult aspect of the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them to quantify, because love in itself is such an abstract concept. Nevertheless, it is perhaps the most important strand in the thread because, as laid out in Chapman’s theory of emotionally durable design, our desire to keep our objects relies on us feeling something for them. 8 participants explicitly said that they loved their Doc Martens, yet it was the most common theme that jumped out to me when both having and analysing our conversations. This is where the feminist praxis of active listening really came into its own: by listening to the pauses and readjustments in speech I was able to hear the feeling behind words and adjust my own track accordingly, or listen to something with new ears that I thought I remembered differently. In this chapter I used the example of Robyn, who only really became comfortable with her admittance for her love for her Docs when I told her that I understood it and did not think that it was silly or inappropriate. Dee described her initial desire to have Docs as “shallow”, and when I asked J about her feelings about her Docs she said: “It is quite funny, there’s something... You feel like such a dick saying it but you’re like, almost proud?” This illustrates the importance of active listening: I did not initially catch the pause in J’s sentence, the reluctance to admit to your clothes having an impact on your personhood. But when analysing our conversation, it became clear that this was an example of what DeVault described as “halting, hesitant, tentative talk” which “signals the realm of not-quite-articulated experience, where standard vocabulary is inadequate, and where a respondent tries to speak from experience and finds language wanting” (M. DeVault 1990, 103). Perhaps it is because it is still considered ‘shallow’ to have feelings for your clothes that I ended up having to employ active listening the most when writing up this chapter – the evidence is hard to find and even harder to explain in quantifiable terms, but the impact of the feeling on myself when doing the work was striking. When listening back to my conversation with

Dee, I found myself crying as she explained the link between Docs and her precious great auntie. I laughed as I went back over Silvia's interview, remembering how animated she had been as we talked about the people who, in her mind, really love Docs:

*"I think it's quite easy to understand who the real Doc Martens wearers are. The ones who love them and want to wear them every day, and the ones that are wearing them as if they were any pair of shoes. I think it's very easy to understand who is who. Don't you think?!"<sup>132</sup>*

When I asked her how you could tell the difference, Silvia shrugged and said, "I don't know. I don't know." Another unquantifiable experience – a feeling of solidarity that you can't explain. Despite the difficulty of dealing with these kind of subjective experiences in a rigorous way, by using new materialist theory I have been able to interpret these reported emotions in a way that goes some way to explaining why object love – and the study of that love – is so important to understanding the nature of the relationship between women and their Docs. Using Fletcher's *Local Wisdom* project and Harper's analysis of what makes an object aesthetically sustainable, I took each attribute and showed how Docs can fit into those definitions. I believe that Docs are both aesthetically sustainable and emotionally durable, making them a rare example of a pre-existing brand that had successfully negotiated both of these aspects of new materialism in their design. I do not believe that this was originally intended, but through the unique weaving of the three strands of history, empowerment, and love, Doc Martens as a company have managed to nurture their reputation as standing for rebellious self-expression while still retaining a sense of community for their wearers. The trust that consumers put in Doc Martens – both physically and emotionally – is a core tenet of this reputation, and by continually encouraging the Docs community to 'share their style' in online platforms, the community created acts as a framework for wearers to start their own new relationships with other enthusiasts, further imbuing their Docs with more and more emotional meaning. Indeed, 13 participants said that they had either passed on Docs to other women or have women pass Docs on to them, showing that this sense of community is replicated as much in the physical sphere as it is in the digital one.

All of these different facets – trust, relationships, pride, community, romance, aesthetic adoration, the list goes on – they all combine to make what is perhaps the strongest thread of them all. Ashleigh told me that Docs had changed her life, and Laura said that they had been a fundamental part of coming to terms with her identity as a queer woman. J got married in her Docs and Hannah climbed rocks in hers. Katherine performed on national television in rainbow glitter 1460s; Dee travelled the world in her first and only pair (still going strong, more than 40 years later); Morgan went to prom in hers; Mo has been to balls, weddings and funerals in hers; Gaye walks to work in hers every day; and I graduated in mine. Every woman I spoke to had a story to tell about her Docs, even if they thought they might not. One participant, Lydia, was worried that she had "hardly given me anything" and yet came out with one of my favourite anecdotes of the entire experience. She had been waiting at a bus stop on a windy evening in Glasgow, wearing her very first pair of Docs, when an elderly woman leaned over to tell her how much she liked them. Her friend snapped a photo of this sweet encounter which Lydia said I could use here (see figure 58 below).<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>133</sup> A disclaimer that this photo is blurry and imperfect, making it the ideal representation of quantifying love for a pair of shoes in a piece of academic writing.



*Figure 58: Lydia and an elderly Glaswegian lady discussing Doc Martens*

The image of Lydia, a young student in her early 20s, and this elderly Glaswegian bus patron discussing Doc Martens in the street perfectly encapsulates the capacity of Doc Martens to bring women of all types together. 25 out of 28 participants said that they immediately notice if other women are wearing Doc Martens and of those 25, 16 said that they felt a connection to those women, regardless of how brief the encounter. There are plenty of examples of the verbalisation of this connection: Kathleen said she gives “a little internal smile” and thinks that she would get along with that person<sup>134</sup>; Ashleigh told me that she was at jury duty and noticed a girl wearing the exact same Docs as her and they immediately started chatting<sup>135</sup>; Claire told me that her Docs “tended to start conversations that are Docs related with perfect strangers. Generally from other women, actually, I don't really have that with men”<sup>136</sup>; and Cathy said that seeing a woman in Docs makes her think, “you're in my tribe. You're going to be interesting, you're going to be a bit different. More open minded and that sort of thing.”<sup>137</sup> But what I noticed the most about the description of these connections was that almost every participant who talked about them made the same motion: a small tip of the chin upwards, as if to show a minute nod of recognition. This motion is not visible in the transcripts, but I remember it clearly. Over and over again this same motion of recognition was used to indicate Kathleen's ‘internal smile’ as a way of expressing to me the miniscule bits of body language that women are so adept at reading in each other. My friends and I often joke that we can have entire conversations across a crowded bar without once moving our lips, and this motion was an indication to me that the women I interviewed had that same skill and expected me to as well. It was understood that I would know what that chin tuck meant – that, as DeVault says, I would be able to translate it – and they were right. In that slight movement I knew that they were trying to

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<sup>134</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>135</sup> In conversation with the author, Glasgow, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>136</sup> In conversation with the author, Derby, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview

<sup>137</sup> In conversation with the author, Cardiff, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

express female solidarity, recognition, understanding, and community, without having to say the words.

This sense of community created by the wearing of Doc Martens by women is why waveless feminism has been the perfect theoretical framework to construct this thesis around. Dahl Crossley's waveless feminism has provided me with a way of understanding the sentiment of the women I interviewed as existing outside of the wave model, thus making more sense as a community of women. Where I was expecting to find generational differences between participants when I asked questions about gender, clothing, and being a woman who wears Docs, instead I found nuanced opinions that did not easily fit into wave-based categories. One of the youngest participants, Destiny, was explicit in her dislike of 'girly' things – an opinion more commonly associated with the second wave; and Mo, a participant in her 50s, said "I quite like looking quite delicate and pretty" while still wearing her Docs – an attachment to or acceptance of 'traditional' femininity in juxtaposition with heavy, solid boots that feels more at home in the third wave, in the context of riot grrrl and kinderwhore. These are, of course, vastly simplified versions of the waves, but the waves in themselves are simplified version of womanhood that do not do justice to the myriad of opinions, feelings and expressions contained within them. This is the point that Dahl Crossley has made with her argument for waveless feminism, that "feminism cannot be understood either in waves or as flourishing or dead" (Dahl Crossley 2017, 148), but as a constant ebb and flow, sometimes in the spotlight and sometimes underground, but always present. In much the same way that Dahl Crossley has stated that "we need to look for feminist activism and solidarity in places not previously examined in order to comprehend its persistence" (ibid), this thesis has sought to give voice to a group of people who have not been examined in order to understand the persistence of Doc Martens in their lives. While this thesis was written and researched with a feminist framework and using feminist praxis, I was not intending to explicitly ask participants about feminism. Despite this, it was a subject that came up in conversation, with 7 participants saying that Doc Martens had been a part of their journey as feminists. Other participants may not have been as explicit, but there are plenty of examples of statements that would certainly read as feminist to me (e.g. Hannah when she said "I always think our group definitely identified as strong, independent women" and that wearing Docs had "enabled us to be keeping up with the boys and doing the same kind of stuff as they were."<sup>138</sup>)

I am not able to say for certain that every participant interviewed would call themselves a feminist. However, Dahl Crossley's waveless feminism has given me a structure within which to situate the answers given to me by participants who otherwise may not have fitted into a particular 'wave', even if they *did* consider themselves a feminist. This gives space to the nuance and difference expressed in participants' feelings on gender, identity, and Docs in a way that is not oppositional, but communal. This in turn has allowed me to discover the three strands of history, empowerment, and love that run through each participant's relationship to her Docs – these strands might look different for each woman, but they are each always present. If I continued adhering to the wave metaphor, one woman in her 50s being empowered by the celebration of femininity in a pair of shiny patent Jaden platform Docs might be considered in opposition to another woman in her 20s being empowered by the utility of a pair of unisex black 1460s. But by casting out the waves and considering feminism not an ocean but a river – in constant flow and flux but always moving forward – these women can exist together in a community unified by their empowerment, regardless of what specifically it is about their Docs that makes them feel empowered.

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<sup>138</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

So, then, what is the nature of the relationship between Doc Martens and the women who wear them? Well, much like Doc Martens themselves, these relationships are full of paradoxes: at once simple and complex; utilitarian and decorative; painful and comfy; ubiquitous and completely unique. Despite the fact that each woman I interviewed had a distinctive relationship to her Docs, there were three common strands that ran throughout – history, empowerment, and love – that I believe combine to create a thread that ties these women to Doc Martens. This is nature of the relationship; one of history, both personal and collective; of empowerment, to buy, to choose and to move; and one of love, a true emotional connection to a thing that you trust, and that brings you joy.

There are few other clothing brands that have successfully negotiated the vast array of changes that the last 60 years has brought – not just in the fashion industry, but in the world. There are other heritage brands, yes, and there may be others that have the ability to engender feelings of empowerment and love in their customers, but I do not think that there are many others who can claim to have such a firm idea of ‘what they stand for’ that has permeated into the communal consciousness of the world. Doc Martens’ unique history in subculture, and subculture’s (unfair) reputation for being a predominantly ‘male’ pursuit, has contributed to a unique sense of empowerment for women who wear them that is gained through wearing an item of clothing that should not belong to you. Of course, as Briar pointed out to me, “it's not, like, a hugely alternative thing to wear Doc Martens”<sup>139</sup> and I do not think that any participant was under the illusion that Docs are still exclusively the property of punks and skinheads, but there still remains a sense of daring for a woman to be wearing them. Indeed, 12 participants said that a woman wearing docs ‘makes a statement’ or ‘sends a message’ about the kind of woman that she is. These two strands of history and empowerment combine together to make a unique kind of love, an emotional durability that has been proven to withstand the test of time. Woven together this creates a thread common to each female Docs wearer and yet, because each strand is made up of feelings and memories that are personal, completely singular to them as well. When I asked participants what they thought when they saw other women wearing Docs, the answers were rarely about having taste or style in common: K told me that, “I think it maybe does have this sort of image of, I don't know, women wearing Doc Martens being a sort of... ball busting feminist”<sup>140</sup>; Sarah-Mary said, “If I see a girl wearing them I will normally assume that they're a feminist. A bad-ass woman wearing bad-ass boots... I definitely get the impression that they'd probably be left wing and quite liberal”<sup>141</sup>; and Fenella said, “I'd be more inclined to think they were nice.”<sup>142</sup> By assuming these qualities to be present in other women who wear Docs, participants were, perhaps, inadvertently telling me what they hope others see in them when they lace up their boots and step out into the world. It is difficult to capture how much warmth and appreciation I felt when participants spoke about their Docs, but maybe Claire can sum it best. When I asked her how wearing her Doc Martens makes her feel, she smiled and said:

*“I know it's just a shoe. But to me, I feel the most me when it hits Autumn and I put on that pair of Doc Martens. It's like a welcome home.”<sup>143</sup>*

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<sup>139</sup> In conversation with the author, Auckland, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>140</sup> In conversation with the author, Wellington, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>141</sup> In conversation with the author, Brighton, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>142</sup> In conversation with the author, London, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview.

<sup>143</sup> In conversation with the author, Derby, 2019. See appendix for full transcript of interview

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# Appendix

## Ashleigh

*Ashleigh is an archaeologist and small business owner in her 20s. She was born in Newcastle but moved to Glasgow for university and has been there ever since. She bought her first pair of Doc Martens in her late teens and she now owns 10 pairs. I interviewed Ashleigh in her tenement flat in Glasgow, in July of 2019. We have a mutual friend in common who suggested that Ashleigh get in touch with me about my research.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Ashleigh**

Well, it was around the first year of uni, maybe a bit before that. My mum got me them. It was in Newcastle and my mum knew the Doc Martens manager for the shop. I always wanted them but never got them, I was too scared. And then my mum was like, 'Just go for it.' So we went and got them - but I got them in a size too small!

## **Georgia**

Why were you scared of getting them?

## **Ashleigh**

I think because there's a certain image you have to have when you wear Doc Martens at that time, I don't know. But I always wanted to, I always want to be that sort of person that wore them, and then just decided that I should.

## **Georgia**

But you got them in a size too small. On purpose?

## **Ashleigh**

Yeah, yeah. Well I bought some boots for digging [Ashleigh is an archaeologist]. And I saw that people were wearing Doc Martens for safety boots. I use them for safety boots now. I remember buying some that weren't even Doc Martens, they were just shitty ones that were similar, and they were way too big and therefore gave me really bad blisters. I was like, 'Shit, I'll have to get some other ones. And Rosie, the manager of the store, suggested I go for a smaller size.

**Georgia**

So why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands, do you think?

**Ashleigh**

I like the look of them. I suppose they just sort of have this kind of punk, indie look that I like. And you see quite a lot of people on TV that have Doc Martens who are kind of cool but a bit of an outcast.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Right. So media had an influence, you think?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, I suppose.

**Georgia**

And so what were your feelings on them as a brand when you first got them? And has that changed over time?

**Ashleigh**

Not really, no. I follow them on Instagram but I don't really keep up with the changes of the brand or anything like that. But I love them the same as I did back then.

**Georgia**

Were you aware of any of your friends or your peers owning and wearing Doc Martens?

**Ashleigh**

No, none of them did. I suppose, actually, when I was younger, much younger than when I first got my Doc Martens, I was in a goth scene. Quite a lot of older people wore Doc Martens but I never got them then. I always wanted them but never got them.

**Georgia**

Okay, interesting. So when you were younger there were people around you who wore them?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, older goth kids who were like, 18 or 19. They were expensive. People would buy them and hang big chains off them and stuff. But at the time that I was going into university, nobody I knew wore them.

**Georgia**

But do you think seeing people who you thought were cool when you were younger wearing them might have had an impact?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, maybe. Probably. I mean, it's hard to think back that far, but I think it probably did leave an impression of Doc Martens being a cool thing to wear. But also in my head they're associated with people who are not the norm, they're a bit more outcast. They want to be a bit different.

**Georgia**

Definitely. And so do you identify as being part of a set subculture? Or did you, because you said that you were part of the goth scene?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, I definitely did then, I was part of the goth scene in Newcastle.

**Georgia**

Full on goth?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah. Yeah, but I was quite a young goth! So I was 13, scruffy, really baggy jeans with big holes in them. I used to wear Vans all the time, have the bracelets, black nails, dark make up, eyeliner all around my face!

**Georgia**

When did you stop doing that?

**Ashleigh**

Probably when I got to the later stages of high school. Because you just want to fit in rather than be something different. I was always slightly emo but when I got to about 17 I wanted to be a bit more... Normal. And fit in a bit more.

**Georgia**

So you never wore Doc Martens when you were a goth, but were they a part of the goth scene?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, yeah. Heavily. Everyone wore them. It was the dark Pascal boot, the black ones, and they had really bright laces.

**Georgia**

That's interesting. So why did you never get any when you were younger?

**Ashleigh**

I don't really know. I think my mum probably would have bought me some if I'd asked. I just think maybe I just didn't think I was cool enough to get away with them. I was into my Vans - I wore my Vans to death

**Georgia**

Do you wear Vans still?

**Ashleigh**

No, I don't.

**Georgia**

Interesting! Did you have or do you have any knowledge about Doc Martens associations with subculture? Did you when you were younger?

**Ashleigh**

I mean, I know they were associated with punk and stuff like that. But no, I mean, it was just people around when I was a goth. I suppose you see mods and stuff wearing them too. But no, I don't think I had like a total connect with the subcultural aspect of them.

**Georgia**

Has that changed as you've got older? Do you know anything about that now?

**Ashleigh**

No. No, not really. Sorry!

**Georgia**

No, that's absolutely fine.

**Ashleigh**

I mean, they are part of British culture. I used to wear all different types of Docs to work in my old job. A woman I knew there, Christine, she would tell me that she was in the punk scene and had bright pink Docs. So you do get a little bit of knowledge through that. But for me, I just like the style. I like the way it looks.

**Georgia**

Are there lots of people in archaeology who wear them?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah. Especially because they are safety boot, too. You see a lot of people wearing the actual safety boots, which just look like the normal Pascal boots but they're steel toe capped. I wear them and I know at least three other people who wear them as well.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, what impact does owning and wearing your Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or do you think it's the other way around, that your identity impacted on your choice to wear them?

**Ashleigh**

I suppose a bit of both. I like wearing Doc Martens because they make me feel how I want to feel. They make me feel quite confident and quite tall because they're quite chunky. But also I quite like how people react to Doc Martens. I've got a pair that have smiley faces on them, on the toes, and every time I wear them someone's always like, 'They're cool.' And I quite like that. But yeah, I suppose I went for them because I wanted something to represent my identity and I thought that Doc Martens would do that.

**Georgia**

So kind of cyclical?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, it keeps happening over and over. You pick it because you like it, because it suits you and who you are, but then also it impacts other people and you quite like that.

**Georgia**

Yeah, and do you think that you're known as a Doc Martens person?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, definitely.

**Georgia**

Yeah, when I put the thing up on Facebook Erica was like, 'You need to talk to **Ashleigh!**'

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, totally. I have too many pairs.

**Georgia**

How many pairs do you have?

**Ashleigh**

10. I have 10.

**Georgia**

That's a good amount. Okay, awesome. So you do still own Doc Martens, and do you wear them regularly?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, all the time. I wear them for work and for outside of work. Mostly if I'm going somewhere nice I'll put on a pair of Doc Martens as well. If I want to look smart.

**Georgia**

Do you wear other types of shoes?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah I do some trainers, but it's mostly boots. My friend Carmen told me that all my shoes are the same!

**Georgia**

Stick with what you know. Okay. So tell me about your favourite pair of Doc Martens, what are they like, why do you love them? What do they mean to you?

**Ashleigh**

I'll have to go and look at them... [Ashleigh gets up to survey her collection]. My favourite pair at the moment is probably very different to what I would have said when I was younger. These are my smiley face ones and I love them, they're Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Michelangelo, because he likes pizza and I like pizza. And I like I said, I like them because they've got the face on them. They are a bit wrecked now but when I first wore them I used to do tours, and you can tell people would come in and be very uncertain, but then they look at your feet and start to feel alright. They've got a real sense of humour. But these ones are my go to at the moment [Ashleigh shows me a pair of plain black Pascal boots with a stacked heel] they're just nice, chunky, and they look nice. They make you feel very tall, and they're comfy as well.

**Georgia**

So two different favourites for two different reasons.

**Ashleigh**

Yeah. But I usually go for something that's not plain. Most might have some sort of pattern on them which I like. I like something that's bit different for shoes because I dress quite plainly on top. So with my shoes I like to make a statement, I like them with artwork on.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Awesome. Cool. And so how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel? And do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, I think I do feel a bit different in them. I feel a bit more confident wearing Doc Martens. They're a shoe that I think does represent me. They're a boot, they're sturdy and I like them. I do think they made me feel much more confident than any other shoe. They're also really reliable shoes, they will last you forever, it doesn't matter what you do to them. They'll never let me down.

**Georgia**

Okay, so do you have any thoughts on like gender and identity? So being a woman who wears Doc Martens and chooses to wear boots like that?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah. What do you mean?

**Georgia**

Do you think that it's a different kind of choice for a woman to put on a pair of Doc Martens than it is for a man to put on a pair of boots like that? Do you think it's a different statement?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, I do. I think maybe older people tend to have a stigma against Doc Martens and that, probably coming into your subculture stuff. I think someone makes a definite choice to wear Doc Martens because they are a different sort of shoe. They're not the typical shoes that women are sort of forced to wear. You see a lot of TV, you see a lot of media, where women are always in very small, cute, dainty heels and things, which are very nice. But Doc Martens represent something more. I don't want to say a masculine side of a woman, but they make a person that doesn't necessarily fit into those gender stereotypes feel more comfortable. I don't fit into a very feminine role of a woman and I don't think anyone should, but a Doc Marten makes me feel comfortable when another heel would make me feel something else. For instance, my flatmate wears Doc Martens and the first time she bought them her mum was not happy with that. Because she said that she would come across too masculine people think she was a lesbian. I don't think there's anything wrong with that whatsoever! But she was acting like that's a negative thing. It's a negative connotation to have. And I felt like it really wasn't. A Doc Marten is a great shoe. It's a comfortable shoe. It's a reliable shoe. It makes you feel great. So I don't know why anyone would care. But it's because you have these associations with them, so they think you're hard as nails if you wear Doc Martens. But you're not, you're subverting the stereotype of that box that you should fit into. I think also maybe because they were work boots and they are sturdy and strong, that some people think a woman can't wear that because women shouldn't be sturdy and strong. 'Why would she need to wear boots like that? Why can't she wear kitten heels or flats or something like that? Something that's dainty.' Well, my feet definitely aren't dainty!

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**Ashleigh**

I don't do dainty things. I find it really strange that people have those perceptions. I think it's because they also have a perception of what a lesbian is, too. They think a lesbian has to be a woman who is very, very hyper masculine, which is completely not true at all.

**Georgia**

Yeah, absolutely. So are there any situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens, and why?

**Ashleigh**

No.

**Georgia**

None? Formal occasions?

**Ashleigh**

I would wear Doc Martens to graduation. And the other day, I was at a wedding, I told my boyfriend to go back and get me my Doc Martens because I was wearing heels and I just didn't want them anymore! And they were much more comfy, I could do a ceilidh in them, and I couldn't do that in my tiny, strappy heels. So no, I don't think so. Because Docs come in different styles - I've got heels from Docs. So no, I don't think so.

**Georgia**

Okay. And have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing your Doc Martens and what were they?

**Ashleigh**

Well, I told you about people smiling at them and being very happy. Asually people are quite positive when they see artwork on shoes and get quite interested and go, 'Why did you pick that?' Yeah, that's really interesting. I've got another pair of Docs which were my all time favourite until I completely wrecked them. They've got tattoos on them and everyone really liked that. I've never really noticed a negative side. I suppose I just block stuff like that out naturally though anyway, I just don't listen, because there's so many things people can say about you. But no, if I received a

negative comment about me wearing them it's never been about the Doc Martens, it's been about me! I'm trying to think and I'm drawing a blank completely.

**Georgia**

No, it's fine. So your parents also were fine with you having them?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah. My mum and my dad are fine with them, completely. They just know that I have a different style to everyone else that they know. And they've always said I've got a wacky style, with my shoes with faces on them. Tops with eyes!

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, so do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah. Immediately. I'm always like, 'I like them, I wonder where she got them?'

**Georgia**

And does that impact on your opinion of that person, or your thoughts of the kind of person that they might be?

**Ashleigh**

Probably, yeah. Automatically I know that we've got something in common and I could talk to them about that. And I suppose, just me, I think immediately they're probably more open minded. Maybe they've got more of a left leaning point of view. The other day I was at jury service and I saw a girl with the exact same Docs on, and we both immediately noticed each other and started chatting. Judging people based on shoes is kind of what a lot of people tend to do, don't they? So yeah, I do think now that there's more of a connotation of people being more open minded, more of a left sort of viewpoint. Especially now that Doc Marten's have vegan ranges as well. I think Doc Martens can start a conversation and then it can go on. But yeah, I think that's what my assumption would be.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Awesome. That's kind of it. Are there any other things you want to tell me about your relationship with Doc Martens?

**Ashleigh**

A lot of the time I think of me walking somewhere or going somewhere in them. One of my first jobs was a tour guide and I wore Docs all the time there. Silly things like I dropped a piece of chicken on my Doc Martens, and it stained it forever! They were really nice snakeskin boots as well. Also, I bought loads when I first started buying them because I knew the manager Rosie. She used to give me 60% off which was the best.

**Georgia**

Was it an actual Doc Martens shop?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah, yeah. And actually Doc Martens shop in Newcastle. So I would get stuff for like 40 quid. So I would buy them all the time. It was a bit of an obsession. And then I suppose it started to change when she left and I couldn't afford them anymore. So I get them every two years now or on special occasion. I think it's just memories of university a lot of the time. Like when I was feeling great about myself in second year, I would always wear my Docs with little tartan shorts and a crop top. They were associated with happy moments for me, nothing negative. I've never had any negative comments with Doc Martens. I think they are a smart shoe and I think quite a lot of people now think that they are quite smart. I've never had a bad moment with them. They totally change your life. Once you buy your first pair, that's it. They're the only shoe you'll ever want. They're just so great. They're lovely and comfy. For a boot that is basically the same style over and over again, they're so versatile.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Have you ever had any problem wearing them in?

**Ashleigh**

Oh, totally. 100%. But I persevere.

**Georgia**

I think sometimes people fall at the first hurdle with that.

**Ashleigh**

Oh, they do. But once you get past it they get to the comfiest stage. And then if you wear them too much, they get a bit floppy. But I've got the Docs socks, they're great, really good. I've covered them in baby oil, I've done that. My flatmate put bags of water in their shoes, put them in the freezer. And

that worked for her. I mean, I've cut my feet up bad. But I love them so much, so I just keep doing it. Eventually you get to that stage where it doesn't bother you anymore.

**Georgia**

Yeah. I had heard people say this before I got mine but they really changed the way I walked.

**Ashleigh**

Totally. I always go for ones that have a chunkier sole because it makes me stand up tall, it makes my back straighten out, and I have problems with my back. They're really supportive. I'm like Meg from Hercules, I've got really weak ankles! I think they're just the best shoe ever. If you get the right size!

**Georgia**

Did you say you still have that pair that's the wrong size?

**Ashleigh**

Yeah. Yeah. I don't lace them up properly. They're not as worn as the others!

**Georgia**

Have you ever thrown any pairs away?

**Ashleigh**

No. No. Even the ones that I've bust, I still have them. I love them so much.

**Georgia**

Do you wear other shoes often?

**Ashleigh**

I wear my trainers. Because some of them do hurt I won't wear them as often. And I don't want to wear them out too much like I did with my first few pairs. I completely wrecked them and I wish I'd taken better care of them. So I will wear trainers. The one thing I do struggle with is driving in them so I tend to have driving shoes. Because they're so heavy and make your foot really wide, so when you're trying to find a pedal it's a bit dangerous because you can't feel anything!

**Georgia**

Oh yeah, totally. All right. Anything else?

**Ashleigh**

No I think that's it.

## Briar

*Briar is a bookseller in her late 20s who lives in Auckland. She bought her first pair of Doc Martens 10 years ago while on a student exchange in Canada and she now owns 7 pairs. I interviewed Briar in her flat in Auckland, in June of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Briar**

Yes, not the specific shop. But I was 18, I was on my semester exchange to Montreal, living away from home for the first time ever. I'd gone from living in the family home to living in a flat on the other side of the world. And I'd wanted some for ages. And then I was like, 'You know what, even though the exchange rate sucks, it's still cheaper to buy them here'. So I did a bit of research, as much as I could be bothered doing, found somewhere that sold them and bought my first pair which were a pair of black 20-ups.

## **Georgia**

Oh, wow. Super tall. Amazing. And when was that?

## **Briar**

That was in 2009.

## **Georgia**

Okay. Right. Cool. And why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

## **Briar**

So I think it was basically one of those things when they just had already cemented such iconic status for me. When I was a fledgling wannabe cool, alternative, Riot Grrl it felt as though having this particular pair of footwear was something that was a marker of being part of that world. I wanted to seem more hardcore than I really was. It's kind of like, it's just a sort of kind of... It was like an armour against the world; a 'give no fucks' kind of footwear.

## **Georgia**

Okay. And so you chose Doc Martens because of their association with that sort of thing, rather than, say, Timberlands or other big boots?

**Briar**

That's true. Maybe things like Timberlands felt like they were bit more connected with hip hop subcultures to some extent. Whereas my trying to be cool and weird started with the White Stripes, moved through Sleater-Kinney. Also, they were probably just more visible. And in the mid 2000s, when internet connections weren't exactly what they are today it was what I was aware of. And they were available to some extent. I probably had enough friends who were slightly cooler and/or had parents more willing to pay obscene amounts for their footwear.

**Georgia**

So it was to do with music as well?

**Briar**

I'd say so. The music I was into was sort of subculture-y, I was trying to be part of this garage rock world, and then this Riot Grrl world. And it definitely felt like an identifier and indicated to people who were into the same kind of stuff as me. Whether or not it actually would be perceived as such, I don't know.

**Georgia**

Okay. Cool. When you got them did you have any particular cultural associations with the brand or things that you thought you knew about them? And has that knowledge changed over time?

**Briar**

I think I probably just thought of them as being a thing of the 90's. Kind of grungey, kind of funky coming up sort of world. And I probably wore them as such for quite a while. Courtney Love kinda style, little floral dresses with the big chunky boots. And probably that still is my preferred way. I like that sort of contrast. That kind of... I HATE the term kinderwhore, but that kind of era of that slightly feminine, girly with the fuck off boots on the bottom. And it's something that I probably don't fully commit to as much as I did when I was, you know, teenager, early 20's. But it is still an aesthetic that I really enjoy.

**Georgia**

So next question is did you or do you currently identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Briar**

No, I wouldn't say so.

**Georgia**

Nice. Okay. And, you already mentioned you had some knowledge of Doc Martens' association with subcultures. Do you think that had an impact in your decision to own them?

**Briar**

I'd say so. Seeing photos and things like that, probably also seeing advertising in NME, that would have sort of fed into it being a part of this idea that Docs were for weird cool people rather than preppy cool people.

**Georgia**

Okay. What impact has owning and wearing Doc Martens had on your identity? Or do you think it's the other way around? Or it's cyclical, did your identity impact on your choice to buy them in the first place?

**Briar**

I think it probably is relatively cyclical. If for whatever reason I've gone through a phase of other footwear it does feel like a bit of a return to a version of me that I feel most in sync with. For example when I've gone through periods of working in sort of office type jobs. Admittedly, I have had a couple of office appropriate pairs that are secretly Docs. It feels sort of silly, but I know it's not at the same time, to have those associations with a garment. But definitely if I've gone through a phase of wearing black ballet flats or whatever, it feels like I'm pretending to be someone that I'm not. That I'm this weirdly put together girl, and that has never and will never be who I am. It's not like a hugely alternative thing to wear Doc Martens. Everyone knows what they are and a lot of people do own them, but I think committing to wear them in a professional setting is a slight mark of have a little bit of a personality.

**Georgia**

Okay. Yeah. Awesome. So it has had an impact on your identity?

**Briar**

It sort of feeds into and reaffirms it. Yeah. It is kind of grounding.

**Georgia**

That's a good word for it, I think. Definitely. Okay, so do you have any thoughts on Doc Martens and gender?

**Briar**

I think I appreciate the relative non-gendered-ness of them. There have been several pairs that I've gotten over time which have been classed as male ones but it always seems pretty arbitrary. I was actually mulling this over as I was walking from the bus stop. I feel like I've never been a particularly traditionally feminine kind of a person. In my high school years I attempted to be a bit more like that because it was an all girls school, it was very posh and all that sort of thing. But I think when I started to get into my various, you know, music obsessions etc., and started to see what I perceived to be this really cool part of the world, it was much more interesting to me. It also probably gelled with my image of myself as well. I have a good excuse now of having a major ankle injury last year to not wear heels, so I have to wear things with ankle support. But with ballet flats and stuff it feels like it's acting. Which is fine in some circumstances, sometimes I'm quite happy to put on the persona of this specific kind of person in heels or whatever. And I do have some pairs of Docs that are more feminine than others. But I think the fact that they do tend to be fairly ambiguously gendered means that when there are things that are more feminine when it comes to Docs it can be surprising to people. So I quite like that. They're still not hyper feminine but they do subvert things a little bit.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, awesome. And do you have a favourite pair?

**Briar**

Yes, I do. I still have a soft spot for those black 20-ups but the zips died and they're gonna be way too expensive to replace. So I haven't been able to quite part with them, they're gathering dust in my mum's garage. I do have a pair of one of the slightly stylized mid calf ones with ribbon laces that are oilslick green, really dark. They actually said they were black when I ordered them online but I am totally down with the green. So those are my favourites but I don't wear them as much as I would because of the effort of lacing up the higher ones.

**Georgia**

Okay. So why are they your favourite?

**Briar**

Um, I think because they just have more of that real 'stompy boot' quality to them. They've got buckles on the back so they do jangle a little bit. They just have a presence more than just being a part of whatever you're wearing. Whereas these ones that I'm wearing at the moment, which for the recording are black sneaker-sole style ones, just integrate into an outfit. Whereas those boots, while they're still a relatively neutral colour to wear, they are making a literally noisy statement.

**Georgia**

So the black ones you've got on at the moment, you wear them quite a lot but you don't love them as much as you love the ones with the ribbons?

**Briar**

Yeah, I used my ankle injuries as an excuse to buy these ones. You can actually see slightly that that one is more worn than that ones because I started wearing it before I could wear that one because my ankle was still in a moonboot. So they've got a bit of a story to them that way. I wear them all the time, enjoy wearing them a lot, but they don't quite have the same personality as the other ones.

**Georgia**

Okay. So how does wearing Doc Martens makes you feel? And do you feel differently in them than you do in other shoes?

**Briar**

Yeah, I'd say so. They are empowering in a way. There's other shoes that I will put on if I'm in more of a rush to leave the house because they just slip on. But I do feel like I'm portraying a peak version of myself when I'm wearing something that has that physical weight, and that perceived meaning to both me and others. I currently work in an indie bookshop and we are all cut from similar cloth. So there'll be days when four of the six of us on the floor will all be wearing some variation of Docs. That's not a rare occurrence. So even though it came into my world through the aspirational music subculture it has actually ended up being where I am in a professional setting as well. It's kind of like a positive uniform in that way. So I guess if I was part of any subculture, it's 'weird bookseller'! It's a combination of making me feel like I'm standing out among people who I want to stand out from, but I am also kind of in with people who I relate to as well.

**Georgia**

Okay. Awesome. And you said you feel differently in those than you do in other shoes?

**Briar**

Yeah. It feels like it's a slight on people who wear other shoes but it's not. I just feel more in tune with the way I want to be perceived than looking like a slick marketing person which I in theory was in the past, and really am not.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So are there some situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens or you wouldn't, and why?

**Briar**

Honestly, not that I can think of. It's probably partly the world I live in and the life I live. These little black ones I could get away with wearing to most meetings I could feasibly be attending. The red chunky sandals are dressy enough for anything I'm going to in summer. And I've got a pair of multicolour patent brogues which are quite dressy and don't at all look like they're Docs. They feel a bit like they're cheating because they don't even have the yellow stitching. But I know they're gonna be comfortable and fit me. I guess if I was going to a wedding, depending on the wedding, maybe not.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. So wedding dependent, why wouldn't you wear them to maybe a more traditional event?

**Briar**

I think you are trying to fit a specific dress code. Unless I was electing to wear something that coded more masculine, which I might do, I just haven't historically, then that would be fine. Thinking of the sort of weddings that I have been to, they are sort of like outdoor spring lawn weddings. It feels like you are expected to present a slightly more delicate appearance. And it's not to say that I wouldn't consider what I already had. But I think there are just times when... I mean, you're not wanting to be the one drawing attention to yourself. It's not so much that I'm trying to be someone else. It's just if I have the choice of wearing something that's going to make everyone pay attention to me instead of the people who should be getting the attention then that's not a particularly loving thing to do. I guess sometimes it feels more appropriate to fit into the expected box.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. And have you experienced any notable reactions from people when you wear Doc Martens?

**Briar**

From time to time. I've had a lot of compliments on those red sandals. There's a couple of pairs that have since been retired to other homes: one which were bright pink and one which were black with bright yellow stripes. This was before there was this resurgence in chunky boots among the cool teen population in the last few years. When I was 19 and wearing Docs and had pink hair both of those things were a bit more of a statement then than they are now. I've never had, that I can recall, negative reactions.

**Georgia**

So your parents were happy enough for you to have them?

**Briar**

My mum just couldn't believe I'd spent that much money on shoes!

**Georgia**

So it was the money that was the problem more than the brand?

**Briar**

Yeah, I've got very open minded parents, but my mum balks at the idea of spending more than \$100 on a pair of shoes.

**Georgia**

They do last though!

**Briar**

That's the thing. I've got a pair of third hand ones from a friend who'd gotten them from a friend, and they're the canvas material. They were printed originally but you can't tell now, it's all faded away. They must be at least kind of seven, eight years old and they're just so comfortable.

**Georgia**

Yeah, a lot of people I've spoken to have said that they've had pairs from friends. There seems to be a real passing on of them to other people. There's a kind of socialist aspect to owning them, you share them out between people.

**Briar**

Yeah, I like that about them. I've had four pairs that I've passed on to other people and it's either been because of a wardrobe cull or they were ones that I'd optimistically bought a size slightly too big or too small.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, do you notice when other people were Doc Martens?

**Briar**

I couldn't say 100% of the time, but for sure. They're so broadly worn that it's not really actually a point of connection, but it's still kind of nice to know that that person has good taste in one thing in their life that I know about.

**Georgia**

Okay. And when you see other people wearing them does it impact your thoughts on them or opinion of them?

**Briar**

If it was just a random on the street then probably not. But I think if I'm encountering them on people who I am getting to know or have just met then there's a sort of knowing look between you. I can already tell there's one good thing about you.

**Georgia**

Okay. Awesome. And that's pretty much it. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about?

**Briar**

I do quite like that aspect of swapping and trading. There's been at least one pair that I'd ordered from somewhere and they sent me the wrong size. But my friend had been talking about needing some so I gave them as a gift to her. And whenever she wears them she sends me a picture of them on Instagram. Actually, I was sort of on the receiving end of a similar thing years ago, when someone from my previous work got the wrong size. I like that sort of connection with other people as well. I've got a couple of cousins who are quite a bit older than me who I didn't even know that well when I was growing up. But when I was posting a picture of my then collection of probably about seven or eight pairs, one of the cousins commented saying, 'Oh my gosh, that's almost as good as my collection was when I was your age!' So those moments are always nice. And I also love that sense of patriarchy stomping boots.

**Georgia**

Yeah. It's interesting that you said earlier that if you were presenting more masculine then it would be more appropriate.

**Briar**

Yeah because they are just standard male boots. And I guess they're also potentially different connotations as well, being a bit synonymous with skinheads and stuff which I've never thought of as

something that would be connected with it, wearing them as a woman. It's interesting, that different perception of things. I guess they traditionally started out as a male item. So the sort of... The ways in which they've evolved to the point of being not only heeled boots but heeled sandals and stuff, that are still very much within that whole oeuvre... Stuff that comes under that banner is really interesting.

**Georgia**

Yeah, they're got a really long history and have changed a lot throughout that history. But there's obviously something about them that has stayed the same because people recognise them, because your purple boots, my red ones, they don't super look like Doc Martens but after a second you're like 'oh they're definitely Doc Martens'. Because even if they didn't have a tag on the back, I think you'd know.

**Briar**

Mmm, for sure. They've kind of got a similar cut. But they do open up the different designs and shapes, there must be some kind of style guide. Because there's always some aspect that does come through. But I have to admit that pair of brogues I've got, you wouldn't clock those. But every other pair I've had they're very obvious. I think it's just one of those things... Once you have something that you know suits your desired aesthetic, you stick with it.

**Georgia**

Yeah, for sure. Cool, awesome. So is there anything else?

**Briar**

No I think that's it!

## Cathy

*Cathy is a university lecturer in her 50s. She was born in France but moved to Wales in her early 20s to study and has lived there ever since. She got her first pair of Docs when she was in her early 20s and she currently has 16 pairs. I interviewed Cathy in her house in Cardiff, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Okay, so can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Cathy**

Yes, I can. It was in 1992 in Carmarthen, in West Wales. I came over to teach French in secondary schools in the UK. And I came to Wales. Now, obviously, you had some in France and everything. But let's just say my mother wasn't a particularly big fan of Doc Martens. And with my first paycheque, I went to the town, and I bought myself the first pair. So I was 22 or 23.

## **Georgia**

So they were available to you in France?

## **Cathy**

They were available in France. But you know, the thing is in France, the way you look is much more important. And you have to conform to a more standardised, feminine kind of look. So although I wasn't totally conforming to anything, my mother definitely could not cope with it. And it took her 20 years to buy me a pair. Then finally she gave in and sent me a pair. She has this particular name for Doc Martens. It's a bit swearsy, but she calls them shit crushers. She ordered them in France from the UK, received them, so paid extra, received them then sent them over!

## **Georgia**

Funny! So what kind of boots were they?

## **Cathy**

They were just plain black. That was my first pair.

## **Georgia**

Yeah. So how long had you been wanting Doc Martens?

**Cathy**

For a very long time. When I went to university I think that was a big thing because I studied English.

**Georgia**

Did you study that in France?

**Cathy**

In France, yeah. And so we were all kind of getting into British culture. We were looking at what they were wearing and how they were dressing and it was so much freer and far less, 'You are a woman and therefore you have to wear those shoes.' You can mix and match the skirt with Doc Martens, or you can have the skirt with big creeper shoes, that sort of thing. So that's when it really kicked in. I had big creeper shoes, that was just about okay, and Converse shoes.

**Georgia**

But not Doc Martens?

**Cathy**

Not Doc Martens. My mother just wouldn't.

**Georgia**

And whereabouts in France are you from?

**Cathy**

I'm from the north of France. I am from a tiny village near Belgium. Then we moved to Reims, the champagne area northeast of Paris when it was two and a half, three. Quite a posh city.

**Georgia**

Oh I went to the North of France recently, Lille. It was beautiful.

**Cathy**

Yes it's lovely. The North is really nice. People are always going on about the North being... But it's beautiful

**Georgia**

Yeah. I thought it was lovely. And it's funny because my only experience of France has been Paris. And I've found Paris like... It's just not my favourite city. I didn't take to it for whatever reason. I was desperate to improve my French and try and learn and Parisian's just refused to talk to me in French! Whereas the people in Lille were so patient, so kind, they were letting me speak my very broken French to them.

**Cathy**

Yes they are very warm! There is this idea of the divide between North and South, and the people in the South can be horrible!

**Georgia**

Definitely, I think I much prefer the North. Anyways. So why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands of shoes?

**Cathy**

I think it was more the style than the brand as such. But there was a lot of things in there. To me they really encapsulated the British pop culture at the time, and Britpop was coming in. And even before that, a rebellion against standards. They were, at the time, famous for being very solid, reliable shoes. Nobody tells you until you've bought a pair that they shred your feet for about a month before they get comfortable. There was this idea that you could keep them for a very long time. And they were sturdy, well made, and they were comfortable. So it wasn't so much... I really liked the look of the boots more than the shoes at the time. Because they went with everything. And you could really create a style wearing those boots.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So you said Britpop was quite a big part of that. Were you quite into Britpop?

**Cathy**

Yeah, very much. And even a bit before that, The Smiths and The Happy Mondays, and all that kind of thing.

**Georgia**

So British popular culture and music had quite a lot to do with it?

**Cathy**

Yes. The style, the look, that young British artists had was really, to me, very appealing at the time.

**Georgia**

Cool. So as you've got older and continued to wear them, has your feelings on the brand changed or solidified or anything?

**Cathy**

I think you buy a pair of Docs and you keep it for life. That is something that I still feel, although maybe a bit less now, I think they may have cut corners. They're not as sturdy as they were maybe, not solid. But to me, they are still really an emblem of the UK, and of a certain culture of the UK, which is quite appealing.

**Georgia**

Mm hmm. And has that stayed the same?

**Cathy**

Yes, it's always been that way. I'm 50. and I wear Doc Martens. I see my neighbour, Mary, her little daughter, she's eight now and she's starting to wear Doc Martens. My son's partners, they have Doc Martens. Older people I know, they have Doc Martens. It's an intergenerational kind of shoe. You don't have to be a certain age to wear them. Or at least, most of the people who wear them do not care whether they are of a certain generation.

**Georgia**

Yeah, for sure. So were you aware of any of your friends or your peers wearing Doc Martens when you were younger?

**Cathy**

When I was at uni, yes. My best friend, Richard, he had those capped ones. He had the proper Smiths look, the Morrissey look, and he had the old car and everything, and those Doc Martens. Quite a lot of people who were in our circles were wearing them. I would say I was aware of them from maybe the age of 16 or 17. It would draw you to a certain category of people, people who were interesting, people who maybe didn't care so much about appearance.

**Georgia**

Yeah. And would you say that the fact that your best mate was wearing them, did that influence your want to wear them?

**Cathy**

Well I wanted them before, and then he had them.

**Georgia**

Ah I see. So did you ever identify as being part of any set subculture when you were younger? Or do you still?

**Cathy**

Maybe not subculture as such. I know when we all got to uni and all studied English, we certainly identified as 'the arty ones'. A bit more into British or American movies, we were into books, we were into a certain kind of music. So it wasn't so much a subculture, but a culture that kind of encapsulated everything we really enjoyed. And that all happened to be the UK culture at the time.

**Georgia**

So in France, would that have been quite an alternative viewpoint?

**Cathy**

It was quite alternative, yeah. Especially in a city like Reims, which is quite posh, with all the champagne. You stand out if you're not conforming, not wearing the little skirt with the scarf and the pearls and the bob.

**Georgia**

So what I would probably say British people think of as quite a stereotypical French look. That was the prevailing fashion where you were, at the time?

**Cathy**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Georgia**

So that is really different from that, isn't it?

**Cathy**

Yes, it is, yeah. And it's the one that my mother still wants me to wear. And it's not going to work! It's been a long time that she's been trying.

**Georgia**

She's still trying? Funny! So did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture when you first started wearing them?

**Cathy**

Yeah, with punk culture. And then with alternative culture, I would say. Alternative living, alternative music. Not conforming to what you would expect, necessarily, but that said, not necessarily a bad thing either. I know with the punk one, and then maybe the hooligans wearing those capped shoes and everything. There was at some point a time where you would think, 'Oh, hang on that brand is maybe going to be owned by a group that I wouldn't associate with.' I think they managed to get out of that. And the capped shoes disappeared, which is a shame, because they were great.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So you did understand that they had a little bit of an association with subculture. Do you think that that had any impact on your choice to buy them?

**Cathy**

With what I would say the positive, alternative thing, yes. Not so much with the white right wing in the 80s, the skinheads and everything. I think at the time, the way we saw it, was that their choice of Doc Martens wasn't our choice of Doc Martens. So they had the steel capped ones, they had big ones that probably we wouldn't have gone for. It was fairly obvious at some point that maybe we would need to make a choice if that trend carried on, but I think they managed to kind of get out of that, thankfully.

**Georgia**

So you said that your mum wasn't too keen. Do you think that's to do with that kind of association with subculture, or do you think it is to do with gender?

**Cathy**

I think it's gender because my mother wouldn't have a clue. She wouldn't have known any of that. What she was seeing was that, to her, a pair of Doc Martens is not feminine. This is not something a young lady should wear. And it's even worse for her now because she thinks that I'm far too old to wear them! Her perception of being feminine is very standard and standardised. My mother doesn't

go out to the supermarket without makeup on. If I come downstairs and she says we are going to the supermarket, she would say, 'Are you getting changed?' She really cannot reconcile a pair of Doc Martens, as girly as they could be, with being a woman.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Right. What impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or do you think it's maybe the other way around: that your identity in the first place impacted your choice to buy them?

**Cathy**

I think it might be a bit of both. So I work at university and I work in recruitment. I always wear Doc Martens, and I always try to wear the funkier ones, especially when they do open days. It's funny that the people who have then come back to be our students always mentioned the fact that I was wearing Doc Martens. My students associate the Doc Martens with me. I come into class on a Monday morning and they'll say, 'Oh you've got a new pair! We haven't seen those ones before.' Or they come to me and show me their own Doc Martens. So I think it's really become part of my identity. People find it very difficult when I don't have Doc Martens on. It's really become part of my image: I'm the Doc Martens lady. For my birthday my best friend bought me my latest pair, a sequin pair. But she didn't have to think very far. 'How do I make her happy?' But she had to find something that was a bit more quirky.

**Georgia**

And have you always wanted them for your whole life?

**Cathy**

Until I came to Britain, no. So from the age of 23 I had one pair. And then I went maybe a few years without having many pairs. But probably from the age of 30 they've been my shoes of choice. Doesn't mean I don't have other things that I wear. But most of the time that's what I wear. So I've actually worn out quite a lot, so some have had to go in the bin, which is a shame.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so you don't keep them after they're worn out?

**Cathy**

No, I did for a while. And there is one pair that really should be going in the bin. But I'm thinking I can keep them for gardening. But no, I reluctantly have thrown some away.

**Georgia**

Okay. They're obviously a big part of your identity as a lecturer, but are they a part of your personal identity beyond your job as well?

**Cathy**

Yes. Obviously, I have to have a certain image when I'm a lecturer, but that image is not that much different when I'm outside of uni. Probably because of the circles I'm in which is very arty, we're very much into music, and going to festivals, and going to loads of live gigs. I've always been in that world, and they fitted well, if that makes sense. So they're just part of me.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So do you have any thoughts on gender and identity in relation to Doc Martens?

**Cathy**

I think you make a statement that to be a woman, or to be feminine, the femininity might not be necessarily just on the outside. To me, if you decide to wear a really pretty dress or fluffy dress or whatever, having a pair of Doc Martens makes you different and therefore, maybe in a way, more feminine, more interesting, more quirky. For men... it's easier for them, because they're just shoes. I don't think they necessarily think about if they need to wear a certain pair of shoes to be perceived a certain way. I think for women, it's a bit different, because we have more rules we have to adhere to be considered feminine. So it's more of a conscious choice not to give a stuff, really. If that's not your style, then that's fine.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so you do think there's a difference for men and women. Okay... This is a difficult question, but do you think that your insistence on wearing Doc Martens and dressing in that style has anything to do with her being quite so feminine?

**Cathy**

It probably does, but I think it's not only her, I think it's more of a reaction to the French way really.

**Georgia**

Okay. So do you see this as a French version of femininity, then?

**Cathy**

Yeah. Being able to wear whatever you want.... It's not just the shoes, but a mix of colours. Why shouldn't you wear that colour with that one? What is the issue? If it makes you feel good, or if you think it works, just go with it. So it's more a question of personal choice, and having your personal choice accepted.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Would you say that British society, when you first arrived, was more accepting of people wearing whatever they wanted?

**Cathy**

Yes. I think it's much more accepting generally. In terms of shoes, clothing, and things like piercings or tattoos. I remember going to shop with my mum, and this guy had earrings all the way down, and something in his nose. And she was just like, 'I don't know. Sure you want to go to that shop?' What's the problem? Has he been impolite to you? Has he not smiled? Has he not being approachable? The appearance is not the person and you've got to be able to dissociate the two. And I think in France, you don't.

**Georgia**

Do you think it's still that way, in France?

**Cathy**

Yes. If someone is a lawyer or doctor or an architect, they will dress smart so that you know they're up there. They won't be wearing little sandals, or shorts, it's not going to happen, because you have to look the part. Whereas here, very few people, unless they have to be wearing the suit in their job, outside of their job you would not necessarily know what it is that they do because they're much more relaxed about it.

**Georgia**

Okay. And was that part of the appeal of living here?

**Cathy**

Yes, actually, the lack of judgement and expectations to conform to certain things.

**Georgia**

Right. And so you obviously do still own Doc Martens. Do you wear them all the time?

**Cathy**

Pretty much every day, yeah. When it's not like this! [It was the British 2019 heatwave]. I also have other trainers which I will wear sometimes, or Converse.

**Georgia**

And do you have a favourite pair of Doc Martens?

**Cathy**

It's really hard, but I do actually. I've got two favourite ones. These ones are the best because they're my kick-ass ones. And I particularly love wearing them when I go travelling to France. I arrive at the airport in a skirt and those. And the other ones are the spotty ones, which I think are the coolest ever. Because my style a lot of the time, especially at work, is black and white, a slightly mod kind of look. And those go with pretty much everything. I looked for them so much, because they saw a picture of them, and I was just like 'I need them.' And it took me about two months to locate them. I think they're very funky.

**Georgia**

So the tall ones, why do you like them so much?

**Cathy**

I wear those usually when I've got a big meeting, or when we have an open day. They're my power boots. Especially when you're in an environment where you've got loads of men, and older men, there's two things happening. First of all, they probably expect you to be feminine, in a certain way. And also to be slightly submissive in the sense that they know best. And so if you dress a certain way and you wear those, they're not too sure how to deal with you. Actually, what I've found over the years, is if I dress a certain way and I've got those boots or whatever, then a lot of people will assume I'm gay. You obviously cannot be wearing those if you're a straight woman. And I like that. I like the games you can play with your appearance, especially with the Doc Martens.

**Georgia**

Yeah, for sure. So how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Cathy**

They're very much part of me now. They send a certain message which is quirky, nonconformist - especially at my age - could be fun to talk to. I just find they go with anything and everything and my

lifestyle. They make me feel good. I feel a little bit strange in other shoes sometimes. I don't feel myself.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. And are there any situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Cathy**

Frankly? No. I've worn them in all situations. I've worn them at weddings. French weddings! I did that on purpose at my brother's wedding, just to see everyone's face.

**Georgia**

Was it as you would have expected?

**Cathy**

God, yeah! Because I had a black dress with a petticoat and Doc Martens. And they said, 'She does look British, doesn't she?' And I remember, I took my youngest son, he was wearing a suit with red Converse. And again, you know, the perception was 'British.'

**Georgia**

Yeah. Was that the sense of like, 'Oh, that's very British' used in a negative way?

**Cathy**

I don't think it's always very positive! But no, I can't think of any situations where I haven't felt comfortable wearing them.

**Georgia**

Good. Have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing your Doc Martens and what were they, good or bad?

**Cathy**

Usually good. I've got patent ones, red and white, and sometimes I mix them up so I come with one red and one white around Christmas time. Usually people don't say anything unless I am in France, where they look at your shoes and decide you're rough. Especially as you get older. You can excuse it

in young people, they go through their teenage thing. But over here, no, I've never had a bad response to them.

**Georgia**

And you said that the students at open days particularly respond well to them?

**Cathy**

Yeah, because they think you're approachable. You might be a bit funky. And so that makes them feel a bit less a bit scared of talking to you. They will feel more at ease with me. That's how I see it. I do try to wear the funky pair so they can remember it.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Because that's also quite a good way for people to remember the university at big recruitment events.

**Cathy**

Exactly, that's it. I remember one of my students said that friends of ours came to an open day, and the girl said they had a hilarious talk by a blonde lady with big Doc Martens.

**Georgia**

And that was you! That's cute. So do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Cathy**

Yes. There's a pair that I've seen someone wear recently, which I've been so jealous of. They're green and they've got a double sole. So yes, I do. I do notice other people's shoes.

**Georgia**

And does that have an impact on your thoughts on that person?

**Cathy**

Yeah. I think, 'You're in my tribe.' You're going to be interesting, you're going to be a bit different. More open minded and that sort of thing. That's how I see it.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. And that's kind of it for my questions, anything else you want to tell me about your relationship with Doc Martens?

**Cathy**

No, I think that's it.

**Georgia**

Oh! Also, do your sons wear them?

**Cathy**

So the 24 year old doesn't wear them anymore, but used to, mainly because I kind of forced him! The younger one is 21, he has a pair. First of all I tried to explain to them that they were the best shoes in the world ever, and they said no because I was wearing them. Obviously. Then he decided his friends were wearing them, so he wanted them. So full circle, that's exactly how it worked. With the younger one there was also another issue because I've never seen a child being able to destroy shoes the way he did. It was outrageous. So I started buying him Doc Martens school shoes, and that helped a bit. They lasted 6 months rather than 3 weeks! Now I buy him boots every so often because they are very good, and he agrees that they actually go quite well with his rock star look.

**Georgia**

Oh, is he the musician?

**Cathy**

Yes. Yeah, the older one has stopped wearing them. He had some funky ones that I got him one year, some brogues. And they went with his thing at the time, he was living in Brighton, and then came back to Cardiff. And then he went totally the other way with brands like Fred Perry, and the shoes had to be Adidas, but the ones that you couldn't run in them if you tried.

**Georgia**

Yeah, the kind of throwback football casual that's very popular at the moment.

**Cathy**

Yeah. So now Doc Martens don't really go with his style, which is fine. But the younger one is definitely Converse and Docs, because that goes well with everything and he just likes the look of them.

**Georgia**

Great. And that's kind of it for my questions.

## Claire

*Claire is a teacher and MA student in her late 30s. She lives in Derby and has 8 pairs of Doc Martens. She bought her first pair around 10 years ago with a tax rebate, having admired them since she was a teenager. We conducted our interview in her house, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Claire**

Yes, I can. They are the shiraz pair of boots over there [Claire points them out on her living room floor]. The moment I noticed Doc Martens was many, many, many, many, years before I actually bought my own pair. I noticed them when I was about 18, the grebs were wearing them, and I was a square and I was like, 'I really like them but that's my not my uniform.'

## **Georgia**

Sorry, who was wearing them? Grebs? That's new to me!

## **Claire**

Really? They would wear Doc Martens and cut jeans. They're what I would call cool kids. Kind of relaxed, scarves, and some might have shaved heads. I'm not sure what the equivalent would be, it's almost like a cross between hippie and punk. Our school didn't have a uniform. I was a square, I was clever. So I didn't wear them but I looked from afar. My family couldn't afford them anyway, so I didn't even ask. But then when I was about 30, I got a tax rebate and I decided that I wanted a pair of Docs. So I bought them with my tax rebate and I don't know why I waited so long.

## **Georgia**

Where did you buy them, here in Derby? Are you from Derby?

## **Claire**

I am from Belper, which is just up from Derby. And I bought them from Amazon. I'm sorry! I don't do that anymore. But I did buy them from Amazon.

## **Georgia**

So why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

**Claire**

Because they look cool.

**Georgia**

Fair enough!

**Claire**

I wanted that specific look. My partner, who is 10 years older than me, went 'No, you'll look like a skinhead! Oh, no, don't do it.' So I did do it anyway. And when I bought them, and I wore them how I wore them, he thought they looked really cool. I also chose Docs because, primarily because I think they look brilliant, but I do an awful lot of walking. And my mum drilled into me from very young age that it's not worth buying cheap shoes. And they just looked like they lasted forever. So that was part of it as well. But it was mainly because I loved how they looked.

**Georgia**

Yeah. You said there was like quite a gap between you starting to want them as a teenager, and then you actually buying them. For that time, in your 20s, did you still want them?

**Claire**

When I looked at them as an A level student, I thought, 'Oh, they look really cool, but I'm not cool' And then I just assumed I wasn't cool. And then for various reasons... I jacked my job in, I got anxiety, and I started to ask, what do I really like to do? What do I really want to look like? I've not got them on today but I've usually got a ring on every finger. And I think that came out of that finding who I am.

**Georgia**

So they were a part of that process?

**Claire**

Yeah, massively.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. Did you have any feelings or thoughts on them as a brand when you were younger? And what are your thoughts and feelings on them as a brand now?

**Claire**

All of the kids who were in that greb box, they would go to music festivals, most of them had been to Glastonbury, they predominantly wore them. And I just associated them with being cool and open minded. And part of that almost hippie culture. Open, experimental, going to music concerts, that kind of thing. That's what I associated them with. And I do still feel the same about the brand, but now I feel part of it. So the change has happened in me. Now I'm part of the cool crowd!

**Georgia**

Did you have any mates who wore them?

**Claire**

Oh, no, my friends at that specific time didn't really wear them. Maybe more at A level. I didn't really think about them in my 20s. I went to drama school in Manchester and they weren't in my sphere of consciousness. I went when I was 19. And it was 1999 to 2002. I don't really remember them featuring much. But then most of our day was rehearsal, and we couldn't wear them to rehearsal, because you're either in bare feet or you had to wear something soft because we had a sprung beautiful floor. So you couldn't go stomping around in Doc Martens. So I don't remember thinking about them then.

**Georgia**

Do you have friends who wear them now?

**Claire**

I've got one friend who used to wear them, I don't know if she wears them anymore. But when I'm out and about I clock if people are wearing them. I sound so shallow! We've started going to a lot of folk festivals and a lot of people there wear them. They're almost a part of your identity.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So your friends weren't wearing them, but there was a group of kids who you thought were cool who did wear them. And do you think that impacted your choice to want them?

**Claire**

Yes, at the time, but I knew there was no way my parents could afford them. I would never have asked my parents for them.

**Georgia**

Okay. So it wasn't even a possibility.

**Claire**

I wouldn't have asked them because they were just twice the price of the shoes they got me. I would never have asked them. And when I bought my own first pair, I felt like I can make my own decisions. And if I want to spend 100 quid on a pair of boots, I'm going to.

**Georgia**

Yeah, absolutely. What do your parents think of them? They have any opinions?

**Claire**

They don't really say much about them. When I first got my first pair, I went to see my parents, my dad said, 'Oh, Doc Martens, they're alright until the AirWair goes.' And so I said, 'Yeah, but it takes ages for the AirWair to go, right?' And he went, 'Yeah. My first pair were a pair of boots like that, they were oxblood.' And I couldn't believe he hadn't told me he used to wear them! We'd inadvertently bought the same pair as our first pair, which was quite cute. And I think my mum likes them but she would never wear a pair. Oh, I'm lying! She's got a pair of the tall ones. Because of me! I had a pair and she loved them. But she would never wear the traditional lace ups. But I think she quite likes them because they're sturdy and they'll keep my feet dry. She often comments, not on the boot, but I'll wear them with ankle socks underneath them and then tights. Which they think is very me!

**Georgia**

Okay, so do you or did you ever identify as being as part of a set subculture?

**Claire**

No, never. Not until probably now where I would say I'm a folky. I am quite hippie, I am quite left wing, but they're only labels I've given myself in the last 5 years or so.

**Georgia**

And you just started seeing people in the folk scene wearing Doc Martens?

**Claire**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Because I had never associated Doc Martens with folk music, which is really interesting. You can pretty much pin them down to almost every other subculture but I would never have put them with folk.

**Claire**

Well, we went to Derby Folk Festival, and people are my age, nearly 40 give or take. They'd be wearing them. My partner bought me the entire back catalogue of Eliza Carthy because I loved her so much. And she wears Docs, I swear. And then I got this [Claire shows me the sleeve of a CD in which is written 'Footwear and footwork by D.M's. Thanks Doc!'] I've got some footage of her wearing them. In her biography, there is an anecdote of Eliza Carthy turning up to the sword dancing thing in blue hair and Docs, that's how they described her. I have to say, I think that's part of the reason I like her so much. Because all of her chimes with me: what she wears, what she sings about, how she sings. All of it.

**Georgia**

Wo, that's so cool. I've never heard of her! I'll have to look her up. So did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture? Do you now?

**Claire**

I knew that there'd been a period in British history where they had been associated with skinheads, punks, and people with safety pins, but I also knew that in the 90s, that had changed. A lot more women wore them. A lot more women more them with tights, with skirts, it changed the look, it softened the look. And that's what appealed to me. That clash of industrial, ostensibly male work boot with the nice scarf and the short skirt and the fishnet. That's why I bought them. I bought them to wear them with a really long, floaty skirt I had. My partner didn't understand, he had never seen the association I had. And I think that's because he hadn't been a teenager at the same time as me. And he would never have worn a pair himself.

**Georgia**

Yeah, uh huh. So do you think that your knowledge of their association with subculture had anything to do with the appeal?

**Claire**

Not punk, I'm not a massive fan of punk at all. But I always liked the way they looked, I loved the way they looked when a woman wore them. It had the association with music festivals, free thinking and general alternative culture. Interestingly enough, Eliza Carthy said she believes that folk is the only

true remaining underground music culture left. She thinks it's the only type of music and culture that is genuinely a subculture.

### **Georgia**

That is interesting. Okay. So, um, what impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or do you think it's the other way around: that your identity had an impact on your choice to own and wear them?

### **Claire**

What an excellent question! I had never been very interested in clothes until I was about 20, or 21. And then I became very interested. And my decision to buy my first pair was very much about wanting that particular look. And I think at that point in my life, it was because I wanted to identify with that alternative, kind of the timelessness of a proper Doc. A classic Doc has got a timeless quality. I wanted that as a look. That is why I bought them. However, from the very first moment, I remember distinctly getting them out the box, and I just fell in love with them as a piece of art. These are beautiful things. I loved wearing them. I didn't have any of the problems of breaking them in that anybody else had. And I then bought loads more and now I am known as somebody who wears Doc Martens. It's kind of gone the other way around. People now identify that as something about me, which I love, I'm not gonna lie. I taught in a primary school and there was a girl. She was fantastic. But she was just she kept getting into trouble because she couldn't keep her mouth shut. And I really loved her. And she came up to me one day, and she went, 'Miss, I've been counting, and I think you've got six pairs of Doc Martens.' And over the space of a term she'd just counted how many pairs I'd turned up in. And she told me to go home and count. So I went home and counted, and then it just became our little thing. And Laura, who put me in touch with your research, told me I had to do it because she knows that's part of who I am. So whilst I got them to attach that look to me, now it's completely part of who I am.

### **Georgia**

That's really sweet about that little girl. Because she'll probably remember you. She'll remember that she had a primary school teacher who wore Doc Martens.

### **Claire**

The best thing was they had a non uniform day and she came in hers!

### **Georgia**

That is very sweet.

**Claire**

Thinking about that more, actually, I'm predominantly a primary school teacher, a supply teacher. When I go into schools that I don't often go into and they are in fairly tough areas, they do get a lot of looks. That the fact that I wear lots and lots of rings.

**Georgia**

So what do you think they're reading in the Doc Martens?

**Claire**

I don't know. I think they're a really strong symbol of individuality and I hope kids are reading that it's okay to just be your own thing. Sorry any teachers out there, and I am one, but teachers do tend to dress the same. Gosh, I've never actually thought about this, how odd I must look. I've never taught alongside another female who was also wearing Docs.

**Georgia**

Yeah, I think there's something quite tough about them. If I saw a teacher wearing Doc Martens I'd be like, 'I won't mess with them!' in a kind of respectful kind of way. But I don't know if that would run through the mind of a 10 year old.

**Claire**

I think it probably would! It's never run through my mind. One of the things that Teacher Active, my supply agency, say is 'We want to send you there because you've got really good classroom management.' Maybe that is the reason why!

**Georgia**

There is something quite military about them, isn't there?

**Claire**

Oh, yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. So, I suspect that you will! But do you have any thoughts on gender and identity in relation to Doc Martens?

**Claire**

Um... I...I sound like a real geek. I do look at people's shoes.

**Georgia**

Same.

**Claire**

Do you really? I thought it was just me. And I...

**Georgia**

It is my job though!

**Claire**

... I do Doc spot. This is terrible, isn't it? I... think there is a definite difference between [long pause] gender, and the motivation to wear them, and age. Very, very much so.

**Georgia**

Talk me through that.

**Claire**

So the gender one. If you're taking men my age, almost 40 and upwards, I can be in a Docs shop with a gentleman who fits that bill, and they will have a shaved head and a T shirt and jeans. I am assuming, I don't have a conversation with them, but they will look in the mirror and think, 'I look cool, I look quite hard.' That's not my motivation. And in fact, you saying they look quite military, makes me think oh no! I don't like the military thing about them at all. That's not part of why I wear them. But I think women who wear them... There's a certain kick-ass-ness about that. Do you know what I mean? I'm not wearing a kitten heel. And I'm not wearing a stiletto for your amusement. This is my shoe because I mean business and I'm here to do some work. I think that's the vibe it sends out. And I think that's different. It's not looking hard, it's looking like you mean business. So whilst I do think it's a definite decision for men to wear them, I think the signal is different for a woman. I think because a lot of Docs are unisex, and my favourite Docs are my unisex ones, it's like, 'I can do what you can do.' It does feel like a great leveller. I stopped wearing heels. I do wear them on occasion but I look like Bambi on ice. I stopped wearing heels when I was in university because I'm 5 foot 10 and I just had men talking at my cleavage. I didn't enjoy wearing heels. I didn't feel comfortable wearing heels. I don't think when women wear Doc Martens that it's an act of defiance necessarily, but it's definitely an act of matching any else. I honestly, honestly, honestly, don't believe any woman wears a heel for herself.

**Georgia**

Okay, that's fair enough. So you obviously do still wear Doc Martens. Do you wear them regularly?

**Claire**

Pretty much every day. Less in the summer because I've only got one pair of Docs sandals, which I do want to change. These are vegan ones because I eat vegan. You know I've said I don't have trouble breaking them in? I've had trouble breaking those sandals in. In the summer I tend to wear Birkenstocks. I've got several pairs of Birkenstocks and I've got three pairs of Converse as well. But from around September through to probably April, as late as I can fudge it, I will always be in a Doc Marten.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, and do you have a favourite pair of Doc Martens?

**Claire**

Yes. I have two favourites, am I allowed two? My first pair I bought, those beauties over there, I love the colour. I love the fact that they're the Pascal cut so they don't have the beading at the top. They're just straight. I love the fact that the laces are the same colour as the leather. I honestly love everything about them. They are super comfy. I could walk for miles in them. I just think the colour married with the style is perfect. They were my first pair, I just love them. And my joint favourite pair now are the shoes. The lace up shoes. They're my latest addition, I bought them in October, and I wanted a pair of shoes for absolutely ages. And because I'm doing my MA and I'm broke, I couldn't afford them. And then there was like 20% off or something for students. And I was really fed up at the time and just bought them. I love them, I love how they look, I love the colour. I love the fact that the laces don't match the leather this time! I wanted them because seeing them on other people I liked what they did with them. I like them when they wear them with invisible socks and cropped trousers. I wear them with a skirt and tights and little socks that pick up the colour of the shoe. They're just glorious!

**Georgia**

And they're quite smart as well.

**Claire**

Yeah, that's why I bought them. I wanted them to have the smarter element because the first pair I bought, they did used to look fairly smart, but I've worn them quite a lot.

**Georgia**

Brilliant. How does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel? And do you feel differently in them than you do in other shoes?

**Claire**

Yes, definitely different than in other shoes. I would say I feel the most me in a pair of Doc Martens. People wear a high heel to compliment their outfit as a fashion statement. But I don't like high heels. And I think Doc Martens are as classy and stylish as a good pair of heels. I never considered them a designer brand. I just didn't. But they are, aren't they, really? And I don't do designer anything. I buy all my clothes from charity shops where I can. It's my only label. Massive brand loyalty. I don't even have that with Birkenstock because I'd rather have more Docs sandals than Birkenstock ones. Their tagline is 'Wear them your way' and I think that is the key. They have got a timeless look but you can team them with whatever you like. You can wear them your way. Everybody knows what it is, it's iconic, but everybody does something different with them. And part of the reason I love looking at other people and how they wear them is to see how they rock them. I know it's just a shoe, but to me, I feel the most me when it hits Autumn and I put on that pair of Doc Martens. It's like a welcome home. I just feel confident, and I feel I belong to the cool set. Which is sad, I'm nearly 40!

**Georgia**

Well, I think there is something to be said for a genuine feeling of belonging. That's really important and it's kind of different from that teenage wanting to be cool, isn't it? So you should own your love of these things because they matter.

**Claire**

Yeah, you're totally right. I feel very safe when I'm wearing a pair of Doc Martens. I don't know why. It's the heavy duty nature of them. You're really connected to the ground, aren't you? Which I think is important. I could run away from somebody. I think my partner's association with them is that they were used to kick people's heads in. So whether that historical male association with them is the violence attached to them, I don't know. You know I was talking about age earlier? I went to Nottingham Pride at the weekend and I think in the younger culture, it's the unisex nature of the Doc Marten that is appealing. There were so many Doc Martens there!

**Georgia**

Yeah, they also are a very big part of the gay community, and always have been.

**Claire**

And I love that about them. And they label it on their website, these are unisex shoes. I love that.

**Georgia**

I think you're right. There's a massive difference in age and what people think. As they're becoming more popular again, and more fashionable, it's almost like exposure therapy, isn't it?

**Claire**

I don't know if I've misremembered this or if I've made it up, but I'm sure Pete [Claire's partner] said something to me when I wanted my first pair, like, 'What if you look like a lesbian?' First of all, so what if I look like a lesbian? He's not homophobic, that's made him sound awful, and he's not like that at all. But it was the idea that again, I think people confuse feminism and lesbianism, that all gets confused. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I don't mind being mistaken for a lesbian, that's fine! In fact, I quite like that about it.

**Georgia**

Yeah, that's something that's come out with a few of my other participants actually, people have assumed that they're gay. So your partner isn't alone in that reaction at all. But again, I do think that might be changing, because there's just more and more young people, young women wearing them. Okay, so, have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing Doc Martens?

**Claire**

The little girl, that was really cool. On occasion I've had had kids at school, usually in year 5 and 6, tell me they like my boots. Generally it's only ever been positive. It's tended to start conversations that are Docs related with perfect strangers. Generally from other women, actually, I don't really have that with men.

**Georgia**

Okay, and you kind of already answered this question, but I'm gonna ask you anyway. Do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens And if so, does that have an impact on your opinion of them? Or what you think about that person?

**Claire**

Yes. I always notice. Yes, it does impact on what I think of them! It depends what they're wearing. It depends what they're wearing with them. It depends in what state they are. Because if they are very, very new and they are on a young person I go all warm and fuzzy about it. If they're proper worn and on an older person I have a tendency to warm to that person, I feel I've found a kindred spirit. I think it does foster an approving appreciative glance between women, whereas sometimes women can do the whole 'scanning them up and down' thing. But I think Docs are different. I certainly feel different.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. Cool. And that's kind of it! That's the end of my questions. Have you got anything else you want to tell me, any other things you think are important for me to know about your relationship with Doc Martens?

**Claire**

I don't know really, I think we've covered it all. I do have one thing that is very selfish that I want to share. My black pair and my purple pair. My purple pair are starting to get holes where the stitching is, and my black pair are nearly worn down at the bottom. And I consider that a badge of honour, that I have nearly worn a pair out. I will replace them.

**Georgia**

Are they the first pairs you've worn out? have you ever thrown any away?

**Claire**

No. No.

**Georgia**

And will you throw them away once they're worn out?

**Claire**

Oh, I don't know. It depends. I think once the bottom has gone, if it's really uncomfortable wearing them, I will get rid of them. The purple ones are particularly broken down. I don't know if it's the way they're dyed, I've got no idea, but I love that look about them. I'll wear them until I actually physically can't. But I have already eyed up in the Docs shop what I'm going to replace them with.

**Georgia**

Which ones?

**Claire**

The black ones, the Church ones? It doesn't come quite as high up, there's a lot of yellow stitching on it. I saw someone wear a pair at Belper train station. They don't do the purple ones anymore so I need to get something I love just as much.

**Georgia**

Have you tried Ebay? Have you bought any second hand?

**Claire**

No. It's the only thing I won't buy second hand. I think shoes are really personal and I can't do that. I wouldn't want to give mine away, they've got all my story in them. It's weird, all my clothes are second hand but I just can't do shoes. Another thing you might be interested to know: I went vegan a couple of years ago and diet wise, I've been totally fine, but I just can't give up leather and Doc Martens are one of the reasons. I know they do the vegan ones but it's just not the same. I went on the Docs website and saw they had sustainable factories, and they might have fed me a load of lies, but I trust them. I trust the Doc Martens brand. Completely irrationally!

**Georgia**

Okay, fantastic. Thanks.

## Dee

*Dee is a nursing educator in her late 50s. She is from Yorkshire, England, but has lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for the last 20 years. She got her one and only pair of Doc Martens in 1976 when she turned 16 and continues to wear them to this day. I interviewed Dee in her home in Auckland, in June of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Okay, can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Dee**

I can remember when. I didn't buy them, I asked for them as a gift. It was my 16th... My 16th birthday was coming up. And the one thing my little teenage heart desired was a pair of Docs. 16 was a significant birthday in our family, we were made quite a fuss of, more so than when you hit 13 or anything. So I thought I could probably wing it, that I could get these, even though I knew it was desperately not what particularly my mom would have wanted me to have. But because it was my 16th I wheedled and wheedled. And eventually she caved and said I could have them. So it was 1976 and I was living in Yorkshire at the time. And I think... I've asked mum, and she said she thinks she bought them from a store which we call the army and navy surplus store. And that's where she thinks that came from in Leeds. And she thinks they cost her 18 pounds, but she could be misremembering.

## **Georgia**

That's pretty good.

## **Dee**

Pretty good, because it's 46 years ago... No, 43 I'm making myself older than I am. I'm 59 now and I was 16 when I had them. So it's 43 years.

## **Georgia**

Do you remember what type they were, what they looked like, what colour? [She points at the boots she is wearing] Those ones? Those actual ones?

## **Dee**

These are them! I've had them since I was 16.

**Georgia**

They've worn so well!

**Dee**

They have been polished, they have been loved, oiled, you name it, I do it. That's what they are. And that's the one pair. I've never had another pair. I love them.

**Georgia**

Oh, brilliant.

**Dee**

Navy blue, 8 holes up each side.

**Georgia**

Amazing. And so you said your mum wouldn't have been keen on you having them. Why was that?

**Dee**

Well, if you can imagine because you're way too young, wind back in time, in the mid 70s punk music was the absolute moment. And I adored the Sex Pistols and the Clash. And it was not anything my mum could wrap her head around. Neither could my dad, not the music. And not that culture of youth rebellion. I mean, they kind of got the idea that young people and teenagers are traditionally rebellious. But you know, my mum's idea of rebellious was when I got my ears pierced at 14. And that was a real 'Ooh you are a shocker!' Whereas I wanted to go to, and did go to, concerts, which were punk music. Hard to believe when you look at me now. I was there in my tartan miniskirt and my ripped jumper and she just didn't get it. And I think I'm not doing her a disservice in saying that boots like this were an embodiment of everything that that subculture represented, and very much not what she wanted her daughter to be part of. She wanted me to be pretty and sweet. And you know, have a nice dress on. Yeah. And I wanted ripped jeans and safety pins holding my t-shirt together, you know. And there weren't as many outward signs... Your hair was your uniform. Now, I never had spiky hair because she would have lost... Well, they both would. They would have lost it. I had long hair and so I used to wear a really high ponytail and that was the un-classiest I was allowed to get with my hair. But yeah, they [Doc Martens] were very much part of that culture of youth and rebellion and kind of anarchic behaviour that they didn't want me to know.

**Georgia**

So you think your mum just didn't get it?

**Dee**

Totally didn't get it. I probably wouldn't have got it in her shoes at that time. But it was everything that I thought was exciting and new and vibrant and I wanted very much to be part of it.

**Georgia**

So she caved eventually and got you your shoes.

**Dee**

She caved, but it was because like, 'I'm only 16 once mum, you said I could have anything I wanted.' You know, really piled it on, I was one of those 'put the knife in and twist it' kids! I wouldn't have held back, I would have given it all. When I spoke to her the other week on the telephone I asked her, you know, can you remember me having to nag you? and she said 'Oh no! We said you can have what you want, so you had what you wanted.' Now, you talk to other people in the family, siblings or whatever, and they said 'Oh my god you were on a campaign! You were desperate!' And I was desperate.

**Georgia**

So did any of your siblings have them? Did they follow that kind of scene?

**Dee**

My brother was a semi professional musician. He was older. And yeah, very much into whatever the current music scene was. And I suspect that's why I probably knew quite as much about bands as I did. Because if you've got a big brother who's in a band, yeah. And you hang out with his musical friends, then you hear the music, and it is very much part of your teenage years. Yeah, yeah. So we were all into that.

**Georgia**

How did your parents feel about him being into that scene? Do you think there was a difference?

**Dee**

Yeah, I do. I mean, I think that not surprisingly, they were a product of the 50s themselves. And so they both thought that it was more appropriate for him to be going out to see bands than me. On the other hand, particularly my dad was probably ahead of his time, a bit more of a feminist than mum was actually. Parity of education was very important to them, parity in terms of what we were given financially, what money we had to spend. Things like learning to drive, they were just as keen for me to have those kind of independent elements to my life. I think less so in the lifestyle choices in terms of the music and the friends I hung out, just because they didn't get it. And they thought

that I wasn't safe, I think. I think that's what it came down to. If I was going somewhere and my big brother was going too, that was okay. He was always charged with 'You mind your sister and take care of your sister and you make sure she's never without you. Don't leave her ever.' Their responsibility of care was just kind of handed to him. Whether he liked it or not. And he was very tolerant and would say 'Yeah yeah yeah.' And then would say to me 'It's alright sis, I know you want to go and talk to your friends, it's grand.' He was older than me. Only a year. But it was enough. He was a male. And they were both very much less protective of him. Yeah.

### **Georgia**

Okay, next question is why did you choose them over other brands?

### **Dee**

I think it was a fashion thing, in my head. It sounds quite shallow. But it's true. I think I wanted Doc Martens... There were other boots that people wore. And we always called them combat boots. And they were Navy or Army surplus boots. And I can remember thinking that if I couldn't have these for my 16th, I would save up my spending money, my babysitting money, and I would probably be able to afford at least some combat boots. But they were kind of second rank to me. These were the things that I wanted. Because they were the things that other people I liked the look of wore. So yeah, there was a definite brand awareness. I don't think I really appreciated the quality of the footwear at the time. Because I mean, as you can see, they have lived through a lot of winters. I don't wear them in the summer in New Zealand. But um, they have walked miles. They're not like new, but they're still in good condition.

### **Georgia**

And do you think maybe that is another reason why your parents were slightly more okay with you having them? Because they're what my dad used to call 'a quality shoe'?

### **Dee**

I can remember appealing to my dad actually. I said, 'Dad, even the police wear them! They're given them for their uniform! How lucky is that?' I had no idea... I didn't care about the job those poor sods had to do, I'm just thinking 'They get them for free!' Mum said 'They're not respectable', that's what she said. Clothes like that. Boots like that. Not respectable for a young woman to wear. 'But mummy, mummy, even the police ladies wear them, how much more respectable can you be!' So I did try that. But I don't know about the quality of them. I don't think they saw that. I think they just saw the emblem of disaffected youth. And they thought 'We don't want her to be like that'. But all credit to them, you know, they did still stand by their principles of well, we gave her a choice. And I said she could have what she wanted. If I had wanted, you know, pearl earrings, they would have been a lot happier.

**Georgia**

But to be fair you've been kind of vindicated, they have lasted a long time! Do you have any associations with Doc Martens as a brand? So when you were younger what were your kind of thoughts on them as a brand? And has that changed as you've gotten older?

**Dee**

I think my perception was that they were only for the young. Or they were certainly an emblem of that young and that punk culture. They were part of the scene and wrapped up in that. I think since I have got older, much older, I've recognized that, actually, because they are so comfortable and they have such longevity that lots of people have worn them for reasons of pure practicality and not because they wanted to be part of the bouncing punk generation. And so you know, I do have a couple of friends who wear nothing but them, both blokes, actually, but wear nothing but Doc Martens. I don't think I've ever seen Tim with anything else on his feet all the years I've known him, which is about 15. So I am aware that people choose them for very different reasons now. So I don't think that as a teenager, I was aware of anything other than that they were seen as cool. Yeah. A bit like, you know how Ray Bans was seen as very cool? Like that. I didn't think 'Oh but they're quality lenses', I didn't think that at all. I was also desperate for a pair of Ray Bans which I eventually got when I was 21. I wasn't analytical about it at all and I think I've become aware that people wear them for different reasons. I also think that when I see other women wearing them, sometimes I feel a kind of connection. Particularly when I see women wearing dresses, what I call a frock, a frock and their boots, I think 'Go girl!', because it's an expression of feminism. I think that's why I think I'm still fond of mine. I still insist that I have every right to wear them because they are not something that, if you fit into the mold of sweet little housewife, happy wife, kind of mold, you're not expected to stomp around your Docs. So I think I do see them as examples of what I interpret as an expression of female emancipation from that role, where we don't all wear pointy toed stiletto heels shoes. Yeah, sometimes we choose to not. I also wear Converse shoes, particularly in the summer because they're lighter. And my daughter wears an awful lot of sneakers. And I think that's the same issue: that we will choose comfort.

**Georgia**

And so you identify as feminist?

**Dee**

Absolutely.

**Georgia**

And when did that start do you think?

**Dee**

Consciously?

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**Dee**

In my late teens I think. I have a very precious... Oh, gosh, I've got quite emotional thinking about it. I have a very precious great aunt who was totally dyed-in-the-wool West Yorkshire. Very interesting life story. But her message to me as I got older was always: have your own money. Always have your own bank account. No matter what. For money, my dear, is power. Never relinquish it. And I can remember when I got married she prodded me in the middle of my chest and said 'Don't give him your money.' Her life had been quite hard. She was, imagine this, a single parent in the late 1930s. And she kept her child. And she kept her child because she earned huge money. She was a weaver and she was especially good at the job. She could weave four looms, which won't mean a thing to you, but what it means is she earned four times what a full time worker could. So she earned huge money and her family weren't wealthy. She lived in the family home, and her parents needed her income to survive and to raise the younger ones. So she had economic power. And therefore she had that choice of keeping her daughter and her daughter being well treated. Because if she chose to lift that child and to go, they would have been in poverty. And she knew that and they knew that. So this earning ability had allowed her to keep her child, had allowed her to live her best life. She was independent financially. And that's what she wanted for me. She wanted me to never relinquish that financial independence because for her, it had been her only way to control what happened to her. Because many women in her circumstances would have had that child taken away, they'd have never seen it again. She only had the power to make those decisions herself because of her earning capacity. And she was very, very keen to see all the girls in the family succeed educationally and succeed in the workplace, because she saw it as the route to keeping your options open. Having a voice I think. So I think she was probably the beginning of my awareness that I shouldn't be subsumed by a relationship or be at somebody else's... Not control, but rather, that I should strive for my own independence. And independence was something that I was criticized for. 'You're so independent', you know? I think I frustrated my immediate family greatly by some of the things that I did and tried to do. Going out and having my own place when I was just 18 and trying to do ridiculous things like replace wiring. But I can remember being... I think my parents, particularly mum, but both to some extent, were a bit bemused by this nutcase daughter. This child who just insisted on going out and doing it on her own. So that was the start of my feminist attitude I suppose.

**Georgia**

So your aunt was kind of always there as a presence, I suppose. Like, you know, an example?

**Dee**

Yes. Throughout my upbringing. She was my daddy's aunt and he made all of us aware of her story because he was inordinately proud of how she had stood up to the pressures of her immediate family, to the pressures of her immediate community, and how she had shown them all. So he was very proud of her and I think that's why I say my dad was more of a feminist than my mum. He admired that aspect of her character. And one set of my grandparents actually used to say to me, 'You're Harriet Parker, you're just like her.' And I would say 'Good!' Because I was a bit bolshy, and fiery tempered, and wouldn't be told no because I was a girl. So yes, she was very much a model of right thinking womanhood.

**Georgia**

So you come from an Irish Catholic family or...?

**Dee**

Yeah, dad's. His tree. And so hers.

**Georgia**

Because to be a single mother, even if you're not a practicing Catholic anymore, that social pressure...

**Dee**

It was massive, **Georgia**. I mean, the labels she was given, and Sheila, her daughter, they were called terrible things.

**Georgia**

And it's only recently we started hearing about the full extent of the Magdalene schools, and how easy it would have been for her to get taken into those houses.

**Dee**

She would have been shifted into a house and that would have been it. Baby would have gone one way, she would have gone the other. And it's frightening to think how close... And I think she knew how close that pathway was. And her only way of avoiding it was this power to earn. And she earned a lot of money. They would say in the family: 'Oh she earned more than a man.' But she probably worked harder than a man as well! She had the power to make those demands of her own parental role. That I'm having this baby, she will be brought up here and you will be kind to her. Or I will take her and we will go and my money will go with me. And so they couldn't afford to lose her because she paid everything. You know, she paid for the food, she paid for the rent, she paid for the fuel for

the fire. And her story was told to me many times by my dad because he was so respectful of what she had achieved.

**Georgia**

So were your Doc Martens a part of your feminism do you think A connection to that auntie?

**Dee**

I like to think so. I think it's why I still have them rather than why I originally got them. So if I'm absolutely honest, I think the original desire for them was all wrapped up in the music and the clubs, although I didn't go to clubs. I wish! But the kind of band scene, that social scene. They were all wrapped up in that image, the desire for them. Then recognizing that even being into punk music at all was quite a feminist action. And recognizing that, and liking that within myself, and aligning that to some of the behaviors that I had been brought up to respect by my great auntie. That's why I'm fond of them now, because they are part of that feminism. The ability to be who you want to be.

**Georgia**

Okay. And so, you said that you went to punk gigs. Did you identify as being a punk when you were a teenager? Would you consider yourself a part of that subculture?

**Dee**

Only mildly. I wanted to be very much. But because I wasn't allowed to do the punky hair thing. And I wasn't allowed to have anything pierced other than my ears. In fact, that had been disapproved of. I was in such trouble for such long time about that. So there was all this.. Part-time. So I would dress up on a Friday night and go out to the Polytechnic, to Leeds Polytechnic, which is where I saw so many bands. And pretend to be 18 so I could get in. And just love being part of it. But I I wouldn't say now 'I was a punk'. I would say now 'I went to punk concerts, I followed punk bands, I loved the music and the excitement of it all.' But then I had to put my school uniform and go down to the local grammar school.

**Georgia**

A part-time punk. Did you stick with that as you got older, like into your 20s?

**Dee**

No, I think I probably waned away from the live music scene. Like I suppose heaps of people do, I didn't have as much time when I started working. I went into the hospital and trained as a nurse. I was working all kinds of hours, horrible shifts, and whatever. I very rarely had the free time to follow... I've always enjoyed music, but I'm probably less current with music the older I get. I think what I discovered in my 20s was travel, international travel. And that's where I put my energy and

my spare time and my spare money. I wanted to see the world. I think particularly once I got beyond the student years, it wasn't as big a part of my life.

**Georgia**

Did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens association with subcultures as a brand when you were younger?

**Dee**

Not when I was younger. Well, only the association with the music scene and the fashion that I saw around that. I still don't. I still don't know if there's any other association... Oh, that's not true! That is not true. Because the gay scene. I'm aware that there are many fans of Doc Martens in the gay scene. And I think that was just a gradual awareness rather than something that media... I don't think subcultures were featured in mass media, because when I was a teenager, we were still in the late 70s. I was 20 in 1980. You know, there was no... Well, there were some music shows on TV but really quite meek and mild. New Musical Express was the only music paper you know, there wasn't anything particularly educating, shall we say. You were either into a scene or you were not. And I so I am aware that yep, gay scene, I would say there's a link. Maybe it's just that they're really comfortable boots and plenty of people like them! But I still don't feel knowledgeable about Doc Martens and any particular subcultures.

**Georgia**

Okay, but you are aware that they have a general association with subculture, maybe not even specific ones.

**Dee**

Yeah, the general subversiveness. They're not mainstream. It's not mainstream wear, and that's an attraction even now.

**Georgia**

Okay, this is quite a big question. So what impact has owning and wearing Doc Martens had on your identity? Or do you think it's maybe the other way around, that your identity impacted on your choice to wear them?

**Dee**

Oh that is an interesting question. I think I see Doc Martens generally with an affection because I see them as reflecting part of my teenage self. Which I still feel connected to. There was that kid who wanted to be part of a lively interesting music scene and not Little Miss Goody Two Shoes, and I really rather like that about myself. So I think there's that fondness there because they reflect

something that I see as positive. But I do think possibly my identity, or my desire to be cool and part of the music scene, was why I wanted them in the first place. So yes, that part of my personality that was striving to be part of that subcultural music, cool punk kids scene. The fact that I wanted to be that, that's what drove me towards wanting the boots anyway. Maybe they've been a way to express individuality ever since. We have a daughter who's lovely, gorgeous, 23, perfectly happy for her mum to be clomping around in Doc Martens nowadays. Wasn't always quite so keen on it! Got told I shouldn't be wearing Levis and Doc Martens when she was about 13 or 14. It was a bit 'not what the mums at the school gate' wear. So we had to have that convo saying, you know, 'Listen, in our family we don't come forward and tell me what they should and shouldn't do, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with it.' And she'd say 'But you know, people think you're a bit strange mum.' Yeah, well, they probably will, but that's okay. Now she's quite proud of the fact that I'm a bit nonconformist. She was very keen to borrow them and wear them herself. In fact I had to kind of prise them back off her a few times. Luckily now she's just a couple of sizes bigger than me in her shoes so she has her own. I happily bought some for her. She's bought a couple of pairs since, I think she has two or three pairs. So she's grown up with them as being something that mum wore, and then she wasn't sure that that was a good idea. But it was a great vehicle to use to explain aspects of feminism and independent thought and the rights of women to be who they are. And to be comfortable with who they are. It was a good vehicle to model that through her teenage years.

### **Georgia**

So that has actually been quite important in your relationship forming with your daughter in terms of ideals?

### **Dee**

Absolutely. In terms of sharing with her my ideals for feminism, for a woman's lifestyle and her choices. I'm actually far more left leaning than my daughter, I would be on every pro choice march, I'm a left voter. I'm that kind of person. So it has allowed me to model some of the thinking throughout my life and to let her see that I'm as good as my word. I think women should be able to stamp around in boots. I mean, if you asked her she'd also say that women should be allowed to wear absolutely whatever they like without risk of censure or danger. We shouldn't be assaulted because we chose to wear a low neck top, she wouldn't buy into that. But she's a lot more traditional in her thinking than me in terms of her politics for example.

### **Georgia**

That's really interesting.

### **Dee**

Yes! Because you always think, I always think the young should be more liberal minded. And she's got every right to her own opinion and I've had to learn that.

**Georgia**

I wonder if maybe... Did do you say you grew up in Leeds? That's a real heartland of Labour and the Left, isn't it? So I'm sure that had a big impact. And when you were there, you know, you're in the Thatcher era. So if there was anything that's going to push you towards the Left then it's seeing Thatcherism at work.

**Dee**

Absolutely. The horrors that you witnessed. People getting their houses repossessed, desperate unemployment, desperate, desperate closure of industry. All the things that Maggie Thatcher did to damage that economy, I witnessed. Because I was between the ages of sort of 17 and 27. And wow, yeah, if you live through that then you never forget.

**Georgia**

And I guess if she's not grown up with that. Luckily, you know, because you've just created a life where she doesn't have to live through that.

**Dee**

Yeah, she's never experienced anything like that.

**Georgia**

No. So you've kind of touched on this already, but what are your thoughts on Doc Martens and gender, and being a woman who wears Doc Martens? What's your experience been of that?

**Dee**

I do see them as a little bit of a badge of emancipation, I think, as a woman wearing them, because I got this whole message when I was a teenager from the family. And to some extent I've had it since that these are not appropriate shoes for a girl to wear.

**Georgia**

And that was the appeal?

**Dee**

And that was exactly why I wanted them and that is exactly why I still wear them. And, you know, I was the kid who played football not hockey, because hockey is for girls.

**Georgia**

Despite the fact that I would argue that hockey is a lot rougher than football!

**Dee**

But it was a girl's sport. And so I wanted the boy's thing. Because of the right to do what I wanted to do. Similarly with, you know, I wanted a bike... I never got a motorbike! Do I wish I had... Well, it was too cold. I'm too soft. But I had the biker jacket. Black miniskirt, fishnet tights. But it was that emancipation and that's what the Docs have been part of, breaking away from the mold. And I think... I mean, I work in education nowadays. And I have done ever since I hit New Zealand 20 years ago. And I think there are more liberal attitudes to gender and dressing. In fact, ever since I've worked in New Zealand, in education, I have worked with colleagues who have been out, colleagues who have been relaxed about gender difference. And that has been something that I didn't experience in the UK workforce.

**Georgia**

Okay. One of my questions is 'Tell me about your favorite pair' but you've only got one!

**Dee**

I've always wanted black patent leather ones and my daughter has a pair, but they're too big for me.

**Georgia**

So you've never thought to buy another pair?

**Dee**

I have thought. And in fact we went to the Doc Martens shop in London when Zoe and I were over there. I bought some for her instead. And I just couldn't afford, I just couldn't justify...

**Georgia**

Aw that's such a mum thing!

**Dee**

I have a friend and she's got a pair of silver sparkle ones. They are awesome. I've got lots of friends who wear Docs, I've got a friend who wears almost nothing else. And she has got a huge range of pairs. She's got tartan ones, bright green ones, neon green. And she'll buy a frock to match the boots. I think my problem is with acquisition, I probably wouldn't know where to stop. These are good. And I love them. And I have thought about buying them in the past. But I've never justified the

expense. The best chance I had was probably in the DMs shop. And I just bought some for Zoe instead.

**Georgia**

I think it's quite cool, though, that you've just had the one pair this whole time.

**Dee**

And you can't say that they're even worn looking

**Georgia**

No, you've obviously taken really good care of them.

**Dee**

Yeah I do take care of them, I do polish them and I put boot oil on them and all sorts of things.

**Georgia**

Okay, so they're obviously your only and thus favorite pair. And why are they special to you?

**Dee**

I think it's a combination of they... embody part of my youth, my history and my rebellious teenage years, which I love. And they do represent some of the feminist principles that I've tried to... Or that I do live by, I think. They've been to some great places with me. Really good travel buddies.

**Georgia**

Did you take them when you went travelling in your 20s?

**Dee**

Yeah. They were very much with me always. Oh no, I lived in Greece for a couple of years and I didn't take them there. But they were very firmly in the tea chest at home. I left a single tea chest and said 'That is my stuff, do not get rid of it, ever!' So they were absolutely in there as one of my treasures. I'm kind of not sorry I didn't take them to Greece because it was just too hot. They've been to some cool places and some great concerts. There's that whole memory wound up in them, a bit like your favourite jeans. They're very comfortable, they're very practical. And I do still like being a bit... Not mainstream. Because, y'knowm I'm not an unusual 59 year old, I go to book club. I do knitting. I bet

nobody else in my bookclub has got a pair of Docs. There may be people who say 'Oh I had some of those when I was young'. Maybe that's a sad thing about me, I'm clinging to my youth! But I like them for all those reasons.

**Georgia**

Okay, great. How does wearing the make you feel? And do you feel differently in them than you do when you wear other shoes?

**Dee**

Yes. Is the answer the second question. How do they make me feel... Comfortable. A little bit more of a risk taker? I think. I like the fact that they have this subversive reputation, and feel a bit more inclined to do what I want rather than what I've should. So behaviorwise, but maybe do speak to the rebel in me and encourage that side to come out and play. I always feel comfortable rather than smart when I wear them. And that's okay. I do have times in my life when and I want to feel smart. And I do have dressy boots when I'm doing that. But overall, they made me feel quite comfortable with myself because I like those bits of me that are not too mumsy.

**Georgia**

So you feel different in them than you do in other types of shoes? Do you wear other types of shoes?

**Dee**

I definitely feel different in them, yes. But yeah, I have kind of heeled boots. I have lots of shoes actually, lots and lots. In fact, my family would roar with laughter if they heard me say this: I couldn't count how many. I'd guesstimate about 50 pairs of footwear. I once tried to count up my boots and I stopped when I got to 18. So I like boots. I like boots and handbags. But I feel I can cope with life if I've got the right footwear on. Which is an interesting and stupid thing to say isn't it?

**Georgia**

No it's not stupid at all!

**Dee**

But if I'm going for an interview I would have my interview shoes on. And if I'm going to see a band, I'd have these on. So I do have shoes that reflect my task, or the image I want to project. And these are sometimes how I feel about the world. Sod you, I don't take any prisoners, I'm rolling my sleeves up and getting on with it. Like it? Great. Don't like it? Don't care. And that's my Doc Martens attitude. The other thing I do... We went to a pub quiz a few weeks ago and as soon as we walked in I said 'Pint of Guinness please.' And that is something I do when I'm wearing my Docs. If I was wearing girly shoes I might have asked for a white wine, but I always drink a pint of Guinness when

I'm in my Docs. In a pint glass - I don't want two halves, don't give me any of that, don't mess with me. So that kind of behaviour rolls out of me when I'm wearing them. And maybe I wear them because I'm in that mood, or maybe that mood comes from me wearing them, I dunno.

**Georgia**

Okay, great. So you said there are some situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Dee**

Yeah, there are. And I suppose that's me learning to play the game of societal expectations. So if my daughter was getting married, I wouldn't go in my Docs. I would want to look the part of a smartly dressed middle aged woman. And like I said before, I don't feel smartly dressed when I'm wearing my Docs. If I was going to watch the All Blacks play, I would wear them because I like to be comfortable. I know that if somebody stands on my feet, it's not going to hurt me because they're strong. If I was going to a midwinter Christmas party at my best friend's house, Anna would kind of look at me a bit sideways I think for wearing my Docs... Actually she might not because she's very tolerant, she knows what I'm like. I certainly go to work in them.

**Georgia**

I was going to ask you if you wear them to work. Do you still teach?

**Dee**

Absolutely. And I would be surprised if anybody even noticed what I wore on my feet to be honest with you.

**Georgia**

Have you experienced any notable reactions from people to you wearing your Doc Martens?

**Dee**

My daughter! But then it was like she suddenly realized: 'Oh, they're Doc Martens!' But I remember her saying to me 'It's bad enough that you wear Levis, never mind those big boots.' And that's when we had to have that conversation.

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**Dee**

So apart from my parents and my daughter I don't think I have. I've had people say 'Oh, nice Docs!' But they tend to be Doc Martens wearers now I come to think about it. This girl I used to work alongside in the nursing department at MIT. She's the one with lots of different pairs, she has said, 'Oh, nice boots.' And I've got this little tag thing on them, sort of metal label. And it came with them and quite a few people have asked me about that. It was on them when I got them.

**Georgia**

It must be pretty unusual to still have it. I reckon people probably just took it off.

**Dee**

I think they probably did. It's almost like you'd expect it to be cardboard but it's not, it's metal.

**Georgia**

it looks like a little charm doesn't it?

**Dee**

Yeah, Pandora for your laces!

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, um, so you've never had any, necessarily, apart from the ones you've talked about any, like negative comments from you wearing Doc Martens?

**Dee**

I have had raised eyebrows generally, about various things that I wear. I don't think that especially my boots, although maybe it's just part of that overall look. I went to a knit and natter group and I thought it was going to be all these cool and funky yarn people. And it really did turn out to be a bunch of nannas knitting booties. At the time I'd got really short hair, so I'd got quite spiky hair. And I rocked up in... Not in a leather jacket, but in a denim jacket, and some quite tight white jeans and my boots. And I think I was a bit more than they ready for. And they were a bit shocked by me I think. We met in a very nice cafe and we all had cups of tea and coffee and I kind of realised I was in the wrong place. They were alright, just a bit shocked. But no, nobody's ever said anything offensive.

**Georgia**

Okay, and I think you actually mentioned this earlier. Do you notice when other people wear Doc Martens?

**Dee**

Yes I do, I do.

**Georgia**

And you had said you notice particularly when women wear Doc Martens?

**Dee**

The first thing I looked at when I opened the door was to check what you had on your feet, is she as good as her word!

**Georgia**

I'm a bit like you though, I'm a bit soft, I've got these suede ones. The idea of breaking in a new pair, I just can't... It's hellish. I actually just bought some metallic purple ones off Trade Me. I'm kind of mentally preparing myself for having to wear them in.

**Dee**

I've never worn mine laced right up. Because I always need a bit more wiggle room so I've always left the top two. But yeah, I do notice women. And I tend to think: 'I like you.' Even if I've not a word said, she's standing in a bus queue, and I'm just walking past. I think 'Good girl, hurray, wear what you like.' I just give them a little mental tick.

**Georgia**

So you've never had any ones except those ones?

**Dee**

I've worn other peoples but I've never owned any others. So my sister in law has a pair of oxblood red ones. She's got tiny feet. Actually, my feet are not very big but hers are a size smaller. And she said that they were too small for her. And I said, oh give them here I'll wear them and stretch them! They were a bit tight, yeah. But they were what I think of as the original colour, that dark red. And then my daughter has those black patent ones and I have stuffed three pairs of socks on my feet and tried it. But they look a bit wrong, because they are the wrong size. I think the answer to that question is no, I'd like some more.

**Georgia**

Great. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your Doc Martens? Any other things you think I should know? You said you've been see the Sex Pistols in them. Very cool.

**Dee**

Yup, December the 6th, 1976. I was 16 and I'd had these boots since my birthday in March. And they went with me to that concert and it was absolutely mind blowing,

**Georgia**

I bet you really felt the part.

**Dee**

Oh yeah, I did. I had some absolutely skin tight drainpipe jeans, they were almost sprayed on. And a tartan kilt. And a black very ripped t shirt. I had done my best with my hair, it was wrapped in a big pony tail on the top of my head like a soda can. And I had borrowed a black leather jacket with chains on it which a friend had loaned me. She wasn't allowed to go to the concert. She said 'Take my jacket, my jacket will have seen them!' They've been to Nepal, they've been to India. I have worn them with a sari. That's probably the most dischordant outfit I've ever combined them with.

**Georgia**

Do you have any pictures of you in your punk era?

**Dee**

I honestly don't know if I had many taken. I haven't got very many photographs of me in my growing up years at all. Photographs were something that you kind of had to pose for and my parents would have made me wear a dress and sandals for something. So there's barely any.

**Georgia**

That's a shame, never mind. Alright, I'm going to stop the recording there.

## Destiny

*Destiny is an early childhood teacher in her mid-20s who lives in the Waikato. She has one pair of Doc Martens that she bought in March of 2019. I interviewed Destiny at a café on the outskirts of Cambridge, in June of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Destiny**

Yeah, I only got my first pair this year in March when we were in Wellington. And I've been thinking about them for long time, trying to decide which pair I wanted to get because they're quite expensive in New Zealand and I want to make sure it was the right kind. But then we walked past some shops and I looked at them, and I tried on a few pairs and got them. So yeah, that was down in Wellington.

## **Georgia**

So pretty recent. And how old are you?

## **Destiny**

I'm 24.

## **Georgia**

Right. Okay.

## **Destiny**

This is my first pair.

## **Georgia**

And you said you've been thinking about getting them for quite a long time. So why hadn't you bought any before then?

## **Destiny**

I think the price.

**Georgia**

So did you save up yourself?

**Destiny**

I just decided. I wouldn't say I saved up I just made the decision and bought them since I had the money anyway.

**Georgia**

So you had to think about it?

**Destiny**

Yeah, but I thought it was worth it.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. Why did you choose Doc Martens over other types of shoes?

**Destiny**

Just because of the length of time you get out of them. I mean, I've heard that you get lots of use out of them. My partner's dad actually has a few pairs as well and he wears them all the time and loves them them. My dad really likes them. So yeah, I think that influenced me to get them over other brands. I did look into boots from other brands but I was sold on Docs because of the following they have, and they seem to go with everything.

**Georgia**

You said your partner's dad and your dad as well wore Doc Martens, so there were people around you who wore them?

**Destiny**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Georgia**

What are your thoughts on Doc Martens as a brand? Do you have any ideas of maybe what they stand for or what they're associated with or anything like that?

**Destiny**

I don't have any strong attachment to the brand. I don't know them that well, only from hearing that they're really popular and last a long time. I watched a few YouTube videos when I was still thinking about getting them, looking at reviews and stuff.

**Georgia**

So you actually sought out reviews?

**Destiny**

Yeah I went and did research before getting them.

**Georgia**

Good!

**Destiny**

So I suppose I saw that over in England they have a subculture of wearing them and things like that.

**Georgia**

Do you think that was part of your decision making process? Like, do you think that influenced you?

**Destiny**

Yeah I think it did. I think it made it look cooler, for me. They seemed like a cool thing to have.

**Georgia**

Was that to do with their Britishness or the subculture or both?

**Destiny**

Maybe a bit of both.

**Georgia**

Okay. Interesting. So do you identify as being part of a subculture of any type?

No, I wouldn't say so. I'm into lots of different things and don't really have a particular style.

Okay, right. And you said that you did have some knowledge of the Doc Martens association with subculture in Britain. And that might have impacted on your choice to buy them. Do you know any specifics about Doc Martens and subculture at all?

**Destiny**

Not really. Just punk-ish, I suppose.

**Georgia**

How do you think you know that information?

**Destiny**

I think through the YouTube videos that I've watched. And my partner's dad is into Docs and he's been wearing them a bit. He'd sometimes say that punk people are into them. And he's into rock music and that kind of stuff.

**Georgia**

So there was someone in your life who is kind of associated with that?

**Destiny**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Were you aware of any of your friends or your peers owning and wearing Doc Martens?

**Destiny**

I don't think any of my friends have them, no. My brother's girlfriend likes them but she doesn't have a pair. So yeah, there's no one else.

**Georgia**

Okay. Interesting. So, obviously, they're quite new to you know, so this will probably be quite a different answer for you than other people. But do you think owning and wearing Doc Martens has had or will have an impact on your identity?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I think they have. I suppose I have an association of looking more tough because of the style of the boot. I think maybe that might come across when I'm wearing them. Because I'm not super girly in how I dress.

**Georgia**

So that was a positive thing for you?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I like that idea. The idea of being tougher.

**Georgia**

Also another way of looking at question is, could it be the other way around, that your identity had an impact on why you chose Doc Martens in the first place? Do you think it like suited you already?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I think it suited my personality because like I said, I don't have a particular style, I'm into lots of different things. Because they are versatile I feel like I could wear them with different things to show different sides of my personality. The other thing that I like about them is that people said that they lasted so long, I was into that, because other shoes I wear don't last me as long. So yeah, that was the other thing I like.

**Georgia**

So they're practical?

**Destiny**

Yeah, more practical. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. And I guess because they are expensive you want to invest in something that'd gonna last for a long time. Okay. Do you have any thoughts on gender and identity and Doc Martens? On being a woman who wears Doc Martens?

**Destiny**

I think to other people it maybe could say something about that. Other people might say that they might be only shoes for men or something like that. I don't see it that way. I think anyone can wear them. It's not a big thing for me to wear them

**Georgia**

So you think other people might have...

**Destiny**

Yeah, I think other people might have those kind of feelings about it. But I don't, I think anyone can wear them. To me they're universal.

**Georgia**

And you just have one pair?

**Destiny**

Yeah. Only one pair, so far. Black 8-ups. Pretty basic!

**Georgia**

And seeing as you've only got one pair I'm assuming they're your favourite?

**Destiny**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

So you said you tried on a few in the shop? What other ones did you try?

**Destiny**

Um, I don't know them by name, I know they do have a name. But the ones with the no laces, the slip on ones. Yeah, I was going between those and these boots with the laces. I didn't want a coloured pair to start off, because I wanted them to be versatile and black is just an easier colour for me. So yeah, I went between trying on those two, and also the guy was showing me the ones with the newer, softer leather because they aren't so hard to break in. And they felt nice but I didn't like the look of them, so I ended up going with these and then I'll probably get the other pair later on!

**Georgia**

So you think you're gonna buy some more? It's started now!

**Destiny**

Yeah, yeah, I definitely will be getting more in the future.

**Georgia**

Why did you choose those ones over the slip on?

**Destiny**

Mainly because I knew I'd get those other ones anyway! Also, at the time, what I was wearing went with the lace up ones.

**Georgia**

Right. And they're the kind of classic ones.

**Destiny**

Yeah, so I thought I'd start off with them.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So, why do you like them so much? Do you wear them a lot?

**Destiny**

I wear them when I can. I'm an early childhood teacher so I can't wear them to work because of babies fingers and stuff. But I do wear them when I can.

**Georgia**

And why do you like them so much?

**Destiny**

I love them because I feel like they're pretty comfortable to me now.

**Georgia**

Mmhmm. Did you have to break them in?

**Destiny**

Yeah, but not by doing anything too specific. You know those pads you get in soft bras? I just put those pads in the heels. I think I saw that on a YouTube clip! And my dad actually, when I showed them to him, he was like, 'Oh they're so cool, I want a pair!' And then he started grabbing my shoes trying to soften the leather! But yeah, I like the look of them and how they go with whatever I'm wearing. And now that it's winter I'll probably wear them a lot more.

**Georgia**

Do you feel like they have any meaning to beyond just being a practical shoe?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I suppose. I do like that tough aspect to them, I like how that makes me look.

**Georgia**

Okay, and how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel? And do you feel different in them than you do wearing other shoes?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I'd say I feel different wearing them. I do feel a little bit more confident wearing them. And then going back to the practical thing, I don't have to worry about puddles or anything like that. I like them being sturdy. I kind of have this thing with shoes... It sounds so weird, but I always like to wear shoes where if I have to run in them, then I can.

**Georgia**

No, you're not the first one to say that to me at all. Do you think that would be a concern for men wearing shoes as much?

**Destiny**

Probably not, I don't think. I don't want to say that I know what they think. But I feel like maybe they don't have to think about things like that quite as much.

**Georgia**

Okay, so you already mentioned you're an early childhood teacher, so you don't wear your shoes to work. Is that just for safety reasons?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I work in the baby area so there's little ones crawling around and stuff. And I just remembered another person, one of the preschool teachers has a few pairs of Docs and she wears them to work. She's into rock music and I think she'd be in that kind of subculture of Docs. You know that kind of look?

**Georgia**

Yeah, I know. So are there some situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens other than that and why?

**Destiny**

Well I've worn them to the beach before! Apart from that I think I'd wear them anywhere else.

**Georgia**

And have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing Doc Martens?

**Destiny**

I've only heard good stuff from my friends and family and stuff, they like them too.

**Georgia**

But people do notice?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I've had people notice.

**Georgia**

Okay, and do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Destiny**

Yeah, I feel like I notice because I've wanted them for a long time.

**Georgia**

Do you think it has an impact on your thoughts on that person or your opinion on who they are?

**Destiny**

Maybe a little. Probably just real surface level, nothing too deep. Just the same thoughts of how cool they look.

**Georgia**

All right, is there anything else that you want to tell me about them?

**Destiny**

I think those pads from the soft bra really helped for me! I only had one blister and that was only because I wasn't using them one the very first time I wore my Docs.

**Georgia**

There's so many different techniques for wearing them in! Okay, that's pretty much everything, that's all my questions.

## Fenella

*Fenella is a university lecturer and researcher in her early 30s. She is from Northampton but she lives in London and has done for the last 9 years. She wore Doc Martens as a child and first bought her own pair in her teens, but she stopped wearing them for much of her 20s. She has recently returned to Doc Martens and currently owns one pair. I interviewed Fenella in a bar near her house in East London. Fenella and I had a small amount of previous acquaintance, having met at some conferences over the last few years.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Fenella**

The first pair that I'd have had, I'd have been in primary school. I was trying to work this out when we were emailing before. I had always wanted my school shoes to be black patent, kind of smart but also fancy. But obviously, growing up in Northampton, we had the outlet nearby. So my mum took me there, and my mum sort of made that decision that I might quite like them. So yeah, I'd have been in primary school when I had them, I think the first pair that I had were silver and they were allowed to be my school shoes. And then the first pair that I'd have bought for myself, I would have been in my teens. That was very much more focused on an interest in a particular time in music. And what's interesting about that is that when I was a small child in the 90s, I was dressing very much without realising it like a Manic's fan basically. I had this leopard print coat and these Docs boots. I wasn't a mess of eyeliner and hairspray, but it was very much sort of indie in the way that I was dressing even though I was a child. And then when I got into my teens, I deliberately wanted to replicate that. And that's something I've come back around to having recently turned 30.

## **Georgia**

So your mum was part of that process? She thought that you might like them. Did your mum wear Doc Martens?

## **Fenella**

No. Completely wouldn't be the sort of thing my mum would wear. So I'm not quite sure where that came from, or whether she just thought they would be a really good sturdy choice. She also might have been into it because they're is a Northampton connection. So she's quite big on that. But it's one of the only things that she's bought me and got right!

## **Georgia**

Brilliant. So I suppose your first pair you, you didn't choose them. But when you started buying them for yourself, why did you choose them over other brands?

**Fenella**

I think that I knew that they had this sort of symbolism with them, this cultural cachet. And also that they were known as being hard wearing. It was about quality as well which is interesting because that's not always first in my priorities, but I think shoes are a little bit different in that respect. But mostly, I think it was just because it was a standard indie or goth shoe that had that association. I was like, 'Okay, I want those ones.'

**Georgia**

So it was to do with the kind of music you're listening to, and the influence of I guess what you'd call celebrities in that time?

**Fenella**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Georgia**

Okay, so what are your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand? And has that changed over time?

**Fenella**

Um, no, I don't think it has changed over time. I mean, to be honest, as an actual brand, I don't know heaps about them. I kind of know very, very basic stuff. But I'm really not that interested in brands and brand loyalty. There are specific things that I would seek out but again, it would be through celebrity or a particular individual. I got those ones because these were the ones that so-and-so wore in this year. Or they look like the closest you could get to the ones that someone from L7 was wearing and that's what I wanted to replicate. The way that I get dressed is very much a back set of references that I understand, but other people read them wrong all the time because that's how fashion works, right? But yeah, it would be more about that than the brand.

**Georgia**

Okay. Yeah. But have you always had Doc Martens?

**Fenella**

Yeah, so the only other kind of boots that I've had that have been a similar style were given to me. I believe they were the Adams Boots company. They were a knee high, so they were slightly different, but they were given to me by a friend of my mum, who had a lot of subcultural connections. And she gave me records - She gave me Alice in Chains records, Siouxsie records, and I remember once I was playing PJ Harvey, and she was like, 'I fuckin' hate PJ Harvey!' [Fenella laughs remembering this] And

she gave me a Pam Hogg coat and these boots, so they came from her. They weren't something I chose myself. But again, I think she could see I was wearing Docs and everything else so she knew I would like them. Otherwise, I'm pretty loyal to them even though it's not necessarily about the brand. But maybe it's just because I know that they wear really well.

### **Georgia**

So they've been a fairly constant part of your life?

### **Fenella**

Yeah. There was one point in my life where I wasn't wearing them. It would have been when I was in my early 20s. And I think around that time I was wearing more things like those god awful ballet shoes, or loafer-y style shoes. 'Lady brogues' as someone referred to them the other day. They're just brogues! I don't know why but I think maybe that was a point where my style was a bit more glamorous, in a way, and I didn't know how to match them up with that particular kind of glamour. Whereas now I think I've leaned more into trashy things. So I bought this Pascal pair earlier this year and I'm in love with him and I've barely taken them off. The woman in the store was amazing and I'd just cut my hair really, really short. And it was good because this woman actually cracked on to me [slang for flirted with], which they never do. So I had this quite nice conversation, she was giving me money off and telling me about how to care for them. She told me I should moisturise them! And since then they've been solidly on my feet.

### **Georgia**

That's so sweet! So were you aware of any of your friends or peers owning or wearing Doc Martens when you were younger?

### **Fenella**

Nobody. Not when I was a kid. When I was a teenager, other friends, but they were mostly male. But then recently it was something that we've all started doing again. So part of the reason I bought the most recent pair was a recommendation from my friend, George. She was telling me about the soft leather so they're not going to cut your feet anymore. It would always be the thing of like, having to break them in. It really hurts and your feet bleed. I've got permanent scars from doing it as a teenager. So that was on her recommendation. And we wear them together sometimes.

### **Georgia**

So when you were little, if your friends didn't own them, that wasn't an impact on your choice to have them. Do you think when you were a teenager, or even now, your friends wearing them, does that impact on you wanting to wear them as well?

**Fenella**

When I was younger, I was like, 'I want the thing that I want.' And I was more concerned with being different. Whereas now, I like that you would have that seal of approval from someone else. In terms of quality or value for money or whatever. So now I think that I pay more attention to that. And I kind of like it because I don't see George all that often. And we'll text each other when we've got them on.

**Georgia**

That's cute!

**Fenella**

Yeah! I had to wait as well, because they didn't have them in black and I was like, 'I do not want these in salmon, it's disgusting!' So they've kind of become a bonding thing and I like that we have the same ones.

**Georgia**

Okay. So do you or did you identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Fenella**

Yeah. So I think that the first thing was I kind of went quite punk.

**Georgia**

So what age was that?

**Fenella**

That would have been about 12, it was quite early. And then that kind of slid into a goth phase. And then everything from that point on has always been goth inflected. Even now, I will sometimes jokingly refer to myself as a dodgy old goth. Even though I don't really think I'm dodgy, or old, or even really a goth! But goth is a state of mind. And I'm from Northampton, it's one of the only cool things that we have, right? Bauhaus [a post-punk band from Northampton]. And as a kid I sort of knew what it was, I'd ride around there on my bike and just look at the venues [places like Roadmender and Soundhaus], and then started hanging out in graveyards. Out of that there was more of a straight up indie phase, where or not you want to call indie a subculture, people argue about that. Now, I wouldn't necessarily call it one thing or another but it's definitely there and it's all through just being really obsessed with music. So there's always subcultural influences, I'm really interested in the subculture, anything to do with it, exhibitions or whatever.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah. Were Doc Martens a part of those subcultures you would have been involved in?

**Fenella**

Yeah, I think so. It's kind of interesting because I'd never thought about this until a friend of mine was working with Underground [a shoe brand borne out of Manchester in the 1980s] doing research and development. She said if I come to one of these sessions and answer questions then they'd give you a pair of brothel creepers, and I think those creepers were my way back into Docs. I've always had a soft spot for a creeper, which I'd probably say I personally would associate more with a certain version of punk. But I think that Docs can slot into all of those positions quite readily. For me, the thing was just like having big, nasty shoes, that's how they sort of made me feel being in them. You could run about in them, you could kick in them, you could go to gigs and people aren't going to crush your toes. And they just look really cool - if you're wearing them with a cool dress or a fur coat or whatever. That kind of juxtaposition, I always really liked that.

**Georgia**

Yeah. When you were younger, did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture?

**Fenella**

Certainly not when I was little and first wearing them. But babysitters would comment on them. I don't know whether that's because I'd have lairy ones? I had the silver, I had a pair of white ones with orange and blue paint splatters. And then I think I just noticed that people were wearing them in my social circle, and then I started to develop knowledge historically of subcultures.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Do you think that that had any influence on you continuing to wear them, their association with subculture?

**Fenella**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Georgia**

Okay. What impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or do you think that it might be the other way around: that your identity informed your first choice to wear them?

## **Fenella**

I think it works both ways. Now, I do like that there is a connection to the place that I'm from, and I have this really complex relationship with where I'm from. I hate it, it's a shit-hole, I'll constantly say that Northampton is a shit-hole and a horrible place to grow up because it's boring. So you cling to those things that are kind of cool about. Which is interesting, because I wouldn't count myself as someone who is that interested in shoes. I own very few pairs of shoes. Well, I own a lot of impractical shoes that I never wear but I just like them. So there's that connection of place with them as well. In terms of femininity as well, and figuring out my place in the world as a woman. I spent a lot of time feeling like the sort of woman I was was kind of wrong in some way. I wasn't able to perform femininity as was expected of me. So my mother will say things like, 'You've got a lot of masculine energy, haven't you?' So I guess the toughness of them as well. I associated them with the Riot Grrl inflected looks that I was putting together. It was about a feminist awakening. I think being a woman who's got an interest in subculture, who's got an interest in the values that come with that as much as the aesthetic that are connected to your ideas about womanhood and feminism. I guess Doc Martens were a way of articulating that. I really like them as something that I've noticed people have started to associate with me again. But I had this conversation with a colleague of mine, I said, 'I'm having a regression session.' I don't know whether it's because I've just had a big breakup, or whether it's because I turned 30, or whether it's both. She said, 'I had the same thing. You know, I broke up with my husband. That was awful. I just returned to being this Riot Grrl which was what I was before.' So maybe that's what's happening. I've noticed that people kind of clock them. I started seeing someone new who's a bit older than me. And he was like, 'You just look like all of the girls in the 90s that I really fancied but who were too cool for me, and too smart.' I'll be honest, I kind of like them with that association as well, there's a romantic association with them. So yeah, I think it works both ways.

## **Georgia**

But it's interesting you say that people think of you as a Doc Martens person?

## **Fenella**

I'm totally cool with it. I think there's something about them in my mind that's associated with them being cool, or having a particular set of values attached to them.

## **Georgia**

Okay, so you kind of touched on this before, but do you have any further thoughts on gender and identity in relation to Doc Martens?

## **Fenella**

I think that it still is a particular statement. I know that they do all of these fancy embroidered styles and stuff but they are still seen as quite a sober choice, some people might think that they're kind of masculine in some way. I do read into them a tough or masculine vibe. I love a feminine shoes: I love a pointy toe, I love a witchy shoe with a square toe, I love a kitten heel because it's trashy.

**Georgia**

I can't walk in them, I'm useless.

**Fenella**

Well this is the thing! All of that stuff, I love it, I used to struggle to wear them out on dancefloors and they looked great. But I just couldn't get anywhere and I couldn't move. Your actual sense of trying to get around in them. And I was just constantly uncomfortable. And it's like, 'Why am I in pain through this choice? Why I am I putting myself through this?' And when I was younger, I'd suffer through it a bit more. But now I don't want to. So I feel like it's a bit of a rejection of fashion and style over comfort, which isn't something I would normally do. But especially teaching, I spend all my time on my feet, I walk as much as possible, I want to go to gigs and be able to stand and be concentrating on what's going on. I don't want to be feeling like my shoes are filled with blood. So when you get through the initial pain of breaking them in, they do that for you perfectly. They speak to you being the sort of person who would do that. I do just love them. Even the dress that I put on today, wearing them with a slip dress, it just looks cool, and it's something that's a bit different. I've just been aware that I could never perform femininity in that way and it doesn't feel right, so what's the point? And I think that Docs are a way of saying something that feels right.

**Georgia**

So do you think it's a different decision for a woman to put on a pair of Doc Martens than it is for a man to put on a pair of Doc Martens?

**Fenella**

Yeah, I think so. I think that it says something different about you as a woman. I think with a man it probably is accepted, they're practical shoes, you might be wearing them for your job. But I think with women, people are always looking for the style statement from them, there's that classic association with fashion. So I feel that to your every day person Docs are probably a little bit of a rejection of that. I'm so sick of - particularly in music places or subcultural scenes - I've spent increasingly more time with heterosexual cisgender men as I've got older. Which is really interesting because it was predominantly me and gay men when I was younger. That's been an interesting learning curve, and a part of that has been through music. They're all older than me and some of them can be quite patronising. So for me I think that they've been a way of asserting that part of myself as well because of their subcultural affiliation. They're sort of relaxed as well? You can dress them up but when I wear them I do feel more dressed down, especially having left this more overtly glamorous version of myself behind a bit, having come into a new decade. I just feels more honest. A bit more myself.

**Georgia**

So you still own them, obviously, and you still wear them quite regularly?

**Fenella**

Yeah, I must wear them five days a week, certainly no less than 3. There was that phase in my early 20s where I wasn't wearing them.

**Georgia**

Do you know why that was?

**Fenella**

I don't know, I think that it was just a particular look I was doing at that time, I was being a bit more experimental with femininity and trying out different versions. I've actually just thought, the person that I was dating at the time would wear them all the time. So I don't know if subconsciously I didn't want to look too matchy-matchy, which is interesting. He wore them because he was the biggest Suede fan I've ever met in my life. And I love Suede! But yeah, I think at that point I was trying to negotiate femininity in a way that made sense for me, to see if I could do it on my own terms. And then I wasn't really wearing them when I was going out clubbing more, because it was very queer and draggy, so the expectation was heels.

**Georgia**

Okay, and do you have a favourite pair?

**Fenella**

I think the pair that I've got with me.

**Georgia**

So why are they your favourite?

**Fenella**

I don't know. The weird ones that I had when I was younger I do have an attachment to, and now, particularly, I like that I was that kid who wore them because I understand it differently. People are always really impressed when I tell them. But I don't know, I guess I just feel that these accurately represent the point that I'm at in my life, a point of acceptance. I've spent a lot of my time feeling weird, whether it's about femininity or my job or whatever, and I've managed to resolve all of that with a lot of hard work. I hate myself for this, but I like them because I'm seeing someone new and they like that I wear them, and they get why I'm wearing them. To have something that checks all of those boxes that we've talked about is rare. They're not extortionately expensive, either. They're

more expensive than the crap that you buy in New Look, but there's a reason why. Even down to the experience I had of going to buy them.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Yeah. Okay, cool. How does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Fenella**

Yeah, absolutely. I feel bad-ass when I wear them. I have this joke where if I'm excited and hyped up, or if I've done a lecture or paper and it's gone really well, I feel like i've got all this extra energy and I want to go and kick the shit out of some bins. You can do that if you're wearing those and you probably won't injure yourself! I feel more confident. You can run, you can move around. I don't run, I mean, look at me! But you know, if I wanted to I could. Yeah, I just feel confident and badass and comfortable. And cool! I do feel cool when I wear them. I don't have another pair of shoes that makes me feel like that. I think with Doc Martens almost subconscious; I'm not aware that I'm wearing the shoes. Whereas the other ones I'm very aware that I'm in them and I'm constantly thinking about stairs or wonky pavements. But with Doc Martens it's almost organic.

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay. Are there some situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens, and why?

**Fenella**

No, I mean, I might not if I was invited to a wedding, depending on what the vibe was. But I would probably try. Because if you pair them with the sorts of dresses that you have to wear I would feel a bit more like I wasn't putting on a costume, which I've definitely felt before at formal events. So that would help me retain a sense of self. I wear them to work, and that's the cool thing about the job.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So there's not many things that would convince you to not wear them. Have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing Doc Martens?

**Fenella**

I wore them to work and someone said I looked a bit like 1990s primary school teacher who goes to gigs on the weekend! But no one's ever said anything negative about them to me.

**Georgia**

Okay, and do you notice when you see other people wearing them?

**Fenella**

Yes, I really pay attention now. When I went to the Bikini Kill reunion gig there was just this sea of them. I was counting how many Docs I could see. My friend Cat was wearing them, and her boss Leslie was wearing them and she's in her 50s. So it's kind of cool that we were this army of women going to Bikini Kill and wearing Docs. I saw someone had a pair of their shoes and they looked awesome, I would really like a pair, so I'm sort of subtly eyeing up what my next purchase is going to be.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. When you see other people wearing Doc Martens does that have an impact on what you think about them?

**Fenella**

It's shallow, but we all do it. I'd be more inclined to think they were nice. I would maybe hope there was some sort of commonality between us, or there might be a reason that they were wearing them too. If I walked into a social situation where I didn't know anyone then that might be an entry point to talk to someone, or a sign that they'd be cool.

**Georgia**

Yeah, definitely. So, obviously, there's more people wearing Doc Martens now than there used to be. Do you think that has had or will have an impact on what people think of the brand?

**Fenella**

Yeah, that great disappointment when you realise that the way that someone dresses doesn't necessarily say anything about their politics or taste or view on the world. With increased commonality you might not be able to separate people, but in terms of the brand, I feel like those associations are so strong. When you asked me about it I realised I don't actually know that much about them beyond the obvious things, yet I know that. To me that suggests that those associations with the brand are quite firmly entrenched in what they do. So no, I don't necessarily think that it would. It seems authentic. And so it doesn't really matter whether everyone's wearing them. I'd hope not, anyway, because if it did then maybe I wouldn't want to wear them anymore.

**Georgia**

Okay. So last question. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your relationship with Doc Martens?

**Fenella**

How it's changed with age is something that I hadn't really thought about, the fact that it is something that I've returned to at that particular point. My hippy friends would say it was my Saturn returned. I don't believe in astrology, but I do think at certain points in your life you do return to certain things. I feel like they're symbolic of that. I already know that even if I stop wearing them again in the future, which I might, they will be the thing that symbolises this point in my life and my particular attitude towards the world. I think they reflect the things that I've been thinking really well, and other people can read them with greater ease than anything else I wear. I'm glad that I have a relationship with them because they've solved all of my footwear problems in a way that's never happened before.

**Georgia**

Beautiful. Alright, thanks Fenella.

Gaye

*Gaye is a childminder in her 50s who lives in Auckland. She got her first pair of Docs when she was a teenager and she now has 10 pairs. I interviewed Gaye in her house in Auckland, in June of 2019.*

**Georgia**

So the first question I have for you is do you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

**Gaye**

Not really, but I've been wearing boots since I was 13 or 14, and I was a punk. And back then I couldn't afford Docs. So we used to go to the army surplus store and buy combat boots. And then probably my first pair were hand me downs. So I can't really remember, I mean, I'm 50 this year so...

**Georgia**

So you were part of a set subculture when you were younger, you identified as being a punk?

**Gaye**

Yes, yeah.

**Georgia**

And when did you start that?

**Gaye**

13.

**Georgia**

And did you stick with that for your whole life? Or did it change as you get older?

**Gaye**

No, I'm just an old age punk basically.

**Georgia**

And so you've continued to own Doc Martens as you've got older?

**Gaye**

Yeah, I'm just trying to find an old photo.

**Georgia**

And why did you choose them over other brands do you think?

**Gaye**

Probably because they were part of the subculture and everything. But also because they, you know, like, they cost a lot of money, but they're going to last 10 years. I don't drive so I walk everywhere. So I am really heavy on shoes. So yeah, they last.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Was it to do with this subculture as well, they were part of that look?

**Gaye**

Definitely. I've actually got dents in my legs from wearing them. My daughter was saying to me 'Oh you've got to let them know about your dents.' It's like, Chinese foot binding or something after years and years of wearing them.

**Georgia**

Did you wear other brands as well, once you started buying Doc Martens?

**Gaye**

No. Only ever Docs.

**Georgia**

And so why did you continue to wear them do you think?

**Gaye**

Because they're functional. And because I walk everywhere. And like, you know, now, especially in winter time. I've been to work already this morning. I'll go again this afternoon. And there's nothing worse than being in soggy socks.

**Georgia**

So practical reasons. What do you do for work?

**Gaye**

Before and after school care.

**Georgia**

And were you aware of any sort of subcultural associations of Doc Martens when you first bought them?

**Gaye**

Yeah, yeah. I have friends that were skinheads and all that sort of thing. There would be people that would have metal capped boots because they found it more efficient for beating people with, y'know? Kicking them with.

**Georgia**

And so you were very much part of that scene when you were younger. And was it in Auckland that you grew up?

**Gaye**

In Sydney.

**Georgia**

Oh, okay. All right. Yeah. Brilliant. And so you're from Australia, originally?

**Gaye**

I'm not Australian, no. I moved there when I was 10. I knew all the bands and all that sort of thing, you know, lots of friends in bands.

**Georgia**

So music was a big part of it, as well?

**Gaye**

Yeah. It's a big part.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. And so what were your thoughts on the brand of Doc Martens when you first started wearing them? And has that changed as times gone on?

**Gaye**

What do you mean?

**Georgia**

So when you first start wearing them you said you aware that they had subcultural roots. Has your opinion on the brand in that context changed or been altered?

**Gaye**

No, I don't think so.

**Georgia**

Do you have any preference in terms of if they're made in England or not?

**Gaye**

Yeah I do prefer them to be made in England because I know the quality is going to be better, right? And you've always got to watch out for fakes and all that sort of thing. Make sure they're tagged properly and printed properly on the soles and all that sort of thing.

**Georgia**

Okay, so you feel like the made in England ones are better quality than the other ones?

**Gaye**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. And did you tend to buy new ones or second-hand ones?

**Gaye**

Both. But I've always been working lots of jobs on minimum wage so friends have kept an eye out for me. They'll pick something up. I'm lucky because I've got a really small foot so I can always get good deals, y'know, \$50 down the market because nobody else can fit into them. I wish they sold the kiddies ones over here because I've got grandkids and I would just love to get them a pair.

**Georgia**

So you would like them to be wearing Doc Martens?

**Gaye**

Oh yeah definitely.

**Georgia**

Did your kids wear Doc Martens as well?

**Gaye**

Yeah. Well, my son's 22, and I don't think my son's ever had any Docs. Probably because I won't buy them for him! My daughter does and her partner does.

**Georgia**

Okay, how old is she?

**Gaye**

She's 28.

**Georgia**

Right. And so did she have them when she was younger, like as a teenager?

**Gaye**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Georgia**

And did she choose that herself or did you encourage her to get them or?

**Gaye**

It was never encouraged, it was just something that was part of our family. She dyes her hair too and has lots of piercings and everything.

**Georgia**

Takes after you then?

**Gaye**

Yeah!

**Georgia**

All right. And do you remember any sort of advertising from Doc Martens at all?

**Gaye**

I guess it's always been in music magazines and things like that. You never see it on mainstream TV.

**Georgia**

Were you aware of any celebrities wearing Doc Martens?

**Gaye**

Oh yeah. Will Smith been through a big phase with them. And Miley Cyrus, in Wrecking Ball with them on. So they sort of go in and out of fashion all through the years but they're pretty steadfast at the same time.

**Georgia**

Yeah, true. Okay. Did you have a favourite pair?

**Gaye**

Yeah, I've got a pair of tartan ones that are my favourites.

**Georgia**

Okay. Why are they your favourite?

**Gaye**

Because they're so comfortable. They're material, not leather, so they just feel like wearing big slippers. They're nice and warm.

**Georgia**

Okay. And so this is quite a big question. So how do you think wearing Doc Martens has impacted on your identity? Or do you maybe think it's the other way around, that you chose to wear Doc Martens because of your identity?

**Gaye**

I think I chose to wear Doc Martens because of my identity.

**Georgia**

And they've obviously become a really big part of your life?

**Gaye**

Yeah. But now it's more like functionality. I just makes sense to buy something for a couple of hundred bucks that's going to last me 10 years rather than going through three or four pairs of boots a year.

**Georgia**

But you wouldn't ever choose any other brand of boot, like Timberland or anything like that?

**Gaye**

No.

**Georgia**

Why is that, do you think?

**Gaye**

Timberlands are quite uncomfortable. Docs, you can put dubbin on that softens up the leather, you know, and just beeswax to keep them waterproof and everything. Whereas Timberlands are quite inflexible and they have suede on them. There's nothing I can do with that.

**Georgia**

Right. So again, that's sort of practical reasons. Would you say you do feel connected to the brand of Doc Martens?

**Gaye**

Yeah, I do.

**Georgia**

Okay. And do you have any thoughts on Doc Martens and gender? So being a woman who wears Doc Martens, what's your experience been like?

**Gaye**

All my friends associate me with the Docs. That's why I got tagged into your post by a few people. I know there's certain connotation within society that if you're a woman wearing Docs, you must be gay. That annoys me, y'know, because I think what they're doing is really breaking down the empowerment that women feel when they're wearing something like that. And making it a derision of it. It's open to everyone, it's not just gay culture, although it has become more part of gay culture these days.

**Georgia**

And do you think that's changing as time goes on? Or do you think it's still like that?

**Gaye**

I don't pay a lot of attention to it. Because I think it's coming from the kind of men that will try and come on to you at the pub. And when you say no they say, 'Oh you must be gay then.'

**Georgia**

Okay. So how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel?

**Gaye**

Ready to take on the day. Ready to battle. Especially when you've got a new pair, and you're all nice and bouncy still, bouncing along on the road.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Uh huh. So do you think it changes the way that you walk as well?

**Gaye**

Oh yeah, definitely. You get this bouncy little gait going on as you walk along and everything. And I mean, they were originally invented as chiropractic shoes for special needs kids. So they're really good for your feet and everything. I look at some of the shoes today, some of the ridiculous stilettos. Man, the damage that's doing to your back, your hips, and your feet. They'll be going through absolute pain and discomfort in the name of fashion. And then they end up with big bunions. Slaves to fashion, y'know?

**Georgia**

Yeah, totally. And so, talking of painful shoes. Did you have to wear in your Doc Martens?

**Gaye**

I always make sure they're dubbined really well first, maybe throw them around. When we were young we used to always throw our boots around to soften up the leather first.

**Georgia**

Literally just chuck 'em?

**Gaye**

Yup, at a wall. And the dubbin softens them up really well too, that's really important.

**Georgia**

Great. So, have you had any notable reactions to your Doc Martens?

**Gaye**

I was at the chemist the other day and somebody was going on about this pair, saying they'd never seen anything like that before. I usually get positive comments saying things like, 'Oh wow, that's different.'

**Georgia**

So generally positive, not negative statements. Have you had any negative comments from anyone?

**Gaye**

Not a lot, no. Maybe once or twice in the past with the gay business. But sort of, you can assume what you want, I don't really care about people's opinions like that.

**Georgia**

Okay. Cool. And are there any other things you want to tell me, any important parts of your life maybe that Doc Martens were a part of?

**Gaye**

Well, I went to a gig, I think it was Anti-Nowhere League. I can't remember, maybe in Sydney, and everyone's in the mosh pit...

**Georgia**

When was that?

**Gaye**

35 years ago maybe? And I went down, I slipped, and it's really dangerous when you do that because you're gonna get trampled on. But luckily this guy scooped me up straight away, but that was after I got a heel print bruise of a Doc Martens boot on my arm. That's another thing though, when you go to gigs in Doc Martens you don't get crushed if people stand on your toes.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so true. Okay great, I'm going to pause my recording there.

## Hannah

*Hannah is a civil servant in her 40s and lives in London. She got her first pair of Docs when she was a young teenager and she now owns two pairs. I interviewed Hannah in her office, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Okay, I'm just going to record this so I can go back through it. So can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Hannah**

I remember having them but I don't remember where and when exactly I bought them. And I don't remember why, either. I think probably... There was a local store in the quite small town where I went to school that did lots of army surplus type gear and I probably bought them from there, along with many other things that were part of the kind of tribal uniform that me and my friends were wearing at the time.

## **Georgia**

And where was that?

## **Hannah**

In a small town called Tonbridge in Kent. I went to Tonbridge Grammar School which is quite a well-to-do school. It's a non-fee paying school but academically quite driven, and I think me and my friends were the kind of... we weren't naughty but we were the kind of counter-culture kids in school at that time. We tended to wear things that were all very similar, and we went through a phase where everyone had a pair of DMs, whether shoes for school or boots for outside of school. We had quite a strict school uniform, you had to have shoes of a certain type. But outside of school everyone customised their DMs, spray-painted them, different laces of different colours, toecaps and everything, you name it. It was a uniform but it was customized individually.

## **Georgia**

So what years would that have been?

## **Hannah**

Probably around... 1992-1994.

## **Georgia**

Okay. Can you remember why you chose Doc Martens over other brands? Was it boots you had first?

## **Hannah**

I would have had shoes for school. But I definitely had boots as well. It was a kind of uniform I think. In later years it didn't include DMs, but me and my friends all virtually wore the same thing. I've got a photo I can show you that illustrates that point. For some reason that was the brand that was seen as cool by us. I don't remember anyone ever considering wearing anything other than DMs. And it's quite funny now coming back to them many years later, and I kind of look at the equivalent now and think 'Why would I not wear them?'

**Georgia**

But there was a time when you stopped wearing them?

**Hannah**

Yeah, for sure. My style definitely changed. I'll show you the photos [Hannah brings out some photos of herself as a teenager]. This is probably a bit later, post-DMs phase, but it could also just be in the summer. But you might notice we are all wearing exactly the same pair of Converse. So whether consciously or not, for a period of time we all looked quite similar. I think probably when we got to our later teens we started developing our own individual styles, some people went perhaps more dressy, some went more scruffy. And I was definitely on the more scruffy end of the spectrum.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So, your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand: what were they when you were younger, and has it changed over time?

**Hannah**

I think they're quite alternative, and that's something that's quite important. I do remember the days of the massive Doc Martens store in Covent Garden – I remember going there when I was a teenager and just being in awe and wonder. And when you think of it now you realise it was this massive corporate space, so they weren't very alternative, were they? But I do still look at them as... I recognise that they are a massive brand, but they still aren't all that mainstream? So for example, my friends who have children and wore DMs try and get their kids to wear them. Whereas my siblings don't do that, because they never wore them in the first place. So there is something that seems to pass on, the love of the brand, at least in the case of my friends. What do I think of them now? I quite like the innovation now. I quite like the fact that there are sandals and all sorts of weird and wonderful boots and shoes. One of the reasons I like that is that as an older person... well, getting older! I don't want to be dressing in the same way that I did when I was a teenager, but I still want to be able to tap into some of those same brands.

**Georgia**

Uhuh, sure. I think you've kind of already answered this, but were you aware of your friends or peers wearing Doc Martens and did that have an influence on your choice to wear them?

**Hannah**

Absolutely. Like I say, we had a look. And it's amazing really because there was never any conscious rules around this, it was just what we did. But if you were to walk down the street behind, we all basically looked the same. We had the same kind of coats, we had the same kind of bags, and we had the same kind of shoes. And that carried on for a period of time until everyone felt more comfortable to move out of the herd and develop their own specific identity.

**Georgia**

Do you think that's the same of teenagers now? Do you think they're still the same kind of homogenous groups?

**Hannah**

Um... probably? I have relatives who are teenagers, and certainly brand power, or maybe spending power seems to be a lot higher than when I was a teenager. It seems like with all the teenagers I know that whatever they want, they can have. Which certainly wasn't the case when I was a kid. I would have had to do my part time job to pay for the DMs that I had. But when you don't know what the trends are it's quite hard to spot them, y'know? But you do end up thinking, 'Wow it's eyelashes, and eyelashes, and eyelashes!' at the moment, and maybe not so much around the clothes anymore?

**Georgia**

Yeah, uhuh. So how did your parents feel about you having Doc Martens?

**Hannah**

They were very objectionable to me having anything with steel toe caps in. because I think that was really seen as bovver boots. And obviously, they're a little bit older than... They'd kinda seen the punk era as bystanders, but I think they were aware of the connections and connotations of bovver boots. I don't think I've ever been a particularly ladylike person, I've always been quite tomboyish. So I don't think they were particularly affronted with me wearing that kind of thing. And I think to be honest, the more our friends started wearing this kind of stuff and had our group identity, the harder it became for my parents to object. There was one occasion where my mum said, 'You're not going out like that', so I didn't. I got changed and then changed back into my clothes at my friend's house!

**Georgia**

Brilliant, a classic. So did you ever identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Hannah**

Well we thought of ourselves as indie kids. All of the music that we liked was alternative music, and our scene was very much centred on an independent music venue in a town called Tonbridge Wells. The music venue is still going, and I still go, which is amazing because I have so many memories from my teenage-hood there.

**Georgia**

What's it called?

**Hannah**

It's called The Forum. We went during a period where it was a relatively new entity. We saw some really incredible bands. Oasis played there, but before they got big. It's situated in a kind of common, so lots of land around there. So when we were younger we would go there and often it was about the music, but just as often it was really about hanging around on the common in the summer. We went to an all-girls school so it was a great opportunity as a group to meet boys and stuff like that. It was very much centred around that. So I think the clothing was reflecting the music scene, grunge and all that sort of thing that was around at the time.

**Georgia**

So are we talking Britpop indie or...?

**Hannah**

Well [pointing at a photo of herself her friends] I would say this is kind of Britpop indie, but notice the difference [pointing at a different photo].

**Georgia**

Yeah that's more kind of Nirvana style isn't it?

**Hannah**

Yeah, we were in year 9 on a school trip then. So we were wearing band t shirts, whatever the band was that we were into. We've got our DMs on there, you can't quite see them unfortunately, but we've got our kind of German army coats. This is my friend Gemma [pointing at Gemma in the photo], who is a very glam lady these days, but she's got the classic uniform on of flowery dress, stripy tights if it was tights weather, and a pair of DMs. And that literally was what we wore for about a whole year.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' association with subculture and do you think that impacted on your choice to wear them?

**Hannah**

Only that they were seen as not quite so mainstream. But I don't know if consciously we did other than the idea that they were cool in an alternative way, in the same way that we wanted to be.

**Georgia**

Okay. Did that change as you got older? Do you know anything about it now?

**Hannah**

Well I went to a festival a few weeks back and there was a DM's sponsored tent there.

**Georgia**

Which festival was it?

**Hannah**

Oh what was it called...? Field Day festival. And there was a DM sponsored tent there and they had a big exhibition with different things to do with the brand and the product, which was really interesting to learn about.

**Georgia**

Oh, cool. So now you do know!

**Hannah**

Now I do.

**Georgia**

So what impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or is it the other way around in that your identity was the reason you chose them in the first place?

**Hannah**

Probably the latter. It was the choice to be alternative and non-mainstream that influenced the choice to go with a brand that reflected that. And I would think that that's probably carried on. I guess I don't particularly follow fashion, I wear what I want to wear. And the older I get I just think... I don't want to swear on tape, but let's just say I don't really care anymore. Not that I don't care what I look like, but I can wear what I want and I feel a bit more comfortable to do that. Maybe about 8 years ago I bought myself a pair of patent leather DMs shoes, which I would have bought today but they are just the most uncomfortable shoes. I've tried literally everything over the years to break them in. I should give them away really but I just can't bring them to because they're such beautiful shoes and they look amazing, but I just can't wear them. I thought that I would really like to have a pair of DMs when I noticed that other people were wearing them again, so I bought this pair that were a different kind of material, a bit lighter weight, good for festivals and stuff in the summer. So I think my practical head has kicked in rather than my fashion head, but I still do think that... y'know, it might sound really silly but if there was an identical boot that didn't have that, and didn't have that [Hannah points at the Doc Martens label and stitching], then I wouldn't buy it.

**Georgia**

Right, so it is important that they're Doc Martens?

**Hannah**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

They could look exactly like that, but you wouldn't spend the money on them unless they had that label?

**Hannah**

Yeah, it's exactly that.

**Georgia**

Do you think that people think of you as a Doc Martens person?

**Hannah**

Yes! None of my friends would be remotely surprised if I said, 'Ooh I've got a new pair of DMs.' I'm not sure how many of them would still be - we're at different points in our lives and careers. Many of my friends are parents and so maybe don't have the level of disposable cash, so if they were thinking about a 100 pound pair of boots then they would probably not choose to spend that, whereas I have a bit more flexibility there. But if money was no object then I think everyone would go for it, I'm pretty sure.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. So do you have any thoughts around gender and Doc Martens, being a woman who wears them?

**Hannah**

Well I always think our group definitely identified as strong, independent women. Without a doubt. We've always carried that kind of attitude. We went to a school where we were basically told: 'Whatever you want to do in life, you can do it.' And I think it was a period of time where stuff was kind of rumbling... I mean, we were heading into a Labour government, heading into an unprecedented amount of female MPs, the Spice Girls were doing 'girl power' and all that sort of stuff. That was the wave that we were riding. A lot of the bands that we were listening to were what was called Riot Grrl, bands like L7, Breeders, a lot of it coming out of America on the coat tails of the grunge scene. Also a lot of British bands as well. I've still got a lot of vinyl singles that occasionally I put on and think, 'Oh why did we listen to them? They were terrible!' But there definitely was that kind of scene at the time and it absolutely fitted with... Again, whether we fitted the scene or the scene fitted us because that's how we felt about ourselves, I'm not sure. I guess we would have seen our brothers and the front men of indie bands wearing DMs. So if we can do anything in the world, why can't we do that too? And I'm pretty sure that DMs I wore when I was younger were men's DMs. There wasn't such a thing really as women's DMs, you just bought the size that fitted you. So actually now the choice is much better and more gender appropriate I suppose.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Brilliant. So you said that you do still own and wear Doc Martens but there was a point that you didn't, is that right? So how long was that, when did you stop wearing them and when did you start again?

**Hannah**

It was probably something like 20 years. I don't even know what happened to my old pair and I'm slightly sad about that, I wish I still had them because they lived through some real times with me. I'm just trying to think what happened to my style... I guess lots of different things: I was wearing a lot more trainers as opposed to shoes and boots, and I'd become a lot more sporty so I was more likely to be in a tracksuit and trainers than jeans and DMs. I guess it was also more of a fashion dictated thing rather than a conscious choice to move away from them. But then I remember being in a shoe shop and finding this beautiful pair of DMs shoes and they just really spoke to me, I had to have them there and then.

**Georgia**

So when was that?

**Hannah**

I think it was about 8 years ago maybe? Maybe a little bit more.

**Georgia**

And they're the ones that you can't wear?

**Hannah**

Yeah. I was so excited about them that when I got home I took a photo of them and put it on Facebook. And I don't put anything on Facebook, ever, apart from the crazy shoes that I've bought. I think I was so excited on behalf of me and all of my friends that ever used to own a pair that I immediately shared it with all of those people.

**Georgia**

Uhuh. And once you'd bought that pair, did you continue to buy more pairs?

**Hannah**

Well I persevered with trying to break those ones in. It was probably about two years ago that I bought these ones. I tend to kind of... Stalk clothes. It sometimes takes me a while to make up my mind about whether or not I want something. Because I think... Well, I'm basically at work the whole time. And when I'm not at work, I'm doing sport. So opportunities to wear clothes that don't fit into those two things are relatively few and far between.

**Georgia**

Do you think that you could get away with wearing Doc Martens in your job?

**Hannah**

I have done on a Friday, dress down Friday. I don't think anyone would bat an eyelid.

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you have a favourite pair of Doc Martens?

**Hannah**

Well, I have the pair that I love for the aesthetic but that are unwearable. These are incredibly comfortable but are not particularly beautiful. So those are my options. For me, at the moment, I prefer comfort over anything else.

**Georgia**

So those ones are your favourite. And you wear those a lot?

**Hannah**

I do, yeah.

**Georgia**

But the other ones. Why do you love them so much if you can't wear them?

**Hannah**

There's something in the design that's very sleek. It's hard to explain them but they're a chunky pair of shoes. Recently, shoes that have platform are quite in but this was way ahead of those. And they're not platform shoes, but they're chunky in the way that a pair of Doc Martens boots would be. Proper classic soles, y'know? So they have that amazing combination. Because they're shiny patent leather, but otherwise a very plain pair of shoes with this very chunky sole. They have that really nice combination of attitude and beauty, which just really spoke to me. My husband loves them, everyone loves them. We just don't get on, we can't wear each other!

**Georgia**

Aw, it's such a shame! Okay, so how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Hannah**

In that particular pair of shoes, yeah, I do. Because I'm a bit taller and I feel like I can walk with some attitude. They're a practical pair of shoes: if you find yourself in trouble, you're going to get out of trouble. You can run out of harm's way. You can walk around easily - you're not tottering around or anything like that.

**Georgia**

Do you think that's a consideration to do with gender?

**Hannah**

Probably. When we were kids and we were on the common in Tonbridge Wells, there were natural outcrops of rock. You're not gonna get up and down, scrambling up and down rock, in a pair of stupid stilettos, are you? So I think, again, that kind of footwear enabled us to be keeping up with the boys and doing the same kind of stuff as they were. There is a place for more feminine shoes and less practical shoes, absolutely, and I totally do wear those when I need to. But otherwise I think: why make life difficult for myself if I've got beautiful shoes that are comfortable at the same time?

**Georgia**

Yeah, cool. Are there some situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens and why?

**Hannah**

So, I bought these ones specifically because I thought they'd be better in hot situations. If you're in heat like this [we were in London during the 2019 heatwave. That day it peaked at 39 Celsius] then wearing big heavy leather boots is not so ideal. But, interestingly, and I should have bought some photos of these, I've been to two weddings recently where I've worn a really beautiful dress. A very expensive dress that I bought in the sale for not very much money. It's a kind of long billowy sleeved dress, black, with passion flowers printed down the sleeves. And I wore nice shoes for the photos, but the minute they were done I put my DMs on. And at both weddings there was a lot of appreciation for the combo of extremely elegant dress on the top and chunky boots on the bottom. So in answer to your question, I'd say probably that there are few situations where I wouldn't feel that I could be myself, and wear the kind of shoes that I love. And I think most people would recognise that that's a part of me.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. Have you ever experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing your Doc Martens?

**Hannah**

So, like I said, at the wedding my group of friends were also there and they love them. The first time I did that was at my brother's wedding and he married a lady who is quite counter-culture. She had on under her wedding gown an equivalent type of comfy boot, so I think there was a bit of solidarity there from her. But from the other wedding I think people were just pleased to see me being myself. I'm sure when I was younger that my gran would have been slightly surprised, but there's such a massive generational difference. She would have seen – and been terrified of – the prospect of punks, but also the connotations of armies and that kind of thing. I think she would have been quite disturbed by those kinds of things.

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay. Do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens and does that have an impact on your opinion of them?

**Hannah**

I definitely do notice. Does it have an impact on my opinion of them...?

**Georgia**

Just a kind of snap decision on what you first thing of somebody.

**Hannah**

Yeah. It might do, yeah. I do quite like it when I see little kids wearing them, I have to say. That makes me think, 'Oh, your parents are probably quite cool.' One of my really good friends, Sophie, she's been trying to make her youngest son wear them and he just won't. She's quite distraught by the fact that he flatly refuses because they're not comfortable enough.

**Georgia**

If you saw someone wearing a pair that you thought were amazing would you be likely to say it to them?

**Hannah**

Yeah, yeah. I think so.

**Georgia**

Great. Well that's pretty much it. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your relationship with Doc Martens?

**Hannah**

Not that I can think of. If I can find a photo of the wedding outfit I'll send it to you.

**Georgia**

That would be brilliant. Thanks so much!

Holly

*Holly is a hospitality worker in her mid-30s who lives in Nelson. She got her first pair of Doc Martens (which she shared with her mum) when she was a teenager, and Holly now owns 5 pairs of Docs. I interviewed Holly in her home, in June of 2019.*

**Georgia**

So, your first question is can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

**Holly**

Yes, I remember I couldn't afford them on my own. So me and my mum went halves on a pair and then we just shared them between each other.

**Georgia**

Oh cool, and when was that?

**Holly**

That was when I was 14. So 20 years ago.

**Georgia**

Okay. All right. Okay, cool. Do you remember where you got them from?

**Holly**

Shit, where did I get them from... I think from Taylor's Footwear in town.

**Georgia**

In Nelson?

**Holly**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. So they were new, they weren't second hand?

**Holly**

Nuh-uh.

**Georgia**

And what type were they?

**Holly**

They were blue 8-ups.

**Georgia**

Oh, the classic 8-ups, but blue.

**Holly**

Yeah, really dark blue. And mum's still got them sitting in her garden with plants in them.

**Georgia**

Oh, really? So you stopped wearing them? You both stopped wearing them?

**Holly**

Well she kind of took over wearing them! So I couldn't wear them anymore. And then as I got older and got some money of my own I kept buying them.

**Georgia**

Okay, and why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

**Holly**

Well, they look really cool. And they last for ages. That's what I like about them. Although my recent pair have not been as good.

**Georgia**

So there's something about the way they looked then?

**Holly**

Yeah. I really liked that whole kind of punk look I guess, too. And it really, really ties in with heaps. It seems like a very English thing. Punk and Docs and all that.

**Georgia**

And that appealed to you?

**Holly**

Yeah, yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay, and so what are your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand? So when you first bought them, were you aware of the brand of Doc Martens and has that changed over time?

**Holly**

No, I don't think it has changed that much. It's nice that they still put out the classic style. But I also really like that they do some really good new things. Because their new stuff is cool, the different coloured ones they do now are so nice. And the shoes, I like the shoes. And the softer canvas ones are cool too.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, so you like the fact that they've diversified?

**Holly**

Yeah, totally. But I love that they still have the original one. Because that's what people liked in the first place.

**Georgia**

Okay. And were you aware of any of your friends or your peers owning or wearing at the Doc Martens at the time?

**Holly**

Um, everyone wanted them. But they're so expensive. So you know, as a 15 year old girl, who can afford 300 bucks for a pair of shoes?

**Georgia**

So they were kind of aspirational.

**Holly**

Yeah. The rich kids had them.

**Georgia**

Do you think that other people that you knew having them or wanting them impacted your choice to want them?

**Holly**

I feel like my mum liking them impacted my choice in wanting them more than other people.

**Georgia**

Right. And had your mum had them before?

**Holly**

I dunno, I never asked. She's got heaps of pairs now too.

**Georgia**

So it kind of started at the same time for you two, which is quite sweet.

**Holly**

Yeah. We're pretty close, it's good.

**Georgia**

Okay, so do you or did you ever identify as part of a set subculture?

**Holly**

No, no. I don't like to conform to anything.

**Georgia**

Did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens associations with subculture when you were interested in buying them?

**Holly**

Well, I definitely knew that there were quite punky, but that was about it.

**Georgia**

Mm-hmm. So kind of a general association?

**Holly**

Yeah. Well, I think some girls obviously like growing up being quite girly. Other girls might want to grow up kicking arse and being a bad-arse. So I feel like they relate more to that subculture look.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So what impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity? Or do you think it's maybe the other way around: that you chose to wear Doc Martens because of who you are?

**Holly**

That's a hard one. I'm just trying to figure out why I like them so much. It must be that they make me look so good! I feel like it's more because of who I am that I want to wear them. Because I feel like... You know, I'm not an asshole. But I do feel like I am a strong, powerful, kind of bad-arse woman. I feel quite empowered as a woman and I really like that about myself. And I feel like maybe that fits my whole persona and my look, having those shoes.

**Georgia**

So there's something about those shoes that match that quite tough aspect of your personality?

**Holly**

Yeah. I have got old ones that I like to wear but then I've got new ones that are my fancy Docs.

**Georgia**

Okay. So you obviously do still own Doc Martens and still wear them. How many pairs have you got? Do you know?

**Holly**

Shall we get them out?

**Georgia**

Yeah, sure. I saw some at the front door.

**Holly**

Yeah those are my newest ones but they have been really shit.

**Georgia**

Oh really?

**Holly**

Yeah. I'm really disappointed. I've not even had them for two years and they're falling apart. They were my favourites, but they're falling to bits.

**Georgia**

So you've got [I count the pairs Holly has got out] 5 pairs. And you've had others previously?

**Holly**

I've had three other pairs

**Georgia**

Uh huh. Okay. Awesome. Do you have a favourite pair?

**Holly**

Yeah, the vegan ones actually. I really like them. They're super comfortable. Yeah, normally I buy a pair and get them stretched straight away but I didn't have to do that with them. And they've lasted amazing. And they are like gumboots because they're vegan. So they don't soak up the water at all.

**Georgia**

So why do you love them so much?

**Holly**

Mainly because they're so durable.

**Georgia**

Okay, so it's practical?

**Holly**

Yeah, they've actually lasted a really, really long time compared to these [Holly shows me her latest pair]. These are newer than the vegan ones.

**Georgia**

So it's kind of practical reasons why they're your favourite. Do you wear them the most, your vegan ones?

**Holly**

Nah, I still wear them [the latest ones] the most.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay. So how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel?

**Holly**

Um, I guess quite confident. Because I can walk confidently in them, because I know that I'm not gonna fall over. I'm quite prone to falling over, I'm just clumsy and slip all the time. But these are great for that. So I feel like they might be confident not only because they look good, but because I know I'm not going to fall in them because they're not slippery at all, ever, on anything. I've had so many really embarrassing falls so I like to try and avoid that!

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Holly**

Yeah, I do actually. Just trying to think what it feels like to wear my other shoes. But I guess it feels more normal for me to wear these pairs because I mostly wear them. And when I do wear other shoes that feels different because... These definitely make feel a bit taller. My other shoes are Chucks and they're always cold. I also always have cold feet so I like Docs because they keep my feet warm and most other shoes don't.

**Georgia**

So you definitely do feel different in them?

**Holly**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

So would you say you wear Doc Martens most of the time?

**Holly**

Yeah, definitely.

**Georgia**

So wearing your other shoes is out of the ordinary for you?

**Holly**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. Cool. What other kind of shoes do you have? Do you do wear heels? Or is it mostly flats?

**Holly**

I like boots really, but I do have quite a lot of footwear. [Holly opens her cupboard and shows me her large collection].

**Georgia**

So a shoes fan in general?

**Holly**

Yeah. Shoes and bags.

**Georgia**

Are there any other brands that you are so loyal to?

**Holly**

No, no way. Except for jeans.

**Georgia**

What jeans do you wear?

**Holly**

A Brand jeans.

**Georgia**

But Doc Martens are, you would say, your main brand loyalty?

**Holly**

Yes. Yeah. And I'm always thinking about buying another pair.

**Georgia**

So it's a pretty big part of your life?

**Holly**

Yes it is, actually. Yeah. I'm quite sentimental about stuff. I try not to be because then when you lose stuff you get so upset. So like, these [Holly holds up a pair of shoes] I never wear, and I could throw them away, but I don't want to.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so you get quite attached to them.

**Holly**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Why do you think that is?

**Holly**

I'm just like that with everything really. Jewellery and clothes. I'm just really into stuff. I hold on to stuff. I've got clothes that I've had for like 20 years that I still wear.

**Georgia**

So you still get some use out of them?

**Holly**

Yeah, totally.

**Georgia**

Okay. And are there any situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Holly**

I don't wear them to work, or on long walks.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay. So what do you do for work?

**Holly**

I work in a cafe in town, so I'm walking around all day.

**Georgia**

Are you not allowed to wear them to work? Or is it your own choice?

**Holly**

I don't want to because they get uncomfortable after wearing them all day. Especially because I normally like to get a size that's a little bit too small because I wear them for so long. By the time they're actually fully broken in they become too big if I get the right size, you know?

**Georgia**

Right. And have you experienced any notable reactions from other people whilst you were wearing your Doc Martens?

**Holly**

Yeah, people saying how cool they are.

**Georgia**

So mostly positive, you'd say?

**Holly**

Oh, totally. It wouldn't be bad, but I guess people thought they make me look meaner.

**Georgia**

Yeah, but you don't see that as a bad thing?

**Holly**

No, I don't care.

**Georgia**

Cool. And do you notice when you see other people wearing them, and does it make you think something about them?

**Holly**

Yeah, I totally notice. and I just mainly think 'Good on them, they're great!'

**Georgia**

So you connect with that person?

**Holly**

Yeah, definitely.

**Georgia**

Awesome. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your Doc Martens?

**Holly**

I'm sad that these new ones haven't lasted very long. I feel like maybe they've just changed something and they don't make them like they used to. Because it's not like I've worn the shit out of them, and I put leather protector and all that stuff on them. Yeah, I'm really unhappy with the quality, which sucks because I waited for so long for those ones to come out.

**Georgia**

Alright well if that's everything... Oh wait, sorry. You have a wee girl don't you, how old is she?

**Holly**

5.

**Georgia**

And does she have the little ones?

**Holly**

No, I can't afford it. Well, I probably could but she fits shoes for a couple of months at a time.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Do you think when she's older would you encourage her to wear them?

**Holly**

I would just encourage her to dress however she likes. My mum always encouraged me to do that. But if she was going to get some I'd really encourage her to get them stretched first before you wear them in.

**Georgia**

So how do you stretch them? How do you get them stretched?

**Holly**

I just take them to a cobbler.

**Georgia**

So you get professionally stretched?

**Holly**

Yeah. \$10. He has them for a week, you tell him where it hurts and he stretches them in that spot. There's a guy on Marjoribanks Street in Wellington that I used to go to when I lived there, he was great.

**Georgia**

Cool. Awesome. All right. That's pretty much everything.

J

*J is a mental health advisor in her 30s who lives in Wellington. She bought her first pair of Doc Martens when she was in her late teens and she now has 9 pairs. I interviewed J at her house in Wellington, in May of 2019.*

J

Hi, I live in Wellington and I work as a mental health advisor.

**Georgia**

Well, so I am Georgia, I'm doing the interviews. And so the first question that I have is can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens, and I know you already told me in your email but if you could just say again for me.

J

Yeah, so I'm pretty sure it was in Auckland at like, a street market, and I would have been like 18 or 19, I think. Yes I was on holiday with my dad and my brother and my partner at the time, we were on a road trip. And, yeah, I found them at this market and they were black with union jacks and cost like a hundred bucks, which was a massive bargain. So, yeah.

**Georgia**

And why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands? Do you think you had any reason for doing that, because there are lots of other boots, you could have had like CAT or Timberland or something like that?

J

Yeah, cus CAT and Timberland are ugly I think! Um, I just, you know, Doc Martens... I've always loved them, I always wanted Docs as a teenager, I was like 'one day, one day, one day Docs.' So, yeah, it was inevitable. It was just, finally I happened to have the money and find a bargain.

**Georgia**

Okay. And what are your feelings on them as a brand? So when you were younger and you first really wanted them, and then when you bought them, and has that changed over time as you've gotten older?

**J**

I've probably... I've learned a lot more about the brand, over time, largely because my husband's a total nerd so he gets really obsessive about stuff. He can identify where they were made based on looking at them, he's really weird. So he tells me all sorts of stuff. Um, but I think, yeah, the fact that they've moved most of their distribution out of the UK, I think is a real shame, but they do still have one this one little branch that does everything by hand which is really amazing. I think that's super cool. And generally, I mean I've had one pair that was a bit problematic, but generally they last. They last and last and last and last and last. And so, I love that about them too that, you know, you're spending a good chunk of money but it's an investment, in a pair of boots you're going to have for a very long time. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay, so what was the problematic pair?

**J**

That was the pair I bought for the wedding, actually. Naturally! And so they're like white brogues with red hearts on the toes, and I started wearing them around the house because they were the evillest, stiffest, worst pair I've ever seen or felt, and I knew they were going to hurt, so I was wearing them inside, and within a week, the outer coating started peeling off like right on the tongue and kind of around the edges. So, I was not pleased. And I could not track down another pair in my size, literally anywhere in the world. It was just ridiculous. Or even like, going slightly up a size. Nah. So, I wore them for the wedding anyway and then I contacted the company, and they said, cut out the tongues and send them back and we'll refund your money. Rather than returning the whole boot. So I cut out the tongues which was where almost all of the peeling was, and went to a shoe repair place, and paid 50 bucks to get new tongues put in. And they're still good, I'm still wearing them.

**Georgia**

Okay, so, were you aware of any of your friends or your peers owning or wearing Doc Martens? And did that impact on your choice to buy them, do you think?

**J**

Good question. I actually... I can't remember. I know lots of my friends wanted Docs as well, you know, I think, and I can't think where that came from. I don't know, like did Kurt Cobain wear Docs? It was probably, you know, music culture. Looking back. And I actually... I can't remember if any of my friends owned Docs at that time or not, but it was definitely something that... I don't know, that it was like 'Oh those are really cool'. I do remember, you know, you'd see people in town like when I was like a younger teenager, and like getting older grown ups to buy you smokes, and people that were really funky and cool and alternative wearing Docs. And you're like 'I wanna be like her, she's really cool.'

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay. And so, did you ever identify as being part of a set subculture?

**J**

Um, everyone else identified me as the goth, I was like, token goth. I don't... I've never really kind of particularly labelled myself in any way. But I guess I'm... In all honesty I think I probably am a goth at heart. I love goth art and movies and music and books and, y'know, spooky stuff. Though I look... I think probably a lot less goth now that I'm getting older, than I used to.

**Georgia**

Yeah, grown up goth. And would you say that Doc Martens were a part of that? Do you think... Would they have been a part of that look?

**J**

Yeah, yeah, I mean, and it's funny because they're quite punk as well, and I think there's a bit of goth/punk crossover. Yeah, they're very... They're kind of weirdly diverse but there's... I think there's definitely a connection with those kind of goth/punk subcultures.

**Georgia**

And you knew that when you were buying them?

**J**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Georgia**

And so you did have a knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture. And do you think that had an impact on the fact that you liked them? On your choice to buy them?

**J**

Probably. Um, I don't know if it did consciously or not, you know, it wasn't like 'I'll buy these because then I'll be cool and I'll be a goth.'

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**J**

So, yeah, I guess you can't really extrapolate... Is it just the aesthetic that you like or is it the societal connections with that, I suppose. But yeah, probably. Yeah.

**Georgia**

And okay so big question: What impact do you think owning and wearing your Doc Martens has on your identity? Do you think it has an impact on your identity? Or do you think it's maybe the other way around, that your identity impacted on your choice to wear them in the first place?

**J**

I think it's both. I think it's probably a spiral. I won't call it a vicious spiral, it's a good spiral. I think it was the identity that made me want to wear Docs, that kind of attracted me to them and I guess I've always been drawn to the more alternative aesthetics. In saying that I think they do become... Well, I can't speak for other people, but they have become part of my identity. It is quite funny, there's something... You feel like such a dick saying it but you're like, almost proud like, when I got married wearing Docs it was like 'Yeah I'm cool because I'm getting married in Docs' and not like, girly high heels. And I wear them to work, you know, I don't... I don't wear grown up clothes to work, I wear Docs to work. And I have in every job I've had. To the point where when we told my husband's parents we were getting married his step-mum said to me, she said, 'Oh, you're going to be wearing your Doccers aren't you? We wouldn't know you if you weren't in your Doccers!' Which is just gorgeous. And I'm like wow, okay, so that's... Clearly she sees that as so much a part of my identity that that's like, a given. So I yeah I think it goes both ways.

**Georgia**

Mm hmm. Yeah. Um, so it's really interesting that your husband's step-mum said that and that was what you were kind of known for. Would you say that's the same in your friend group as well, that you're sort of known as that, as a person who has a lot of Doc Martens?

**J**

Yeah, definitely.

**Georgia**

Um, and do you have any thoughts on identity and gender in relation to Doc Martens?. Is it something that you've been aware of? Like you said, you wouldn't have worn high heels to your wedding or even to work or that kind of thing.

**J**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

And have you got any thoughts on that?

**J**

I do actually have Docs with heels.

**Georgia**

So do I!

**J**

Yeah, I've got ones with little heels, and I used to have some with really big heels. I don't know if it was age or what but my feet just went, actually, you can't wear heels anymore. So I reluctantly... I still mourn them. But yeah, they are more masculine, they have a masculine look about them. You know, they're not generally dainty feminine footwear. And it's interesting, I have had people comment on the ones with heels and gone, 'Oh, I didn't know about Docs but actually I really like the heels.' So there's... I wonder if some women are put off because they're not feminine enough.

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**J**

Hang on, tell me what the question was again!

**Georgia**

Haha, just thoughts on gender and Doc Martens.

**J**

Yeah, it's funny I own more pairs than my husband does. We were even for a while, we got really competitive. They probably started out as being much more for men, and you know, police and military and that sort of thing, and skinheads. I mean, I think it's probably grown in terms of women wearing them. And certainly, I think there's probably a much much much bigger range for women, than there is for men. Yeah, but they've got... They do have a masculine look about them.

**Georgia**

And was that part of the appeal, do you think?

**J**

I don't think so. Because even when I was probably much more alternative than I am now, or outwardly, at least. I think I always wore dresses. It's only relatively recently that I started wearing jeans. So I don't think that was it. And I had quite a high pair, and I had really funky like, red laces with spider webs that laced all the way up. I wear them to work with dresses, with work dresses. So it's never been kind of a... No... I don't think I've been particularly attracted to them... I've never dressed... Well, not since I was a wee tomboy tween, I've not dressed particularly in a masculine way.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. And...

**J**

Do you know what, sorry, I'm still thinking about that and mulling that over. Because actually I think there probably is something there, in that... Yeah, they're practical. And there's something about not being a dainty little girl that can't... You can do stuff in Docs. You can go out and you can walk and you can climb things and you can dance and you can... Do whatever you want. Yeah. So there probably is something about that, and about not being, I don't know, trapped in some high heels where you can't walk on grass and you can't walk more than 100 meters with having sore feet and having to sit down.

**Georgia**

Yeah, unless you're wearing them in. And then you get sore feet!

**J**

Oh, my god! I wear silicone dots and stick them on the back of the heels, it really helps.

**Georgia**

Everyone's got their own little tricks to wearing them in. Yeah, but I often feel as though you can have all the tricks in the world but you just have to accept that it's going to be a process, like you know it's gonna hurt for a little while.

**J**

I think there's almost a pride in that? Like it's a rite of passage, like my feet are bleeding and I earned these Docs! Yeah, my wedding Docs... When I was wearing them in, because I was wearing them every day around the house, I had lines around my calves from them.

**Georgia**

Yeah, a friend of mine got a pair of brogue ones like you're talking about but they were just plain black ones. And I remember her wearing them and, and she insisted that she walk around Glasgow with them on because she just needed to wear them in. And we got back to her flat and her feet were just mashed, they were like... There was blood through all the socks, but she was like 'I spent 200 pounds on these shoes I'm gonna wear them!'

**J**

There is some sort of perverse pride. It's like that with tattoos, you know, it's like the pain is worth it.

**Georgia**

It's funny you should say about being able to do things in Docs because that's another thing that's been quite consistent through my research, is people saying... Like I had one participant who said that she just felt really safe in them. And I wondered if that was maybe something that men would think about their shoes, necessarily?

**J**

Only the type of men that might be out getting into trouble. I suspect, it would be a different... I think women... We are much more aware of our safety all of the time. Day, night, anywhere we are, there's always that part of your brain that's aware of that. Whereas I think, for men, it's probably only if they, you know, are going out getting into situations where they know they're likely to get into a fight, or have to run from the cops or something.

**Georgia**

Yeah, my dad used to call Doc Martens 'shinkickers'.

**J**

Yeah, yeah, that's the exact thing that springs to mind. Those are the kinds of men that would think of them like that. Whereas women, we're much more aware of our safety.

**Georgia**

And it's more like 'what do I have on me that I could use if I needed to' rather than buying them for a specific purpose of having a weapon.

**J**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Georgia**

I thought that too. And so you do still own Doc Martens, and you do still wear them. Do you have other shoes that you wear as well?

**J**

This is embarrassing. Um, so I have really bad problems with my feet. I have a lot of pain with my feet. I always feel like I have to give this big justification! But basically, we were in Hong Kong on a stopover on the way back to the UK, and my feet swelled up really really badly in the heat and I had these little leather sandals that were just killing me. And so we went to the Crocs store. And to my great disgust I bought Crocs, and they don't look like Crocs, they just look like black, you know, black sandals. And I was like 'Holy fuck these are the best things I've ever worn!' And quickly became a convert. So, pretty much I wear Docs and I wear Crocs.

**Georgia**

Brilliant. Yeah, but the Docs are all right for your feet?

**J**

Most of the time. Yeah, they're quite temperamental, my feet. So it's like some days actually they're just going to be horrible and some days they're okay and certain Docs, so my wedding Docs are still really bad. I made the mistake of bringing them teaching the other day for a full day teaching, a lot of time on my feet, and that really sucked. Shouldn't have done that. But some of the others are really comfortable. And heat, I think heat plays a role.

## Georgia

Yeah, definitely. I'm the same. Like if I go somewhere super hot, my feet and my lower legs just get so sore. Okay, so do you have a favorite pair?

J

No, no, I think I fluctuate between which ones I wear a lot. So in some ways my wedding Docs are my favourite because I wore them when I got married and they're really pretty, so I do love them but they're definitely the worst to wear in terms of comfort level. I do have quite a high pair with ribbon laces that are fairly uncomfortable too. And then I've got these kind of really cool patent bright... I can't believe I actually bought something so bright. But they're like a really bright kind of aqua. And they're patent, and I hate patent. It took a lot of umming and ahing. And they're really beat up, I bought them second hand off of a work mate, and then I've just beat them up even more. But they're really comfy, really, really comfy so they're kind of my go to comfy one. And then I have a black pair that are not classic Docs that are my kind...They're like my most professional ones. Yeah. So yeah, I go through phases with which I wear the most.

## Georgia

So you don't have an all time favourite pair that you've ever owned, you would say?

J

No, but I did love my high heels.

## Georgia

I've got a pair of Persephone boots with quite chunky heels, they're oxblood red and I wear them to conferences. Because it's funny, whenever I present my research, people expect me to be wearing Doc Martens, but I don't feel as though I can wear like these ones [pointing to my purple pixie boots]. They're a bit beat up or whatever. So I'm like, okay, I needed some slightly more shiny sort of professional looking ones. And I found these high heels. I thought oh, they're great. And people just love them. They think they're brilliant. And I love them too. Yeah, they're really good, but they're as heavy as a pair of classic Doc Martens. So like wearing them around all day, you're kind of dragging these heels around.

J

Yeah, although I did used to wear New Rocks, so Docs are really lightweight compared to them. I made the mistake of... Well, I dunno if it was a mistake, but I did a boudoir photoshoot before my wedding because I heard it was really good for your body confidence. And I'm crap with cameras. I hate being photographed. And you know, I'm like really unphotogenic. So thought it would be a good idea. And yeah, and she's like, you know, bring some high heels because it's all that classic look. And I'm like well the only high heels I've got are my slightly high heeled Docs. So I rock up with these

Docs that she thought was hilarious. And then she's got me like lying on a bed, in my undies, in my nice undies! With fishnets, with your legs straight up in the air. And I have to hold it for ages, and you have to position everything in flattering angles. And I'm like 'Fucking hell!' And she says 'You wanted to wear the heavy boots!' It's like you just have to deal with it. Man, it was hard work!

**Georgia**

So not quite as relaxed as you were hoping?!

**J**

No it wasn't this like, glamorous life just lying about, it was really hard work!

**Georgia**

Hahaha. So you don't have a favourite pair but you do have lots of pairs. So, this is quite a big question: Why do you think you love them so much? Why do you think you're so attached to them? What makes them special to you?

**J**

That's a really hard question. They just look really cool! Yeah, they look really cool. I think it's that thing about quality too. I'm really... I don't like letting go of things? I get very attached to things. I remember when I used to buy really cheap boots, and I'd buy a really cool pair from like Number 1 Shoe Warehouse, really cheap, then within however many months they'd disintegrated. And then I'm like 'Now I have to find another pair of boots!' and it's just torture, I hate it. I hate buying new handbags, wallet, you know, I'm just such a baby about it. I will spend ages trying to find... I don't want to own 50... Obviously Docs are an exception! But I want to find the one and then I'll just use it till it dies. And then I'll sulk when I have to find something else because nothing will be as good. So I think I love the fact that you can buy a pair of Docs and they will last you a phenomenally long time. Yeah, you can almost always rely on them being really good quality. And they're just really cool!

**Georgia**

So the fact that they last sort of matches your sensibility as a person?

**J**

I think so, yeah. And I don't know... They just look great. I don't know. I think the fact that they're really distinctive, like almost all Docs are instantly recognizable. There's knockoffs but you can't miss them. They're just so recognizable. They have their own look. But then they can be really, really different. So you can have ones with heels and you can have ones that look really different. But they're still very distinctly, clearly Doc Martens.

**Georgia**

Okay. And so do you think wearing your Doc Martens makes you feel different? Like do you feel different in those shoes than other shoes? Or how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel?

**J**

Probably more badass. As cheesy as that sounds. Yeah. It is that thing about feeling a bit more... I don't know... Robust. Like, yeah, you feel stronger, or safer or tougher in Docs. Yeah, even at work. I think I've never been particularly good at fitting into mainstream what you're supposed to wear and how you're supposed to look, and so even though I'm much more workplace acceptable looking now than I used to be there's still something about Docs. It's like, you know, it's almost like a little bit rebellious. Like I'm not quite fitting in. I'm not quite dressing corporate. Yeah. I might have a nice professional looking dress but I've still got my Docs.

**Georgia**

Yeah, it's those weird kind of old fashioned views on what's acceptable in the workplace.

**J**

Yeah like tattoos, tattoos in the workplace are so polarising.

**Georgia**

Yeah I've got loads of tattoos. And I've never covered them up when I went for job interviews because if you're the kind of workplace that cares about it, I don't think I want to work for you.

**J**

No, no. And it's a lie because I'm not going to come to work wearing long sleeves to cover up, I'm just selling you a lie. And I'm not a full sleeve person, I would die, I would overheat so.

**Georgia**

Haha yeah, exactly! So are there some situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**J**

So I used to work in education, teaching mental health and addiction workshops. And we did really corporate workshops. So we did one up in Auckland we were told 'this is very corporate' and so I didn't wear Docs. I wore these weird shoes that like... I like, but I've probably worn twice since. So

occasionally, for things like that. The vast majority of the time though, I might not... You know, I'll wear the tidier ones. So I do some contract work where you have to be quite mindful about presentation. And I still wear Docs but obviously I'm not wearing the really beat up bright aqua ones, I wear the tidy black ones. At my students' graduation I deliberately wore my Docs shoes which I almost never wear because they hurt like hell, but one of my students really wanted to see them. And she was so excited. So that was a student, you know, that was substantially older than me. Proper grown up. And when she came up to get her certificate she was like 'Oh, my God, are those your Docs?! Oh, they're so cool!' It was really funny. Yeah, it would be unusual that I wouldn't wear them except for comfort.

**Georgia**

So only really if someone specifically told you not you?

**J**

Yeah, probably. Or if I was insecure. Sometimes if I'm doing something, particularly with work, where I'm a little bit concerned about perceptions and stuff then I'll wear longer sleeves, I won't cover all my tattoos but some of them. Very occasionally, I don't do it anymore, but I used to sometimes swap my nose ring for a stud. So in those instances I would consider it. So it's probably more about my own concerns about people's perceptions, because I think being young and female in an industry... Any industry, really, that's not predominantly younger. I mean, health is full of women, but younger women not so much. And I don't have clinical qualifications so at times that think about credibility and how you're perceived has been a real barrier for me. So sometimes I would weigh that up. Yeah. But not really anymore.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. So you maybe thought back then that if you wore your Doc Martens you might be perceived as less professional or less able?

**J**

Yeah, yeah. Less professional. I think that thing about being young. And if you're young and alternative, that's almost like two strikes against you.

**Georgia**

Mmhmm.

**J**

So it might be viewed as almost emphasizing that you are younger. Yeah. And might be seen as being less professional.

**Georgia**

And have you experienced any notable reactions from other people when you were wearing your Doc Martens? Do you find that people comment on them? Positively or negatively?

**J**

Yes, but I don't think I've ever had a negative comment that I can remember. Even at our wedding. Or at least nobody said anything to my face at our wedding! Lots of positive comments. Yeah, I mean, I've had people say very loudly, right in front of me but not to me, 'Oh, look at her shoes!' to someone else. And I'm like, 'Hello, I'm right here.' When I worked at WelTec there was a librarian in there who wore Docs all the time. And she once almost chased me across the library when I was short cutting through to get to a class, chased me down to ask me 'Where did you get those Docs!? They're amazing!' which was really funny. And I was like 'I'm really keen to chat but my students will be waiting!' So lots of people have commented at lots of different times. Definitely strangers. Probably not only women, but possibly more women than men. Although I think generally any aspect of my appearance, I probably get more comments from women. Or compliments from women than men. But yeah, both men and women. Both. Yeah, I've had lots of compliments and no negative comments that I can remember. Possibly from my parents when I was teenager but that's about it.

**Georgia**

So do you think your parents were not as keen on you having them?

**J**

I think my dad quite liked them. In fact after I bought that pair when we were on holiday, my first pair, later on he kept trying to say that he had bought them for me. And I was like 'No, you didn't, I paid for them. But if you want to give me the hundred bucks, that's fine!' My dad was kind of weird. He sometimes bought me some quite alternative clothes and stuff. And quite liked some of the really weird stuff I wore. My step-mum did not, really did not. I don't remember her ever really having a problem with Docs, though that was probably the least... You know, if you think about the hierarchy of the things I did: bright pink hair, dog collars. Docs were probably quite far down the list of things that upset her!

**Georgia**

Hahaha yeah, okay. So do you notice when you see other people wearing them?

**J**

Yes.

**Georgia**

Yeah, you kind of zoom in on them?

**J**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

And do you think that would have an impact on your instant opinion of them?

**J**

Yes! Hahaha, immediately. I think people are better if they're wearing them. Which is a terrible thing to say. But I am, I'm like 'Oh they're really cool, they're wearing Docs.' It's terrible. But it's like 'Oh, there's someone that I could be friends with.' Yeah. You warm to them immediately. And then they might turn out to be a dick anyway. But yeah, it definitely does. I think it does. I do have an instant perception of somebody.

**Georgia**

Ah, yeah. You've got at least one thing in common with that person. Yeah. Which is a pretty normal way to connect with people I reckon. There's been so many people say to me 'Oh, it's terrible to judge people on their clothes.' But there's often nothing else you can judge somebody on, you know, it's the first thing you see. So it's a totally normal thing to do. And it's not even necessarily a positive or negative thing. It's just that categorize people, naturally.

**J**

Oh, yeah, I totally hear that.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So, you got married in your Doc Martens? That's really cool. And was it a decision that you made together, the two of you?

**J**

Oh, that's a really good question. I don't even remember. Because he wore Docs as well. But I don't... It was almost a given, I think.

**Georgia**

Right.

**J**

I don't think we really ummed and ahhed to much about it.

**Georgia**

There wasn't even really a discussion?

**J**

I don't think so. I think probably the first discussion we had was when his step-mum said about me, you know, wearing Docs and I think after we got off Skype (because they were in the UK), after we got off Skype to them I was kind of like 'Oh, that's really good. That's really good to know.' But it wasn't ever really a dilemma. Actually, I bought the pair with the smaller heels thinking I would wear them for the wedding. And then I stumbled across the shoe version of the white with the hearts. And I was like 'Oh, man, if they were boots, that'd be perfect.' And then I wondered if they were boots, and I looked them up. And then I found them and they were fairly expensive. And I'd already bought this other pair that were on their way from wherever I got them. And so I was like 'Oh I can't buy another pair.' And it was actually Gary [her husband] that was like 'Just buy them, just buy them, don't even worry. Just buy them.' So yeah, I bought them before pretty much anything else. And so then I had to get my dress designed around them. I went to a dressmaker and said...

**Georgia**

Oh really?

**J**

Yeah! I said 'I've got these boots.' Yeah.

**Georgia**

So they were really central to the whole wedding?

**J**

Yeah, yeah. So my dress was a mullet dress, that was shorter at the front and then longer at the back. Because I'm like, why would you have such fabulous boots if no-one's going to see them?!

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay, brilliant. That's really cool. And is there anything else that you think I should know about your relationship with your Docs? Anything else you want to tell me?

**J**

It's not actually about MY Doc Martens but it would have been... Yeah, when I was maybe early 20s. And there was three of us that were really good friends and one of the friends, her dad took her to Europe and the UK on this big trip. And she bought presents for me and the other friend while she was away. And she bought my other friend a pair of Docs, like these really cool limited edition, really cool Docs. And she bought me a witch puppet that I think cost the same as the Docs and I just remember being like, 'What the fuck is that?' And you have to be really grateful and say thank you so much. It was hideous. It was so hideous. And I'm obviously still... More than 10 years later I'm like 'What the fuck was she thinking?!' That friend got Docs...

**Georgia**

Hahaha, still mad about it.

**J**

Little bit, little bit. Obviously I made up for it by buying heaps more pairs myself but...

**Georgia**

Haha yeah. So you obviously weren't quite there yet as the Doc Martens lady?

**J**

Not at that point! Clearly my other friend had established herself more firmly. The friend that got given the Docs, we're still really good friends, she was one of my wedding crew. But the other friend, we're no longer friends. And that's not the reason why! Just to be clear. But we had this massive fight when we were early 20s or something and my first thought was like, 'Oh, thank God, I can get rid of that fucking puppet!' I felt like I had to keep it out of obligation in case she ever came to my house but I was so relieved to get rid of it.

**Georgia**

Hahaha, and does your friend still have those Docs?

**J**

No! No, similar to my wedding ones, the coating sort of disintegrated, it's a shame.

**Georgia**

So you mentioned earlier that you're aware of the fact that they have they still have their Made In England factory. Do you tend to try and buy from that part of the brand or are you not so fussed about it?

**J**

If I can, then yes, but they are way more expensive generally. I don't know if I have any. I bought some Made In England second hand that were very cool. The soles were mint, absolutely mint, but I put them on and I don't know. I don't know how on earth somebody does this but they were worn in and like so hard on the inside. Like really, really, really insanely worn. But the outside was like they had never been worn, I mean how does someone really even do that?! Like just wearing them all day vacuuming or something! So my feet didn't like them. So I got rid of them. Yeah, I sold them. So the vast majority of mine are not Made In England.

**Georgia**

I mean the Made In England ones are a lot more expensive, obviously. All right. I think that's pretty much everything, thanks!

## **Janine**

*Janine is a science communicator in her 20s who lives in Glasgow. She has worn Doc Martens since she was a very young child, and she currently has 4 pairs. I interviewed Janine in a café in the West End of Glasgow, in July of 2019. Janine and I used to work together when I lived in Glasgow.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Janine**

My mum bought me my first pair of Ravel which was a shoe shop that went into administration. She used to work there with my auntie Cathy and so she bought them there. They were black and floral, I was maybe 3?

## **Georgia**

Aw really, tiny!

## **Janine**

Yeah, they were my first pair, so they were bought for me.

## **Georgia**

So was your mum a Doc Martens wearer?

## **Janine**

No, no. My dad never wore them but he was into a lot of punk music that would be associated with people who wear Doc Martens. So was my uncle Scott, who was my aunt Cathy's husband. So I guess my dad was into that culture and style but he never wore them himself, he was always more of a trainers kinda guy.

## **Georgia**

So when did you buy your own pair?

## **Janine**

Maybe 2014 was the first time I bought my own pair because I'd always had them as a gift. They were the 1960 style shoe, plain black, from the Doc Martens store in Glasgow.

## **Georgia**

And why did you choose them over other brands?

## **Janine**

I just like chunkier shoes. I'm quite heavy on my feet so they're good for that. I've never really liked my legs, they're quite chunky, and I think it balances them out to have a bigger shoe. I always thought they were really cool and a bit edgy, and I always wanted to be that, but I was a bit of a sheep in school. I ran with the pure popular crowd in school but then I'd go home and I'd be a completely different person. I didn't wear them out with everybody else, they were always something I wore with my family. I didn't want to be associated with being goth or emo or whatever,

I just wanted an easy life and didn't want anybody to give me any hassle. So they were part of a pure split personality, which I didn't really realise until I started telling you!

**Georgia**

Okay. So why didn't you wear them with your mates, do you think? There's that very Scottish thing which might be quite hard to translate to New Zealand when I'm writing about this, but being a goth or an emo in Scotland was SUCH a bad thing, wasn't it?

**Janine**

It just wasn't cool.

**Georgia**

Even when emo was at its height in the rest of the world it was still such a bad thing wasn't it?

**Janine**

It wasn't popular here. And it wasn't that I wanted to be pure popular, I think I just wanted to be accepted. In P7 [aged 10/11] I had been bullied, right? And it really messed about with me and I never wanted to go through that again. So when I went to high school I built up this pure tough exterior, which was a total front, if someone had shouted boo at me I'd have ran, do you know what I mean? To the point where I was quite cruel to some people, I was quite nasty to some people as a way of being like, 'Don't mess with me or I'll batter you.' So knowing what it's like to be bullied I just felt like I couldn't be anything other than what the norm was because otherwise I would have to go through all of that trauma that experienced previously.

**Georgia**

Right, yeah. So I'm assuming you weren't aware of any of your friends or peers wearing them?

**Janine**

None of my friends in my group wore them. I guess when we started getting older, maybe 16 and 17, they started to become a bit cooler. But you would just wear them with your jeans and dress them up a bit like a rock chick, that was okay. I noticed the 'outsiders', whatever you want to call them, wearing them, but they were never as mainstream as they are now.

**Georgia**

So do you think that seeing people starting to wear them had an impact on your choice to wear them?

**Janine**

Oh, yeah. I started wearing them more freely rather than just restricting myself to wearing that clothing at home or in family situations. I began to not worry about wearing them in school or with my school friends. There was a switch at the age of 16 because a lot of the people that I hung about with at school left school early, whereas I stayed on to do my Highers. So I got some new friends and had changed a couple of classes. And they were more into the music I was into, more indie, some stuff a bit heavier than that. Then I started going out to clubs that weren't dance clubs, they were more indie clubs, and I was doing more things that actually suited the kind of person that I had previously only been able to be at home. That helped bring me out of my shell because I could wear them with those people.

**Georgia**

Yeah, great. So do you or did you ever identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Janine**

No, nothing.

**Georgia**

Did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with those kinds of subcultures?

**Janine**

Yeah. I would never have thought of it as being super strict, but I did always associate it with skinhead and punk. My uncle Scott was a skinhead when he was younger, he still is now even though he's 50. I guess from watching certain films and stuff, like Quadrophenia, it was a mod film but there were skinheads in that and they would all wear that style. So the result was an association of Doc Martens with those subcultures.

**Georgia**

And do you think that your knowledge of their association with subculture had any impact on your choice to wear them?

**Janine**

I liked them because I thought that was cool, and I guess that was associated with cool music. There's always a want to belong to something, although I never wanted to belong to those groups specifically. I guess it would have impacted on the fact that I wouldn't wear them around other people who weren't into that kind of thing.

**Georgia**

It must have been really hard to be that kind of, split person?

**Janine**

Yeah. I honestly never thought about it until years later when I was maybe 21. I'd be at home listening to Morrissey with dad and then be in school listening to dance music. It was mental, but I truly didn't realise it. I was just trying to fit in. I was so scared of being bullied.

**Georgia**

Yeah, I think that's so normal at school though, everyone's trying to be someone that they're not. Okay, so what impact does owning and wearing your Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or do you think it's the other way around: did you choose to wear Doc Martens because of who you were in the first place?

**Janine**

I think they did impact on my identity. I guess when I first started wearing them more freely, I did feel a bit cooler and a bit edgier. Maybe a bit more stand out. But then in other ways I was blending in with another group that was going to indie bars and rock bars and stuff. I think I started to feel a bit more free, not worrying quite so much about what other people think of me. I would never, ever think for a minute, 'I'm not going to wear Docs because somebody might think something' now. That definitely disappeared. So it has impacted on my identity. They just made me feel a bit better

because I was wearing something that I really liked and that I knew was a controversial piece of clothing at one time. I just started to feel like I could really do what I wanted.

**Georgia**

So do you think that they were a part of that process of you starting to care less about what other people think of you?

**Janine**

Yeah, definitely. Clothing was, and Doc Martens are a part of that clothing, so yeah. Changing my style and wearing more gothy dresses, and skater dresses with tights and your Docs and stuff.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So do you wear them quite regularly?

**Janine**

Yeah. Especially in the winter. I recently got a pair of Doc Martens sandals as well, I got them sent over to Thailand [where Janine had been living] as a wee gift. So yeah, I still wear them all the time. I wear the shoes too. I've never thrown a pair away apart from one because they just last forever.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So how many pairs do you have?

**Janine**

I have 4 pairs. Two pairs of boots, one pair of shoes and a pair of sandals.

**Georgia**

Did your mum keep any of the pairs you had when you were wee?

**Janine**

I don't know if she still has them, I think she might have given them away. I'll need to ask her.

**Georgia**

Okay. So tell me about your favourite pair of Doc Martens? What are they like? Why do you love them?

**Janine**

I wore them today! This green pair. They're a bit burst here [Janine points out the marks on the front sole] there's a story about how that happened as well. They were the best pair first off because I didn't have to wear them in, they're so soft, they're just perfect. I do like dark colours, but I don't always want to wear black, and so I saw these pop up on an advert and then my mum got them for me as a Christmas present. They're super comfy, I didn't have to wear them in, I can wear them in all weathers even though they're suede. You just put a bit of protector spray on them and they're good to go. I was working in Edinburgh a couple of years ago and we got snowed off for a couple of days. I was with some people from the Science Festival and we went and climbed Arthur's Seat. These were the only shoes I had: it was these or trainers! It was obviously freezing, so my boots got pure rigid and frozen over which I hadn't really realised, so I took them off to dry in the house and they heated

up so fast that the rubber just split. I did ask Doc Martens to replace them, but they said no! So now I just have to love them with a backstory.

**Georgia**

That's amazing, it's so cool, I've never seen that before! Okay. How does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel differently wearing them than you do in other shoes?

**Janine**

Yeah. I feel bolder when I wear them. Even though I've never really considered them a bold fashion choice necessarily. When I wear them I feel a bit... Punky? Because I know I'm wearing them for me, and they're just so versatile, you can wear them with everything. But I do feel a bit bolder when I wear them, especially compared to trainers or whatever which are quite casual. Even though Docs are quite casual too, you just feel a bit more dressed up in some kind of style when you wear them. And when I wear them people always notice them, I'll quite often get compliments.

**Georgia**

Right. Are you a heels person, have you ever been a heels person?

**Janine**

No. I would have for nights out. Not so much now, I guess in the past I would have worn them a lot for nights out, but it's become more acceptable to be more casual, praise the lord! If I'm wearing a heel now, I'll go for a comfy block heel. No more stilettos, thank god!

**Georgia**

Yeah, uhuh. Okay. Are there any situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Janine**

I guess formal occasions. Maybe like a wedding or a party that has specified formal wear. You can still dress them up with nice dresses and look quite edgy and cool though. And maybe on hotter days because they're heavy shoes. But other than that I don't think there's many times I wouldn't wear them. I'd never look at someone and be like, 'They wore Docs here, really?'

**Georgia**

Okay. So have you experience any notable reactions to you wearing your Doc Martens?

**Janine**

Yeah. Especially the ones that are a bit different. So because these ones are khaki and suede people do notice them all the time. And people love the sandals, all the time people tell me how lovely they are. I went to a barbeque the other day and like 5 people must have said something to me about them.

**Georgia**

Which ones are they?

**Janine**

They're the pink metallic ones. They actually get marked really easily so they can look a bit tatty and because they're not real leather it doesn't come off as well. So if I was going to get them again I'd definitely get a darker pair. But I still fling them on and once they're on I don't really care. I think if you dress them well then people seem to receive them really well, you just look really cool and put together.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So you haven't had any negative reactions from people?

**Janine**

I don't think so. I've not had anything directly negative said about them, but I would imagine there would be some people who might think they weren't good enough to wear to certain places. Maybe I wouldn't wear them to work? I don't know if anything would get said about that.

**Georgia**

Okay. So do you have any thoughts on gender and identity and Doc Martens?

**Janine**

For a long time they were probably just associated with men. They are chunky, they're sturdy, they're made for durability, and I feel like women's fashion has never been made to last. Our shoes are always really flimsy – for a long time we were all walking about wearing those little ballet flats. This isn't Doc Martens related but I used to work for Clarks and at one point these had these adverts up that got complained about: the boys shoes were 'built for kicking and running' and whatever, and the girls shoes were 'built for looking pretty' or something like that. And it was good that people did complain about it because I'm like, 'Girls like to kick as well.' More girls are wearing them now but I think it's considered more of an edgy thing for girls to do, whereas for a guy, he's just wearing a pair of boots. Maybe other people think that you're trying to make a statement, but they wouldn't think that about a man because it's not as bold a choice. If we want to get up and put on a pair of steel toe capped boots then we should be able to do that, but again, they're associated with trades that are male dominated. So I don't personally think it is a bold choice, but other people might do. As is the case with a lot of feminist issues. I don't... I don't think we should use adjectives like masculine and feminine for clothing, but then it's kind of... Weird, I guess, because I would use those words too, because I've grown up conditioned to do so, you know? It's always 'bold' things that are masculine and feminine stuff is always flimsy and light.

**Georgia**

Mmhmm. Yeah, totally. So do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Janine**

I think I do, yeah. Probably just because I like them so much as an item of clothing. I think as well it's nice to get inspiration from other people for how you might wear them. You maybe don't realise you're doing that but I think we do pick up bits of style from things that you see. So yeah, I do notice them but never in a judgey way.

**Georgia**

Yeah, which brings me onto the second part of that question, which is to ask if seeing someone wearing Doc Martens has an impact on the kind of person that you think they are?

**Janine**

No, no. I really don't think so. At one point I might have thought of skinheads or whatever but now I think they really are for everyone. There's a way to wear them for everyone and that's really cool.

**Georgia**

Cool! That's pretty much it. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your relationship with Doc Martens?

**Janine**

Actually, I think my relationship with them might be changing, since we've all started to become a bit more conscious about how things are made. I don't know if you've heard of this app called Good On You? You type in a brand and it shows you how ethical they are in lots of different ways. It tells you about the company and tells you about how they score on things like their labour, their environmental impact etc. and Doc Martens actually doesn't have a great rating on it. Of course, they use leather which does impact their rating, but also their labour isn't great and they aren't that environmentally friendly. So if I wanted a new pair I think I would really have to start considering that and potentially making a move to something similar but more ethical. I was actually just really gutted when I saw it to be honest with you, I feel like they really could do better with it because they have the money, they're such a big brand. It's so sad because I love Docs, and I'll probably always wear them, there will always be a space for them in my wardrobe. But can you really justify unethical production practices just because you love them?

**Georgia**

Yeah, it's really difficult isn't it? Right, well if that's everything, thanks so much

## Jo and Morgan

*Jo and Morgan are mother and daughter and they live in Helensville, north of Auckland. Jo is in her 40s and is a professional embroiderer. She is from England but has lived in Aotearoa New Zealand since she was in her 20s. She bought her first pair of Docs when she was a teenager and she now owns 3 pairs. Morgan is 16 and owns two pairs of Docs which she got when she was 16. I interviewed them both together in their home in Helensville, in June of 2019.*

### **Georgia**

Okay Jo, so where and when did you buy your first pair of Doc Martens? Do you remember?

### **Jo**

Yeah, I was probably 19. And they were black 10 hole boots. And I bought them from a shop, don't know the name of it, in Colchester in Essex. And I got 10 hole boots because they were the same price as the eight hole boots. And I felt like I was getting two holes for free!

### **Georgia**

Okay, and so what roughly what year was that?

### **Jo**

Oh, would have been about 1992.

### **Georgia**

All right. And do you remember when you got your first pair?

### **Morgan**

Was it two years ago?

### **Jo**

Yeah it must be, you're in year 10.

### **Morgan**

Yeah, I kind of got two at the same time because Mum bought me a pair for school because my feet had stopped growing. And I bought myself a pair, I bought my cherries. From Pat Menzies in Auckland.

**Jo**

Because the rule was she could have Dr. Martens when her feet stopped growing because they're expensive shoes, so I said if her feet didn't grow for a whole year then she could have Dr. Martens.

**Georgia**

Okay, so Jo, did you have to save up for your first pair?

**Jo**

My mom was with me. So I presume maybe we went halves. Maybe I needed shoes and she would have said 'I'll pay this much.' But they're so much cheaper in England compared to here. So I suspect we probably went halves.

**Georgia**

Was there any resistance from your mum to you having Doc Martens?

**Jo**

No, no.

**Georgia**

Okay. And why did you choose them over other brands? Why did you want them?

**Jo**

Because I was at the end of a punk phase. I was a punk when I was a younger teenager. And I'd just started... Oh, this would have been my second year of training. I'm an embroiderer. So I was at the Royal School of Needle Work, which is at Hampton Court Palace. And I think I just wanted a bit of a remnant of that punk... I just wanted to kind of hold on to that punk bit.

**Georgia**

So did you not feel that embroidery was very punk at the time?

**Jo**

No, not really!

**Georgia**

Because it's become quite cool now! Those kind of crafts have become really quite cool.

**Jo**

It is quite cool, yeah. But the Royal School of Needlework certainly... Yeah. Wasn't very punk.

**Georgia**

Great, okay. And what about you Morgan, why did you choose Doc Martens?

**Morgan**

I always feel really silly when I think about it... I think it's because my mum and dad had them as well. It was just kind of a family thing I guess.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay. So you just grew up in an environment where...

**Morgan**

Where they were just kinda there. Also because I feel like all the other shoes that people at school wear, like Vans and stuff, they generally have to buy a new pair every two terms. They're just not meant to be worn every day.

**Georgia**

And Jo, were you happy that Morgan was venturing into the world of Doc Martens?

**Jo**

Yeah, absolutely! It was like a rite of passage. And it honestly felt like that when we went to Pat Menzie's, it honestly felt like a rite of passage. Because from that time I've always had a pair, if not multiple pairs. So I was really pleased that at least one of my children was going to go down the Dr. Martens route because my son, Kingston, he's not a Dr. Martens wearer.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. So when you first bought them did you have any particular associations with the brand? Did you have any things that you knew were associated with Doc Martens and has that changed over time?

**Jo**

I must have had some visual thought about it. Because otherwise, why would I have hunted them down? I can't remember having that. But it certainly wasn't in the house. Like, my parents certainly weren't Dr. Martens wearers. But I kind of... You then become a bit of a Dr Marten person, I think. And then I think you just learn more about it. I loved the fact that at that time, they were still made in England. And there's still some that are made in England, which I really like. I really like the fact that you can still get some that are made in England. I like that about them, that they champion that made in England thing. So I must have known something about them.

**Georgia**

Did you have any peers or friends or anything that wore them?

**Jo**

No, no, I wouldn't have had any.

**Georgia**

But you said you were interested in punk?

**Jo**

Yeah, so I think it must have been a visual thing.

**Georgia**

Yeah. And same question for you, Morgan?

**Morgan**

Probably just punk and rock music I guess.

**Georgia**

So you kind of knew about the subcultural association that they have?

**Morgan**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. And did you ever identify as being part of a set subculture in that way?

**Jo**

Oh, I think I did. Yeah. Because when people see that you've got Dr. Martens on they kind of acknowledge you. Whereas I don't think other shoe brands do quite so much. And you've certainly had that in the shop, that people have seen that she [Morgan] has got Dr. Martens on and then start a conversation, like 'Oh, God, I had those when I was your age.' And so you do instantly feel part of a club. And I'm always surprised when people say, 'Oh, they really cool boots' and I go 'Oh, they're Dr. Martens' and they don't know what they are.

**Georgia**

Really?

**Jo**

And I've had that a few times.

**Georgia**

I don't think I've ever met anybody who hadn't heard of them, that's wild. So you were a punk, you said, when you a little teenager? And did you stick with that into your late teens?

**Jo**

No, I wasn't angry enough really to be a successful punk I don't think!

**Georgia**

More the aesthetic?

**Jo**

Yeah, it was more about the look. And to be an older punk I think you need to actually be a bit angry about things. And I really wasn't. I just kind of continued... I have remnants of punk.

**Georgia**

Okay. Yeah. And Morgan, have you ever considered yourself part of any kind of subculture or group like that?

**Morgan**

Probably theatre kids? Because that's like a really big family. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Are there other people in theatre who wear Doc Martens as well?

**Morgan**

Yes! I have a friend, she's a genuine punk rock baby, so her dad's a rocker and her mum is a punk. So she had the same sort of influence as me I guess.

**Georgia**

And are there other people at your school who wear them?

**Morgan**

Maybe a couple, not very many.

**Georgia**

Right, so not heaps. Alright, cool. And good to know that they're still kind of... Slightly different!

**Jo**

Oh, I know. And then a friend of Morgan's bought a pair because she thought the cool kids wore Dr. Martens, and she didn't like them, she hardly wears them.

**Morgan**

It's because they hurt her.

**Georgia**

You've kinda got to power through it.

**Jo**

Yeah, just got to go with it.

**Georgia**

Yeah, did you have to wear yours in? [Morgan shakes her head] Really? Did you have to wear your first pair in?

**Jo**

No, I can't remember having to. I just put them on: Great.

**Georgia**

Oh, my goodness. Lucky. So you kind of did know about Doc Martens being a part of subculture. And hey, this is quite a big question for you both but what impact has owning wearing Doc Martens had on your identity? Or do you maybe think it's the other way around? Or cyclical? Did your identity impact on your choice to wear Doc Martens? Bit of a chicken and an egg one.

**Jo**

I would say... Because having had the conversation with you, I'm like starting to think why do I... So I wear Dr. Martens because... Because of what I do for a living, I like the fact that I don't look like an embroiderer. So the Dr. Martens kind of help with that whole... Well, I don't think 'edgy' is the right word, but 'edginess' of me as a person. As opposed to what I do for a living.

**Georgia**

Right. So there's a kind of intentional juxtaposition?

**Jo**

Yeah. Yeah. So I intentionally don't look like people expect me to look. So this afternoon, for example, I did a talk at a W.I [Women's Institute] And I wore... I've got rainbow Dr. Martens. And I

wore my rainbow Dr. Martens. Because I like the fact that they had, on a little brochure, 'Oh we've got Jo Dixey coming who is an embroiderer.' And then I rock in not looking how they were expecting me to. So I intentionally want to look different, yeah, that's right.

**Georgia**

And you think that there's an affinity with that subversiveness with that brand?

**Jo**

Yeah. Because they're probably slightly chunkier than normal boots. But also people that know about Dr. Martens put them in the punk/ skinhead/ kind of edgy category. And I really like that, because I like that they put me in that little box.

**Georgia**

Okay. Cool. And what about you? [Morgan pauses]

**Jo**

I think it helps you be who you want to be though?

**Morgan**

Yeah, but I don't know if I was already like that and it's just what a chose to wear. Do you know what I mean? I feel like it was just kind of me anyway.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so it's a kind of natural extension of you.

**Jo**

I think you like being a little bit different to everybody else.

**Morgan**

Probably.

**Jo**

And that's quite a subtle... Your footwear is quite a subtle way of saying I'm not quite the same as everybody else. Like at school, when you have to wear a uniform, and you have to do everything else. At least your shoes... They have to be black, but they can have a little bit of an impact on your identity.

**Morgan**

I still feel like it hasn't changed my identity.

**Jo**

Oh, no. No, no, I think it's just solidified it.

**Morgan**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

So it's like a good way for you to show that you're a wee bit different from other people, but without doing anything mad! Or, you know, doing stuff that you're probably not allowed to do at school? [Morgan nods] Okay, do you have any thoughts on Doc Martens and gender? Or have you had any notable experiences, any comments or anything like that?

**Jo**

Um, no, I've never had... No, because I have a shaved head! So what I have on my feet would not be what people comment on.

**Georgia**

Would you say it's a different decision for a woman to put on a pair of Doc Martens than for a man to?

**Jo**

Oh, I think it probably is because they're bulkier than most women's shoes. So I think maybe you have to be comfortable with stepping away from what people expect a woman to wear. You have to be comfortable with doing that before you put them on. So I think I probably have always been comfortable with that, so I didn't really think about it. But I would say it probably is quite a big decision.

**Georgia**

Because they aren't particularly what you would call traditionally 'feminine' shoes.

**Jo**

No, not traditionally. So I don't think I think about it too much. But I can see it would be a big decision. Because it's not your normal choice of 'girly' shoes.

**Georgia**

Okay. What do you think Morgan?

**Morgan**

The only comment I've had is about the price of them. Because like, I'm 16, on a minimum wage job, I feel like some people think I didn't buy them myself. But then I also feel like it probably is a big decision for some people because they do look quite different. Like it's a bit of an investment for something that is a bit different, and people might think it's weird.

**Georgia**

Like you said you had a friend who bought them because she thought she liked the way they look and then just doesn't wear them. That's a lot of money to spend on something you don't wear.

**Jo**

I think because she could see the 'cool kids' wear Dr. Martens so she wanted to be in that club

**Morgan**

I just think it wasn't really the aesthetic she was looking for.

**Georgia**

Okay. Cool. How many pairs have you had do you think? Did you have more than one at a time? Or did you wait until one wore out?

**Jo**

To start with I only had one at a time. So I probably had... 5 pairs? I now have more than one at a time. And it's a good **Job** I don't live closer to a Dr. Martens shop. So, yeah, so probably I've had maybe five.

**Georgia**

Okay, and Morgan you've just had the two. And so what is your favourite pair of all of the ones that you've had?

**Jo**

It would probably be the pair that I'm wearing at the time. I've had metallic gold ones, which I loved. And I still love them. And they've got a split in the sole. And I'm just gonna wear them in the summer. But now I've got rainbow ones, which I also love. I've got a pair of cherries and I love those too. So I don't think I could pick a favourite.

**Georgia**

No. Okay, and so out of those three, why do you love those ones so? Why are they special to you?

**Jo**

I love the rainbow ones because I love colour. And I love coloured shoes. And I love the kind of mix up of those bright colours on a pair of Dr. Martens. So the shape is that kind of... Not aggressive, but really strong shape. But then there's a rainbow on them and I really like that. And part of the sale of those went to LGBTQ youth. I thought that was really cool. And I love the cherries just because they're kind of iconic.

**Georgia**

And Morgan out of your two what are your favourite ones?

**Morgan**

Probably the cherries because they're the iconic ones, and also they go with more other colours.

**Georgia**

And I guess if your black ones are your school ones...

**Morgan**

Yeah. I still like them but I think I'm more of a boot person than a shoe person

**Georgia**

Okay, the black ones are shoes then

**Jo**

Yeah, not allowed boots for school. The yellow stitching is kind of a little bit on the edge there as well.

**Georgia**

Yeah, we weren't allowed them at my school. Alright, how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel?

**Jo**

Um, it makes me feel like I could do anything. So if your car's broken down, it's fine, you can deal with there. And if you end up that you have to walk up a gravel road, then you can do that. Like I've always got the right shoes. So, capable. But also, you could go out for dinner and have Dr Martens on and be fine too. I remember I was working in Dublin once and the boss said, 'Oh, we're going to go out.' We went out one night, and I said, 'I'll just have to go and put my boots on.' And he said, 'Why'd you need to put your boots on?' And I said, 'Just in case I have to run.' But I think it makes you feel like you can do anything because you've got comfy shoes on and you don't have to worry about your shoes. You know you're not gonna sink into the ground or break your neck.

**Georgia**

Okay. How about you Morgan?

**Morgan**

Kick ass!

**Georgia**

Awesome. Okay. And do you feel different wearing Doc Martens than you do wearing other shoes?

**Jo**

Uh, yeah, I think I probably do. Because I have got other shoes that I wear sometimes. I think I probably feel less me when I don't have my Dr. Martens on. I think my Dr. Martens make me feel me. And I've got my other shoes on it's like I'm pretending to be somebody else.

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay. Interesting. What about your Morgan?

**Morgan**

When I'm not wearing Doc Martens I feel worried that my shoes are going to break, the sole always just feels a bit dodgy.

**Georgia**

So once you've started wearing them other shoes feel really flimsy compared to them?

**Morgan**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay, and are there any situations where you don't or wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Jo**

I don't wear my Dr. Martens if I've got a skirt on. I don't personally like... I mean I like it on other people, actually. But I don't like the look on me of a skirt and Dr. Martens. So I tend to wear other shoes when I've got a skirt on. But that's not very often. But there would be no occasion as such... If I've got trousers on then I've got Dr Martens on.

**Georgia**

Right. So there's no like social reason why you wouldn't wear them?

**Jo**

No, definitely not.

**Georgia**

Okay, what about you Morgan?

**Morgan**

Um... the school ball. Just because other people can be shitty.

**Georgia**

So that's more to do with other people than yourself?

**Jo**

We're just having that conversation now, aren't we?

**Georgia**

So if it was up to you...?

**Morgan**

If it was up to me I probably wouldn't care because I wore them to prize-giving last year and it was fine. But last year a girl wore her Docs to the ball and everyone was like 'Really?'

**Georgia**

Good to know high school hasn't changed!

**Jo**

I think Doc Martens have realised that they need to broaden. Because it seems like in the last few years somebody's taken over their marketing, something's changed. And they've widened their range. Because they brought those light ones in to try and get the Vans wearers and I can see why they did that because otherwise their market share was never going to grow. So I mean, it's amazing that they've been around as long as they have and, and it's only within the last maybe 10 years or so that they've actually widened their market share. I just love it. And I love that in the late 70's, early 80's, the police were wearing Dr. Martens and the rioters were wearing Dr. Martens you know? I love that. They're just universally worn. I love it. And when we first got her [Morgan] some it was great because they're chemical proof, so if there was any drama in the science lab we knew her feet would be safe at least!

**Georgia**

Cool. Good. And do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens? Do you clock it?

**Jo**

Oh, yeah, I think so. Yeah. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Do you think something about them because they're wearing Doc Martens?

**Jo**

It's like they're part of the club too then. I think you do have an opinion actually. Yeah, you're more likely to kind of just acknowledge they exist. I think you do notice. You also notice if someone's got a fake pair on.

**Morgan**

They've got some cheap ones in Cotton On at the moment that are so obviously rip offs!

**Jo**

And I think maybe because Doc Martens are that little bit more expensive it maybe keeps them as a subculture. You know, if they were everywhere would it change how we all feel about them?

**Georgia**

Yeah, that's really interesting. So is there anything else you feel like we haven't covered?

**Jo**

I don't think so. Morgan?

**Morgan**

Nope!

**Georgia**

Great, well thanks very much both of you.

## Julie

*Julie is an Occupational Therapist lecturer at a university in England. She is in her late 40s and lives in Derby. She has been wearing Doc Martens since she was a teenager and has upwards of 70 pairs. I interviewed Julie in her house, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you got your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Julie**

It wasn't me that bought my first pair, it was a present from my parents. In about 1988 or 89?

## **Georgia**

How old would you have been then?

## **Julie**

17 or 18? I'd wanted Doc Martens and I don't think they were as easy to come by. Either that or I had no money. But I was really disappointed because the ones they got me were.... I don't know if they did vegan ones at the time, but they didn't feel like leather. They weren't a smooth leather that classic Doc Martens boot is, they were like a very finely pockmarked plasticky stuff. I don't know, maybe they weren't even real Doc Martens, I don't know. But I never ever wore them in and I don't have them now. I sprayed them silver as a last ditch attempt to wear them, and then ended up giving them to a charity shop because after years and years and years could never make them comfortable.

## **Georgia**

When did you buy your own ones for yourself?

## **Julie**

When I moved to Derby, so sometime in the early 90s. And I've got them upstairs. They were from the Famous Army Store, a friend of mine told me they were going quite cheap. I think 20-something pounds. So he's got green ones and I got purple ones.

## **Georgia**

Brilliant. So why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands? What was the appeal?

**Julie**

I guess they were kind of different, slightly sort of cultish. I was a goth in my teens so it kind of fitted in with that. I don't know if I paid much attention to the song 'Dr. Martens Boots' by Alexei Sayle. I'm not sure. I tend to have quite an obsessive personality. So it's not surprising that I've ended up collecting them. It might have been a development from monkey boots because I started off on monkey boots, and they felt like a more adult version.

**Georgia**

Okay. So you said that you were a goth when you were a teenager, were they a big part of that subculture? Was it common to see people wearing them?

**Julie**

Not as common as now, no. And I'm not sure whether we would have been allowed to wear them to school. I don't remember other people wearing them. And I don't remember knowing anyone who had them. I think monkey boots were more common. The army surplus stuff was more available. There were more markets. We had an outdoor market in my hometown.

**Georgia**

Where's your home town?

**Julie**

Sittingbourne in Kent. We had a market that had an army surplus store and I think that's where I got a lot of my clothes and shoes. Whereas I don't know that we had anywhere that sold Doc Martens in the way that they're sold now. I remember when I moved to Derby the loveliness of seeing them in shops. Every shop had some. Maybe it's because it was a small town that I grew up in.

**Georgia**

Alright. Okay. Cool. So your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand, have they changed over time? Can you remember what your first thought about them?

**Julie**

They were workwear, and I was aware of that. And I knew that they were safe. They've got the rubber soles that were well made. And they were going to last. So they were good value for money. I guess now, I think of them more as a fashion item, and a lot of the ones they make now are to make people buy more. Like the glitter ones, which I've gone overboard on. They even call them 'occasional wear' because you wouldn't wear them in the rain. And yeah, they're not going to last like the leather ones.

**Georgia**

Okay, so you do feel like the brand has changed over time?

**Julie**

Yeah. Oh, yeah. It really has.

**Georgia**

Were you aware of your friends or your peers or anyone that you knew wearing Doc Martens when you were younger?

**Julie**

No, not until I left home.

**Georgia**

Okay, so when you moved to Derby there were more people wearing them. And you still know people now who wear them?

**Julie**

Oh, yeah. Yeah, lots. Not as many as me though.

**Georgia**

Oh, you've kind of already answered this question, actually. But I'll ask you anyway. Do you or did you identify as being part of a set subculture? You mentioned goth. Do you still consider yourself a part of that subculture?

**Julie**

On the inside! What's The Smiths lyric: 'I wake up black on the outside because black is how I feel on the inside!' I'm far more colourful these days though.

**Georgia**

Okay. So when would you say you stopped going the whole hog with goth?

**Julie**

Probably mid 90s.

**Georgia**

And have you continued to wear Doc Martens all throughout your life? Was there ever a point where you weren't wearing them?

**Julie**

So from from late teens onwards, I've worn them. As you'll see, when I show you, It's not just Doc Martens that I collect. I'm probably more well known amongst friends for collecting Doc Martens and wearing them, and I do make an effort to change them a lot so that I can justify having so many. But there are other shoes I've got.

**Georgia**

Okay, so how many pairs do you have? Have you counted?

**Julie**

I think the last count it was something like 70, I'm not sure.

**Georgia**

That's a lot! Have you ever thrown any away? Or do you keep them?

**Julie**

I've worn some out. That's rare. But I have worn some out. These are my second pair of these ones, these Mary-Janes. I bought these second hand on eBay, thought I'd never find them again. Yeah, I have worn ones out and I have sold them if they don't fit properly, or they hurt, you can't wear them in, that sort of thing. I've given the odd one to charity shop where I couldn't be arsed to sell them.

**Georgia**

Yeah, fair enough. So after they've reached their usefulness if they break, or you wear them out? Do you keep them? Or do you chuck them away?

**Julie**

The only ones I've kept that I probably wouldn't ever wear again are those first pair that I bought. I guess because I've got so many it's hardly ever going to happen now. But I have got a broken pair that I bought that needs replacement zips, that I'm waiting till I can pluck up the courage to find out how much that's going to cost to replace them. I've held onto them. I think it would depend on the pair of shoes. Because there's some that I'd never get them again.

**Georgia**

Okay, so how come you kept your first pair?

**Julie**

I guess because they were the first pair. Because I've never bought any others like them. I'm not actually sure they would fit anymore.

**Georgia**

Okay. Did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture when you first got into them?

**Julie**

No. Not really, no.

**Georgia**

And has that changed? You know more about that now?

**Julie**

Yes. Well, I've got a book that someone bought me. What I haven't done is been to the factory shop, but I bet they've got some stuff in there about the history. I know that they were very associated with punks and skinheads, and that's put me off the cherry red ones.

**Georgia**

Because of the association with skinheads?

**Julie**

Yeah. I did have a pair of Jaden cherry red which had zips and were the chunky ones, but I didn't wear them enough so I sold them before I scratched them. I like purple ones, and deep red ones, the ox blood ones and the vintage red ones mainly. And black shoes. So there's particular colours I like rather than ruling things out. I think if they were in a particularly unusual style in cherry red, that wouldn't stop me.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay. What impact has owning and wearing Doc Martens had on your identity? Or do you think it's maybe the other way around: that your identity impacted on your choice to have them in the first place?

**Julie**

I think in the first place it was my identity that influenced me to get Doc Martens. But I now think it's become the other way around. And that people associate me with Doc Martens. Have you ever listened to Thinking Aloud on Radio 4? It's a sociology programme. Occasionally they'll have a subject that interests me, and I've been mentioned in things that I've contributed to. So there was something on subcultures so I talked about being a goth and sent some photos. There was something else on footwear or shoes or something, so I sent them something on Doc Martens. And also on Facebook, I've got a whole folder called shoes and people are used to me posting pictures of new shoes. And I'm in a couple of Doc Marten groups on Facebook.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So they are quite a part of your social life in a way?

**Julie**

Yeah, I've got a number of searches set up on eBay as well to look for unusual ones.

**Georgia**

How regularly would you say you look for new ones?

**Julie**

I'm not looking at the moment. At times I'll look every day at all the lists. But that's really an interesting change. When I first started buying and selling Doc Martens on eBay, in a size five or six, there would be a maximum of 60 or 70 for sale. Now there's hundreds.

**Georgia**

When was that? When did you start doing that on eBay, would you say?

**Julie**

2004 I joined eBay. So since then. So in 15 years it's grown hugely. What's useful in knowing that product really well is that when there's something rare that I want, I know I'll get it because I know what it's worth and how much I'm willing to pay. And I'll just put a massive bid in.

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay. So does Doc Martens' association with subculture have any impact on your choice to buy them?

**Julie**

I think it's become less important as time has gone on. However, I can't think of anything else that has the same sort of history or connotation.

**Georgia**

And is that important, that history?

**Julie**

I probably couldn't have imagined collecting any other brands of shoes. Initially, I never thought I'd get into Irregular Choice, but I guess they're different in another way. And they're a kind of cult brand as well. But I guess, as far as functional footwear goes, I can't imagine me getting into Caterpillar in the same way. They haven't got the variety. I don't think anything else has been adopted in the same way as Doc Martens have been adopted.

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you have any thoughts on gender and identity and Doc Martens? Do you think the world sees something different in women who wear Doc Martens?

**Julie**

Only if they're of an older generation, possibly. Vast majority probably not. What I have noticed is though, when I post these pictures of pretty Doc Martens on Facebook, I've got a few friends who are size eight and above who are women who are going, 'Oh, I wish I could wear those.' And they find it hard to get them. I'm a five and a half so it's been a blessing to find out that they do youth up to a five and a half, instead of me having to get a five that's slightly too small or a six that slightly too

big. So I'll put pictures up when I've bought these youth ones which have all got zips and are slightly more padded, and they do designs that you can't get in the adult ones. And then I've got friends who, you know, female friends who can't get them. I've got a gay friend in Tenerife, who when he saw my rainbow ones, he wanted them. But he wears flip flops! He's never gonna wear them, it's too hot in Tenerife. 110 pounds or more for those probably and you're never going to wear them.

**Georgia**

Very true.

**Julie**

Yeah, I guess that's the nice thing about a lot of the standard classic designs is that they're pretty unisex.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So you don't feel as though there's any statement being made, or that the world would see anything in a woman wearing a pair of 1460s?

**Julie**

I've never had any negative comments so it's really hard to say. And they've come up with all these artsy ones, the ones with the different paintings on, which have appeal to a wide range of people. I follow an author called Robert Rankin on Facebook, and he's got some, can't remember which artist, but he's just turned 70 I think. And he's wearing them. But he's quite avant-garde. And I've got a friend down the road who's got the Joy Division Doc Martens. She bought them, and then she decided they were too expensive and took them back, and then regretted it and then went to the factory shop and got them back again at a cheaper price.

**Georgia**

That's the way to do it. Okay, so you obviously do still own Doc Martens, do you wear them regularly?

**Julie**

Almost every day.

**Georgia**

Okay. And are there any situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Julie**

Because I've got so many Irregular Choice as well, if I'm not going to be walking any distance, and it's nice weather then I'll try and wear those. I probably wouldn't wear the glitter ones to a festival because you can't judge what the weather is going to be like and they'll get messed up. Someone I used to work with wore the purple ones to her wedding, a proper white wedding dress with purple Doc Martens. So I don't think there's any occasions I wouldn't wear them. Although I bought some nice Hush Puppies heels to wear when my dad got an MBE. So we went to Buckingham Palace I didn't actually wear Doc Martens. I toed the line apart from dyeing my hair purple.

**Georgia**

Would you have liked to have worn them?

**Julie**

I probably would have felt more comfortable wearing them.

**Georgia**

Do you feel like your parents had any positive or negative things to say about you wearing Doc Martens?

**Julie**

No, don't think so. My mum's quite a rebel anyway. My mum rode a motorbike and my dad did embroidery. So the roles were a bit reversed. My dad's quite emotional and my mum's not. So they weren't stereotypical in any way. I hadn't told my dad about a relationship I was in for many years until there was my step sister's wedding and I asked if I could bring someone with me. I had to tell him, and I said, 'And the reason I haven't told you about them is...'. And my dad goes, 'It's a woman.' And I could have kissed him. I was thinking how lovely that he'd be open minded enough to think that. It wasn't a woman! But they're not judgmental at all. I've never had pressure to have children. I think they're quite proud of me.

**Georgia**

Yeah, that's really sweet. So you already had that model of a kind of rebel femininity?

**Julie**

I just had an image of my mum in her afghan coat, taking me to school, and me being very embarrassed. My mum's never toed the line in any way. I think she had a first tattoo in her 40s, she took up power lifting in her 40s and won some British title in the master's category for power lifting. She's taken up cycling in her 60s and 70s. She's in her 70s now. She used to come and steward with

me at festivals for Oxfam. She's just decided cycling's not for her and she's doing too many other things now. So yeah, she's not one to judge.

**Georgia**

Awesome. Okay, do you have a favourite pair of Doc Martens?

**Julie**

It's hard to narrow it down to one. I might be able to narrow it down to two. One of them is an oxblood colour, very soft, mid calf lace up, with a very round toe. I'll show you when we go upstairs. And the other ones are purple patent leather, purple stitching, a short boot with quite a square toe. I've never seen any others with purple stitching.

**Georgia**

Okay, so is that why you like both of them, because they're unusual?

**Julie**

They're almost entirely unique. I've seen one other pair like the red ones that were black on a Facebook group, someone in France owned them and I thought I was going to get to buy them but they never got back to me.

**Georgia**

Okay, so for you the unusual-ness is important?

**Julie**

How unusual they are, and the colours.

**Georgia**

Okay. How does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel differently in them than you do in other shoes?

**Julie**

I guess I feel like me.

**Georgia**

Would you say there's anything different about wearing them compared to other brands?

**Julie**

The Irregular Choice ones I know are going to be noticed. Not all the Doc Martens are going to be noticed. Some of them are. Whereas without a doubt any of the Irregular Choice ones get you noticed.

**Georgia**

Yeah, they're very different brands of shoes to collect. They're almost completely opposite to each other aren't they?

**Julie**

Yeah! Although Irregular Choice have started doing some boots that don't look dissimilar to Doc Martens but I've avoided buying them. They're never going to be as good.

**Georgia**

Yeah, true. Okay so have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing your Doc Martens and what were they, good or bad, or anything you can remember?

**Julie**

Usually positive. There's people at work that I'll show them off to when I've got a new pair and they'll ooh and ahh at them. Silver boots are important because of a band that I like called David Devant and His Spirit Wife. And one of my favourite songs that they do is called 'I'm Not Even Going To Try', also affectionately known as 'Auntie Mabel'. And there's a line in it that goes 'from my head right down to my silver boots. I'm going to sell my story to whoever it suits.' And so I've got to have silver boots, and when they brought out the holographic silver boots, I had to have them. I managed after years of being a fan to go to a gig of theirs last year and wore the silver boots and other fanatics that were there were commenting on them.

**Georgia**

Aw, that's cute. Do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Julie**

Yes.

**Georgia**

And does it have an impact on what you think of them?

**Julie**

Yeah, yeah. I don't know if I want this next judgemental statement attributed to me! But I work with a lot of Christian mothers, and I was really surprised when one of them was wearing a pair of Doc Martens. And it made me like her better!

**Georgia**

Okay, that's kind of everything, that's all my questions. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

**Julie**

I think it'll probably come out when we look at them.

**Georgia**

Alright, let's go and do that shall we.

**Julie**

But I will say, most ludicrously of all, I have spare ones. These are ones that I love so much that I've bought spares of. But I have no more room for anymore, so I'm not allowed to buy any at the moment.

K

*K is in her 20s and works in customer service in Wellington. She bought her first pair of Docs when she was 17 and she currently has one pair. I interviewed K in her house in Wellington, in May of 2019.*

**Georgia**

Here we go about to start our interview. So first question: can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens? I know you answered that already in your email but if you could just say it again for me here.

**K**

The first pair of Doc Martens I had, I bought when I was 17. So I'd just left high school, and I'd just started uni, and just started my first proper job making money for the first time. I didn't actually know what Doc Martens were, I didn't really have any exposure to them before that point but I worked near the shop in Auckland. And so I used to walk past all the time, and I saw these shoes I thought 'oh these are really cool, but they're just so expensive.' And I could never justify, you know, spending that much on a pair of shoes. I'd never spent that much money on anything before really. So yeah. Then it got to the point where I thought, well, you know, it's my first job. I've got my first salary, I'm going to treat myself. Yeah, I ended up buying them and basically wore them like, every day pretty much so they wore out, I bought another pair. Yeah, so I think I've had a few pairs since then. I've just got one at the moment. So yeah, we downsized quite a bit when we moved to Wellington, because I'm originally from Auckland. Yeah, I've just always had at least one pair since then.

**Georgia**

So you said you basically wore your first pair out?

**K**

Yeah. Wore them all the time. Every day. Yeah, yeah.

**Georgia**

And was it just because you spent that money on them do? Or because you really liked them?

**K**

I think it was a combination of both. And it was a lot of money. So I like to get my money's worth. Also, yeah, I just really love them and loved how I felt in them. There's something about the weight of them, I think, yeah. They're a heavy pair of shoes. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. So how did they make you feel?

**K**

Confident? Definitely. Um, yeah, I used to feel quite fearful in a lot of public situations, because I had like, a couple traumatizing experiences. You know, as a teenager, so I would always get scared about going out at night. And you know, being in the crowds, that sort of thing. Then when I had the shoes on, I don't know what it is, but it just, maybe it's because it feels slightly like a weapon or something so if someone's going to come up to me then I'm able to like, I don't know, kick them out of my way or something like that. Yeah, not that I would actually do that. But just having the weight of them yeah, like, you feel grounded. I don't know. And they sort of became a big part of my life because I was just wearing them everywhere. So when I think about that time of my life... And obviously, I don't wear them as much anymore, because now I'm at work and stuff. But when I think about that time in my life and being at uni and feeling really free and confident, and you know, yeah, the shoes are just so intertwined with that as well.

**Georgia**

Interesting. So, was there a particular reason that you think that you chose Doc Martens any other brand? Because you know, there's other brands of big boots like CAT or Timberland, or that kind of thing. So was there any particular reason you chose them over other brands?

**K**

Um... Not really, the only other shoes that I was wearing at the time was Converse. So I had my Chucks, and then I had my Doc Martens, and those were pretty much the only two pairs of shoes that I just alternated between.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Yeah.

**K**

It was weird, because I really don't recall seeing any marketing about the Docs, or I've never seen anyone... Like I'd never noticed anyone wearing them. Obviously, once I bought them, and I started sort of noticing them and seeing them everywhere. But at the time, like, compared to Converse, for example, where I felt like I'd been exposed to a lot of marketing and I knew a lot about the brand. And I felt more... You know, there was something about the brand, but for the Docs it was more of a personal feeling.

**Georgia**

And when were you at uni? What year did you buy them?

**K**

2012.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. And so do you have any sort of particular feelings or associations of Doc Martens as a brand? I know, you just said they weren't really in your sphere of vision when you bought them. But did you have any feelings then? And do you think that's changed now, as time has gone on, your feelings about the brand or your associations with the brand?

**K**

I've seen them a lot more everywhere now. So I wonder if it's become more mainstream? I don't know if that's the perception. But yeah, I think there's something about like, you know, that 'indie girl' trope now. Like, my sister has bought them to wear as school shoes, and lots of her friends had them. Whereas I didn't know anyone at the time who had them. So I feel like it may have changed. Yeah. And I almost wonder now if I'm just too old for them? Like I'm not old, but I'm at a different stage in my life now.

**Georgia**

Okay. And were you aware of any of your friends or your peers owning or wearing them? And do you think that had any impact on your choice to buy them? You said you didn't know anyone?

**K**

No I don't think I did. But yeah, it was one of those things where once I started wearing them that I noticed other people wearing them. But before that, no.

**Georgia**

And do you know people now who have them?

**K**

Yeah, yes, definitely.

**Georgia**

Okay. And do you identify as being part of any set subculture at all?

**K**

No.

**Georgia**

And did you have any knowledge of Doc Marten's associations with subcultures when you when you bought them?

**K**

I feel like it has associations with, like, working class. Maybe like punk? Yeah, I don't really think it reflects my lifestyle.

**Georgia**

No. Okay. And what impact do you think owning and wearing Doc Martens had on your identity? Like, if any impact. It doesn't have to have had an impact!

**K**

I don't think my identity impacted my choice. But I think it definitely... the shoes shaped how I felt about myself and yeah, sort of, yeah, my position in relation to other people. And I definitely felt a lot more confident. At the time I had started, you know, uni, and I started working at a radio station, and I was going to a lot of gigs, and I was involved in that more alternative music. And art and film and all that sort of stuff, so...Yeah, in that sense, maybe that's the sort of alternative culture. Definitely noticed people in that scene who were wearing them more than I had been exposed to prior. Yeah.

**Georgia**

And do you think that those kind of... identity conversations around Doc Martens has anything to do with gender?

**K**

I think so. They're not particularly feminine shoes... I don't think. I mean, I would wear them all the time anyway. I wore them with dresses. At the time I was working in a very corporate job, and sometimes I would wear them there. So I think maybe it was a bit of a statement at the time. Yeah.

Probably when I think about the people I knew at the time who were wearing them, they were definitely more feminist. More alternative. Yeah.

**Georgia**

And do you think that there's something... That's a bit of a difficult question, but do you think that there is something feminist in wearing shoes like Doc Martens?

**K**

Definitely, yeah, I feel very strongly about that. Yeah. That's why I feel so personally attached from thinking about all the places it's taken me, where I've taken my shoes, overseas, or... you know, all the fun nights that I've had out with my friends. But yeah, yet they're very functional shoes. Definitely. And there's almost pride in the fact that I've worn them out. Just like... the utility of them, and not just wearing shoes for other people, you know, who might be looking at your outfit or anything. A lot of the time I feel like they didn't even match what I was wearing but it didn't even matter because I just felt good about wearing them.

**Georgia**

That's really interesting. And so this question says, tell me about your favourite pair. Now you only have one pair at the moment right? And so would you say that these are your favourite pair? Or do you think your first ones were your favourite pair? Or do you even have a favourite?

**K**

All of the pairs that I've had have all been the exact same style, the exact same shoe. I've never bought another colour or another style. I think I'm just a creature of habit by nature anyway, as a person... and probably the other thing is like, purely on a functional level. I have really wide feet, really flat feet, and I'd never worn a shoe that was super comfortable until I wore the Doc Martens. And I was like 'this is the most comfy shoe that I've ever worn.' So I think that probably had an effect.

**Georgia**

So did you have any issues wearing them in? Some people take ages wearing them in.

**K**

Yeah, I had no idea. And then I just got blisters for the first few weeks. I wasn't prepared at all. I just bought them because I thought they looked cool. Yeah, I didn't realize that that was going to happen. So that was a thing. So I learned that for the next pair that I bought.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so you stuck with them though?

**K**

Yes, definitely. I actually found it really hard to get used to the weight of them because they were so heavy. Back then, when I first started wearing them, I was still living at my mum's house. And I had to walk to the train station every morning to catch the train. And that was like an hour long walk. And I remember walking thinking 'ugh these shoes are so heavy. Like what?' But now the weight is one of the things that I love about them.

**Georgia**

Okay, brilliant. And, so you just said that's one of the things that you do love about them. And, you've already mentioned that you think they had quite a big impact on you feeling more confident whilst you were at uni. Is there anything else that you really love about them? Are there any other aspects of them that you think are special to you?

**K**

Um... I'm not sure. I think those are probably the main ones. It sounds weird, but I definitely feel safer wearing them. I feel like I could run from a situation if I needed to, I feel like I could defend myself in a situation if I needed to.

**Georgia**

That's funny as well because I wonder if that's something that men who wear Doc Martens think is important? It would be my thought that that wouldn't necessarily come into their head. But for women, it is important that like, you know, maybe to have shoes where you feel like you can run if you need to, kick back if you need to.

**K**

I definitely feel really grounded when I put them on. I feel really strong in myself. It was kind of funny, because I used to wear them a lot at uni. And then my partner and I moved to Wellington after I graduated. And then, in one of the first jobs that I had here in Wellington, I used to wear them all the time. And then there was this girl at my work who was like, really vegan. And then she made a comment one day about how I shouldn't be wearing the shoes, because they're made of leather. And that was the first time I thought, well, maybe I shouldn't wear them. So I sort of stopped wearing them. In that particular workplace because I was like making her uncomfortable, and that made me feel uncomfortable.

**Georgia**

Oh really?! Are you vegan?

**K**

No, not at all! I was like 'what's this girl talking about?!' So yes, I actually stopped wearing them for a while. And then yeah, changed jobs and started wearing them again.

**Georgia**

So that kind of input from somebody else, really mattered to you?

**K**

Yes I'd just never viewed them that way before.

**Georgia**

Yeah, that's funny, I guess if it's not part of your lifestyle you just wouldn't ever think about it, would you? I've never met anybody... I've never met anyone vegan, or not, who was so like... upset by me wearing leather or something like that, that they would comment on it. That's wild! In the workplace as well...

**K**

Yeah it was extreme. But she was pretty extreme in a lot of ways!

**Georgia**

Hahaha! So you already pretty much covered how they make you feel. And do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**K**

Definitely. Definitely.

**Georgia**

So you said that you used to wear Converse. So what would you say is the difference in how you felt when you wore your Converse compared to how you felt in your Doc Martens? Because Converse are still pretty practical shoes, I think.

**K**

I think it's just the strength feeling of them, yeah. Like nobody is going to get in your space because you're wearing these big heavy shoes.

**Georgia**

And did you ever wear heels or anything like that?

**K**

Only in the work place. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. Right. So... not your everyday life. Okay. Um, why? Why do you think that is?

**K**

In terms of what shoes I choose to wear?

**Georgia**

Yeah, like, why do you think you didn't wear heels? Or you don't wear heels outside of work?

**K**

Um... Comfort, is probably the number one thing.

**Georgia**

Cus you can get Doc Martens heels now.

**K**

Really?

**Georgia**

Yeah. I've got a pair of like, they're like boots...

**K**

Like platforms?

**Georgia**

Yeah, they've got like a really chunky heel and like chunky soles.

**K**

Wow!

**Georgia**

Yeah. And they're like... they're good. They're still heels so they're not the most comfortable shoes in the world. But they're really heavy as well they're the same weight as those ones [pointing to **K**'s shoes]. I love wearing those shoes. They're like my conference shoes. So whenever I present research, usually on Doc Martens... It's funny, people absolutely expect me to be wearing Doc Martens. But I didn't want to wear the boots so I was like, I gotta go find something else. And then I discovered these heels and I thought, oh, I'll wear them. I've also got some like purple suede pixie boot ones, and then I've got some vintage ones from the 90s that are sort of like desert boots. So I've got three now.

**K**

Yeah I was quite sad about having to get rid of... because I had like a floral pair.

**Georgia**

Oh, yeah?

**K**

They were sort of like a maroon colour. And then yeah when we moved down to Wellington we literally moved with like, three suitcases. And Docs are really heavy! But I was like 'I have to keep at least one.' And those ones are actually sort of falling apart now.

**Georgia**

So were you sad to say goodbye to the other pairs?

**K**

Definitely, yeah, but I kept my favourite pair.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah. Fair enough. And so are there some situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens?

**K**

Yeah probably after that incident at my work, I stopped wearing them. And then after I stopped wearing them, I just... Because I was so used to wearing them, like out of habit, that once I stopped wearing them I found that I wasn't wearing them as much anymore. Yeah. And then yeah, like pretty much in the last year or so I started wearing them again after I changed jobs.

**Georgia**

So you still you wear them to work now?

**K**

Yeah, I wear them to work sometimes. Which is where this conversation started, because someone at my work was like, commenting on them and stuff. But yeah... I almost feel like, I don't have a reason to wear them out anymore?

**Georgia**

Right.

**K**

It's weird. But before when I was wearing them, you know, when I talked about the safety thing and stuff, like, I was single at the time, I was going out a lot. I almost felt like I had to wear it for my own personal safety and feeling comfortable in myself. Sort of that period where you're transitioning from being a teenager into an adult.

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**K**

All that sort of stuff. And yeah, now I feel like my lifestyle is really different.

**Georgia**

Do you think the changing city has anything to do with that?

**K**

Potentially, yeah. Auckland's definitely got more of a big city vibe. Yeah. And maybe just like the connotations that I had of being in certain situations in the city. So yeah. But now I live in the suburbs so... No threats here!

**Georgia**

Hahaha yeah! Um, so, you said that, you know, at your old work you wouldn't wear them because of somebody else saying something to you. And is there any situation now do you think that you would look at and be like 'oh I won't wear them for that.' Do you think there's anything that you would be like 'nah, that's not appropriate for that'?

**K**

Probably like... nice occasions?

**Georgia**

Right. Okay.

**K**

Back in the day I wore them literally everywhere, all the time. To places that probably weren't appropriate! Like I wore them to my graduation, to funerals. Because they were just the pair of shoes that I wore everywhere. But now, probably, I would probably not pick them for formal occasions.

**Georgia**

Why do you think that's changed?

**K**

I mean, on a purely practical level, I just have more shoes now.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay. So you've got more choice?

**K**

Yeah! Whereas before I pretty much had spent all my money on this one pair of shoes so it's like 'okay, I'll have to wear this now to everything'.

**Georgia**

So money is a kind of part of it as well, you know, now that you're in a full time job, you've got a bit more disposable income, you've been able to buy more shoes to choose from.

**K**

Yeah. Which is weird, because the Docs were so expensive! So I just didn't have the same quantity maybe.

**Georgia**

Yeah! And actually, you... You said something really interesting in your email. When you were talking about your first pair that you bought, you said that there was a certain amount of shame that you felt that having spent that much money?

**K**

Yeah, on a pair of shoes.

**Georgia**

Could you talk a little bit more about that and why you felt that way?

**K**

Um, so yeah, growing up, we didn't have any money. I was raised by single parent. You know, my mum was on the benefit a lot of the time, she's working multiple jobs, and I had a lot of siblings growing up. It was just like... You just wouldn't... We just didn't have the money to spend. And anytime we did buy shoes, or clothes, or anything like that it was second hand or stuff that had been given to us or whatever. And so when I bought them, I was almost horrified at myself as well, like, Oh, my God, how can I spend so much money? Like... It was almost... Whether I deserved them or not? I felt like I didn't deserve them. And like... what if I need this money in the future? Yeah. So maybe that was part of the reason why I felt like I needed to wear them so much as well. I need to like prove to myself that it was a worthy investment, rather than just some like, frivolous thing that I

was doing. And they did last a really long time! So yeah in terms of the utility I definitely feel like I got my money's worth. But yeah, just at the time, I guess I was, like, starting to move out of home and stuff and trying to figure out what that meant, what my life was going to look like outside of my family and outside of the situation that I've grown up in. So there definitely was a little bit of shame about having such expensive shoes, when I knew that my family was still struggling as well.

**Georgia**

But then that's maybe sort of in contrast to how the shoes actually made you feel when you wore them? Because you said they made you feel more confident when you wore them. So that's like, a kind of opposite, isn't it? You know, to how you were feeling about buying them in the first place?

**K**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

So do you think that may be confirmed that it was a good decision for you to buy them?

**K**

Definitely. That's sort of weird thing to say and a bit vain to say but I was definitely walking around a bit like 'I bought these, with my own money, these are my shoes!'

**Georgia**

No, I don't think that's vain, I think that's a sense of achievement. And it is an achievement! Spending that much money on something that you love. You know, that's... That's probably quite an important part of growing up, isn't it? You know, your first big purchase outside of home, that sort of thing.

**K**

And the weird thing is that now that I feel like I'm a real adult, I don't know if I would spend that much money on a pair of shoes now. Yeah. Like I have other things that I needed to be spending money on, I have bills to pay! So I'm actually really glad that I spent the money at that point in time because I don't know if I would be able to do that now because I have other responsibilities and stuff.

**Georgia**

Okay. And so, you've already said that you had that one big reaction from the girl at your work but have you experienced any other sort of notable reactions from people about you wearing Doc Martens? Have people commented on them, in either a positive or negative way?

**K**

I've definitely had comments from a lot of men.

**Georgia**

Oh really? Saying what?

**K**

Yeah. Saying like... They wouldn't necessarily say anything specifically but they always make this comment where they're like 'Oh, Doc Martens, you're a Doc Martens kind of girl' and all those sorts of comments. And I'm always like, what does that mean? Exactly? Like, what do you... What are you trying to imply? So I think it maybe does have this sort of image of, I don't know, women wearing Doc Martens being a sort of... ball busting feminist.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah.

**K**

The first job that I had when I moved to Wellington, it was a real public facing job. So I was seeing people all the time, and yeah, lots of... Majority men were talking to me and I got lots of comments in that environment from men, yeah. I remember this one encounter where he said it in a really sort of... um... I just had this feeling like he was watching me wear them? It just made me feel really self conscious. Even though that was the thing that had previously made me feel really confident about myself, like when it's pointed out, you all of a sudden feel like, okay, now I'm wearing them, and you're watching me wear them? And what does that mean? Does it change the dynamic and how I feel about them? And he used to come into my workplace quite a bit. And every time he came in, he would make the same comment, like 'the Doc Martens girl, the Doc Martens girl! Oh, you're wearing the Docs again.' Or, 'I hope you're wearing the Docs again!' And then I just started to feel that maybe I shouldn't wear them because I don't want him to be focusing on that rather than on the conversation that we're having or the work that I'm doing.

**Georgia**

Though I'm sure if you didn't, he would have said, 'Oh, you're not wearing your Doc Martens!'

**K**

Yeah he actually did at one point!

**Georgia**

So you just can't stop them hahaha, there's always something! Okay, that's really interesting. But not as much from women then?

**K**

No, no.

**Georgia**

I think in general, most women probably don't feel maybe confident or able to randomly comment on people's appearance or clothing or something.

**K**

The only time I ever got compliments was when I wore my floral Doc Martens and then some girls would be like 'those are cool!', but never for the black pair because they're just a pair of shoes.

**Georgia**

Okay, and, do you think that you notice when other people wear Doc Martens? So you said, you first kind of didn't think anybody you knew wore them. And now there's lots more people wearing them. Have you noticed that as time has gone on? Or if you meet somebody do you like take note of what they're wearing?

**K**

I definitely notice it more. Oh, yeah, it was funny because during the period when I'd stopped wearing them, we had this flatmate who I really didn't like and he wore Doc Martens and it almost made me not like them because I didn't like him as a person? I dunno... It felt like he was wearing them... Okay, this is bad for me to say because I'm sure that I was also doing this and wearing them for this purpose... But I felt like he was wearing them as part of this like... image? Like, you know, he was always talking about his tattoos, he had a leather jacket and he wore his Docs and he had this whole image of him being a certain type of person. And then he would always make sure to remind me like... Because I would just tie the shoe laces up like normal, and he was have them all loose and stuff, and have them all clomping around. There was something about it that just irritated me. Now, I don't know if it's because it was such a personal purchase for me. But watching someone else, like,

take this object that means so much to me and like, use it as part of his image. Right? Something about it irritated me. And that was the one time I really noticed someone else wearing Docs.

**Georgia**

So you felt as though his use of them maybe wasn't genuine? Or wasn't as sort of like... What's the word? Authentic, maybe, as your kind of love of them?

**K**

Yeah which is ridiculous, right? Like who am I to say? I don't feel like that's a legitimate point to make. For myself to be like... saying that about him but...

**Georgia**

But it's still how you felt!

**K**

Yeah it's still how I felt! I was like 'you're such a poser!'

**Georgia**

So he was trying... So you felt as though he was doing that kind of alternative image, maybe more aligned with subculture?

**K**

Yeah but he wasn't like punk or skinhead or anything like that. Just general alternative vibe. Yeah, he had picked and chosen these things about how he wanted to present himself. I honestly hate myself saying these things! Because I always say like 'you do you, do whatever' but in that situation it just... Just irritated me.

**Georgia**

I think a lot of the time, people like to think that we're above that sort of thing, that we wouldn't judge somebody on the clothes that they wear or anything like that. But everyone does it. It's impossible not to. You know, our clothes are a really integral part of us showing who we are to the world. So it's like a perfectly normal thing to read somebody's clothes like that. It's often the only thing that we can do when we first meet somebody, you know, if you don't know who they are, it's a pretty good fallback to look at someone's clothes and be like, oh, you're that type of person. So does it kind of... Impact your opinion of people, you think, when you see them wearing Doc Martens? Like it would maybe fire off a few synapses in your brain?

**K**

Yeah. It makes me feel nostalgic when I see teenagers wearing them. Like I'm an old lady or something! Like 'back in my day...!' And my youngest sister, she bought a pair, a white pair, and she wore them to her school ball.

**Georgia**

Aw cute!

**K**

And that made me feel really nostalgic. And then sometimes I'll see like, really old ladies still rocking them and I think 'Oh that's awesome!'

**Georgia**

Have you got any other siblings? Have they showed any interest in them or anything?

**K**

No, just her that's been interested, but she's probably way more alternative than I am. I wasn't surprised when she got them. Yeah.

**Georgia**

The white ones are pretty cool.

**K**

Yeah, I think they look really cool. She made her own ball dress with flowers on it and she had her white shoes, it was an awesome outfit.

**Georgia**

That's really, really cool. How did your mum feel about them? Did she like, comment on them or anything?

**K**

Definitely. She was like, shit, that's a lot of money. So I don't think she was particularly supportive. But at the same time, my mum's very much like 'it's your life, you do whatever, if that's what you wanna spend your money on then that's what you want to spend your money on. And yeah, the thing is that outside of that, I'm actually super frugal. I hate spending money. Even now, even though I'm making money. I still panic anytime I have to spend any money. Yeah, it was quite a random thing. But I think it was just the right place, right time. So yeah, just felt right at the time. I don't know. I think I just needed something like to, like, move into the next phase of my life. That was like a big part of it. Yeah, cos I, like I said, I had left high school a year early. So I didn't have any of my friends with me. They were still in high school. So I'd started University alone. And I was like, Okay, I'm gonna reinvent myself, this whole thing that you go through, you know, yeah, it was like, what do I want to be wearing? Because all of a sudden, you don't have a school uniform to wear. So yeah, you have to figure out what style you're gonna wear. Like, it sounds really stupid. But there is something about having this new chance to figure out who you're going to become as an adult. Yeah, yeah, I think it was a big part of that. I'm really grateful.

**Georgia**

I don't think it's stupid at all, I think that's something that everybody does, you know, when you go to university, you want to, perhaps, be someone different from who you are. There's a real chance to kind of reinvent yourself, like you said - be somebody different. And so it's probably a pretty natural time for people to choose slightly alternative styles of clothing and Doc Martens definitely, certainly in the 70s and 80s, and even 90s were definitely associated with teenagers and young people, and that kind of thing. So I reckon that's maybe why we're seeing more older women wearing them now, because they were teenagers in the 70s and 80s and they loved them so much.

**K**

It's funny because at the time... It was a purchase that was like, you know, I was thinking 'I'm not gonna care about what I look like anymore, and I'm just gonna wear what I want to wear'. And maybe the reason why I don't wear them so much anymore is like... I actually do care how I look? I want to make sure I'm presenting myself professionally, or whatever. So maybe there's more careful consideration when I wear them now?

**Georgia**

I think because you get a bit older, you come to terms with the fact that it's totally fine to care about what you look like. It doesn't make you vain, it doesn't make you vapid or anything like that. It's okay to want to look nice and suitable in different environments. Whereas when you're a teenager, you want to be really like... Kind of raw and independent and cool and stuff. And part of being cool is not caring about anything, when you're a teenager, just complete apathy. But when you get older you're like 'Oh, no, it's all right for me to mind what I look like'. But certainly for me I find it's now like a less self conscious way of doing it. You know, I'm not dressing up for other people, I'm doing it because I want to look that way. Yeah. But that's a long process!

**K**

Yeah I hear you! The feeling cool thing is quite funny, because I totally remember when I first got them, I did feel cool. And I don't know what that means. Like, why the shoes would make you feel that way.

**Georgia**

They're quite transformative, I think. I hear that a lot from people who wear Doc Martens, that they can like... Almost the moment they put them on, they can feel like a different person. Which is really interesting.

**K**

The fact that they're so heavy, like you have to change the way you walk. I don't know if it's just because I'm little but my walk definitely changes when I put them on. Yeah, yeah.

**Georgia**

Absolutely, they probably do affect your walking. They've got a really interesting history as well, like a social history attached to them, which is really fun to study and fun to look at. They're kind of ubiquitous... They've always been there, they've sort of always been around, but nobody really notices them. Which is amazing, from a marketing point of view, you know, that it's like 2019, and they're still not putting out adverts on the TV and yet, they're more popular now than they've ever been. But they don't use traditional marketing techniques. They um, they like sponsor stages at music festivals, and they're very careful with who they associate themselves with, and curate that image of alternative business. And I've been studying Doc Martens for a while, and I've only just been able to get in touch with their marketing department. It took them that long for them to even admit that there is a marketing department! So they're quite careful in their image and what they put into the public. And like... I think were so used to being advertised to. Like you knew the story of Converse, you knew that brand, but it's not the same with Doc Martens?

**K**

And I kind of like that, because you can sort of put yourself in that position instead of having to aspire to something. Like with the Converse, I definitely felt like I was having to aspire to being a certain type of person. And everyone knows that brand so all of a sudden, they're looking at it, you know, through the lens of that brand? Yeah, I didn't get that feeling with the Docs at all. Yeah, the functionality side was probably a big part of why I bought them. Because, you know, even though I talk about feeling shame, spending all that money and stuff, that was almost one of the ways that I could justify having spent the money, whether it was to myself or to my mom, or whoever, it's like, no, this is going to last a long time. Like, they're really good shoes. Whereas it wouldn't have been the same if I spent \$300 on a pair of designer heels. Yeah, the 'big scary boots' thing it's funny because I did get that reaction a little bit but for me like... That was something to be proud of. It's like, you should be scared of these shoes! You should be scared of me! Part of the reinvention maybe.

**Georgia**

Yeah, I think it does make you feel a bit better though doesn't it? Sometimes, when people are like 'oh scary feminist girl in her big boots' and you're like 'yeah, absolutely. Don't mess with me!' But apparently people are still going to talk to you about your clothing choices, even in Doc Martens...!

**K**

It's quite funny because I feel like I need to get a new pair because those ones are falling apart. But I almost don't want to because then I have to start fresh and it's just different having brand new Docs that haven't been worn in, they're still plasticky and shiny, they haven't moulded to the shape of your feet, versus having shoes that you've known and have worn for years. It's quite weird, but I'm just wearing these shoes that are just falling apart.

**Georgia**

Yeah, you don't wanna part with them.

**K**

I feel like if I were to buy a new pair, I would have to like wear them around the house or something until I got to the point where I could wear them out!

**Georgia**

I know, my partner got a pair of Doc Martens maybe like... six months ago? And he's only just started getting blisters. Like he was fine for the first wee while and then he wore them out the other night and he was like 'Georgia I've got really bad blisters!' I was like 'Oh it's happening, finally!' hahaha. When I did my Masters I interviewed some subcultural people and they came up with all sorts of tricks for like, wearing in your Doc Martens. There was one girl who said she used to wear like three pairs of socks and then sit on her sofa watching the TV and would blow dry the leather with her hair dryer because it loosens up the leather? Then there was another guy who used to wear them in the bath because the water softened the shoes. But I guess it just depends if you wanna spend the time doing it... I probably wouldn't spend my time sitting in the bath wearing shoes! I've deliberately not bought the classic boots because I know I would not be able to cope with the blisters, I am such a wuss.

**K**

Yeah it's so weird because after I stopped wearing them, when I started wearing them again I started getting blisters again even though the shoes had already been worn in, and I had forgotten what it felt like to have the boots come up so high. Bit weird!

**Georgia**

Yeah! Alright, well that's my full list of questions so I will pause the recorder there. Thanks!

## Katherine

*Katherine is a musician and teacher in her late 20s who lives in London. She got her first pair in her late teens and she now has two pairs. I interviewed Katherine in her house in London, in July of 2019. Katherine and I know each other through a couple of mutual friends.*

### **Georgia**

Okay, so can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

### **Katherine**

I've never bought a pair of Doc Martens. But I remember when I got them. It was Valentine's Day, they were a present from my boyfriend at the time. It was the day before my uni interview and I remember that because I wore them. They were gold ones and I had to buy gold polish for them.

### **Georgia**

Okay, so you've never bought a pair?

### **Katherine**

Never, but I've got two pairs that I have been given.

### **Georgia**

Okay, brilliant. Did you ask for them?

### **Katherine**

No. I had been looking at getting some Doc Martens and we'd gone into a couple of stores in London and I tried a pair on, but I couldn't afford them. And he then surprised me with them, I wasn't expecting them.

### **Georgia**

Right. So that kind of changes the questions I'm going to ask you, because normally I'd ask 'why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands' but...

### **Katherine**

Well I did choose the other pair so I can tell you about them. The other ones I have... I wear them every day Georgia, so they're quite beat up now. I did a TV show in 2017, a kind of choir singing competition. Awful experience, however, they put us in matching... Well not really matching but they asked us to have our own style as a group, and the Doc Martens were one of the options. And I fought all the others to have them and decided after that I would just keep them! They're sparkly and colourful and I just love them. They're so comfy. I mean, after the initial week or so. I do a lot of walking, living in London so they're kind of ideal. Waterproof, and they look cool.

### **Georgia**

Yeah. So why did you fight for them over other shoe options?

### **Katherine**

Well because I wanted another pair of Doc Martens! They were easily the coolest shoe they had as an option. They also had like... Sparkly trainers and stuff. I did actually end up with those as well...

**Georgia**

Okay. So what are your feelings on doc Martens as a brand, and has that changed over time? Maybe from when you were younger to now.

**Katherine**

Um... [Katherine pauses]

**Georgia**

Do you have any cultural awareness or associations...?

**Katherine**

A little bit. My mum was a punk so I know they were associated particularly with that, and the skinhead movement as well, a bit later. But I was probably wearing them before I knew anything about that. When I was younger I was quite into ska and stuff, so I'd go to gigs where there were a lot of people wearing that kind of style.

**Georgia**

Right, so you were kind of surrounded by subculture in general?

**Katherine**

Yeah, definitely. Also just living in London, particularly this area. I know the ones that I buy aren't made in the UK but they do have that whole 'made in the UK' range which are very nice, but they're a bit boring for me.

**Georgia**

So you said your mum was a punk, did she ever wear them?

**Katherine**

She never had them, no. Looking at her now you would never have thought she was a punk. But her favourite band, Stiff Little Fingers, they're a Northern Irish band. We must have been to see them 10 times or something by now. We try and go every year, if they're touring. And you're surrounded by skinheads and punks, and they still dress in what they used to wear. So that was probably the first time I was really aware of Doc Martens as a brand, because they were all wearing them.

**Georgia**

Right, so you were growing up surrounded by people wearing that sort of thing through your mum. Were you aware of any of your friends or peers owning and wearing Doc Martens, and do you think that that had any impact on your choice?

**Katherine**

I don't think any of my friends had Doc Martens. I was in a band for most of my teenage years and I guess other people in the band scene might have worn them? I remember meeting Tom [an old mutual friend] and he definitely had a pair. But I don't remember any girls, certainly not any of my school friends or anything.

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you or have you ever identified as being part of a set subculture?

**Katherine**

No. I tend to dip in and out. I wouldn't say I go particularly far into any of them, but I'm usually kind of on the periphery of those scenes. I went to a lot of mod and ska and skinhead nights when I was younger, so I flirted with that a bit, but I wouldn't say I ever prescribed to one in particular.

**Georgia**

Okay. Did you or do you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture and do you that had an impact on your choice?

**Katherine**

I don't know the origins of the punk thing. I knew that it was a thing, but I couldn't tell you who started it. I guess The Sex Pistols probably had something to do with it but I don't know. But I definitely thought punk was cool because it was my mum's thing, not my dad's. And my mum is infinitely cooler than my dad!

**Georgia**

Have you always felt that? It's quite interesting because when I was a teenager I thought my mum was like, the least cool person in the world. And as I've got older I've realised she's actually the coolest, most amazing woman on the planet!

**Katherine**

I know. But the fact that I knew my mum had seen The Clash numerous times, and obviously Stiff Little Fingers as well. And as I started getting into my own bands I was like 'Wow this is actually cool', going to punk gigs with her and stuff. There's something about them... Whenever I go to a punk gig I'm like 'Why am I not in another band?!' I've always felt that punk is cool. Like Debbie Harry, one of my all-time favourite people. Don't know if she's ever worn Doc Martens?

**Georgia**

Probably! Okay, this is quite a big question. What impact has wearing Doc Martens had on your identity, if any? Or do you think it's the other way around, that your identity impacted on your choice to wear Doc Martens?

**Katherine**

I think it's reasonably cyclical. Since I got the gold pair, I would say at least 2/3 of every day I have worn either of my pairs of Doc Martens. So whether or not I mean for them to be a part of my identity, they clearly are. When Olivia saw your post asking for participants she very quickly tagged me in it, so I guess they have become a staple part of what I wear. I don't know about identity... I think it's the fact that the ones I've chosen or been given are the very bright and bold ones, and I think that is the thing that ties into my identity.

**Georgia**

So you think it might have more to do with the colourfulness of them?

**Katherine**

Yes. I almost bought the completely sequin ones but I managed to stop myself. Have you seen the iridescent ones? Oh my god!

**Georgia**

Yeah, I know. So I guess there's a kind of intersection of things there. It's not just that they're Doc Martens, you've gotta have the interesting ones, the fun ones?

**Katherine**

Yes, yeah.

**Georgia**

Would you say that you would buy like, a black pair or an oxblood pair?

**Katherine**

No. I do like them on other people but they are too serious for me! I'm not very serious.

**Georgia**

Yeah, it's interesting that Olivia immediately said that you have to do this study. Obviously other people consider it to be a part of who you are. Have you ever thought about that before? Have you been aware that other people think 'She's a Doc Martens girl?'

**Katherine**

No, not before she tagged me in it. But I guess it does make sense.

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you have any thoughts on gender and identity in relation to Doc Martens? You mentioned before that you remember boys wearing Doc Martens as a teenager, but not any girls.

**Katherine**

Yeah, I think it's probably more of a statement for women to wear them. Maybe not quite so much now that they've got all the fun ones. And I would say now that I notice more women wearing them. Often on the tube or whatever people will comment on the ones I'm wearing. I haven't ever done it myself because I'm too scared, but they'll be the ones I notice, the bright coloured ones. And they're almost exclusively being worn by women. So maybe it's because they have decided to cater to a different market. Growing up, I just reckon it's because of the environment that I was in. It's a very male dominated scene, particularly the old rock scene. Me and Emma, my guitarist, were often the only two women on the bill. And going to gigs as well – I was never the only woman in those audiences but I was often one of very few. That has changed recently, in the last 3 or 4 years, but it's still very male dominated. So I think probably not seeing it growing up was because of where I was spending my time.

**Georgia**

Yeah. And do you feel, as a woman who wears Doc Martens, do you think that like... Either separates, or integrates you into any groups?

**Katherine**

[Katherine pauses and thinks for some time] Because I live here, no. But if I was back home then maybe, a bit more.

**Georgia**

So home is...?

**Katherine.**

Cambridge. It's obviously so much more conservative, in almost every way, than here. Occasionally I'll put bright colours in my hair and I will get stared at in the street back home.

**Georgia**

Right, so living here, in London...

**Katherine**

Yeah, Doc Martens and bright hair are like, the least stand out thing ever here!

**Georgia**

So it's kind of geography dependent as well then, isn't it?

**Katherine**

Yeah, definitely.

**Georgia**

Okay. So you do still own and wear Doc Martens. Do you wear them pretty much every day?

**Katherine**

Not in the summer. But in the winter, yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay so you don't wear them in the summer because it's hot?

**Katherine**

I mean, it happens sometimes. If I'm doing a lot of walking I'll still wear them, even if it's hot.

**Georgia**

Okay. So which of the two is your favourite, would you say?

**Katherine**

I'd say the glittery ones.

**Georgia**

Okay. And why do you love them, what do they mean to you?

**Katherine**

I remember when I first got them, looking down at them, I would actually smile. They were just so glittery and colourful. And now they're just comfortable and my go-to. They don't remind me of the

TV show, thank god. At the time I was in charge of the choir and you had to come to the TV show with a vision of what you would like, your identity as a group. And I chose really bright colours and wore my DMs, my gold ones. And they clearly picked up on that as a styling point for the rest of the choir, there's 9 of us. So it was quite nice for that to be the thing that represented us - bright colours, slightly alternative. Sorry I've forgotten what you asked me...

**Georgia**

Haha, about your favourite pair, what they mean to you.

**Katherine**

Oh yeah. I guess kind of being the boss, they remind me of that too. A style icon!

**Georgia**

Definitely fair! Okay, so how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different wearing them than you do wearing other shoes?

**Katherine**

Hmm... I have a lot of crazy shoes. So even though they are very colourful, they're probably the more sensible end of the spectrum of shoes that I have. They're my go-to comfortable, confident ones. I'm a musician but I do a lot of singing teaching, often in schools. And they're actually my more conservative shoes.

**Georgia**

So the sparkly Doc Martens are your professional, conservative shoes?!

**Katherine**

Yup, ha! Absolutely. So if I know I've got to do a lot of walking or I'm going to have a long day, I'll wear them.

**Georgia**

So you feel quite comfortable in them?

**Katherine**

Yeah totally.

**Georgia**

Physically comfortable, or in yourself?

**Katherine**

Yeah, both. I think they sum me up pretty well, in a shoe.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. Would you say you feel different in them than in other shoes, or not?

**Katherine**

I don't know about that. I'm a big fan of shoes in general. I've never really thought about how I feel in them as opposed to other shoes. Other than the fact that if I know I like the shoes, I don't really care about what else I'm wearing.

**Georgia**

Right, so they take precedence in terms of an outfit?

**Katherine**

Basically, yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. Are there any situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens and why would that be?

**Katherine**

I've just said I go to work in them, and I do. But for a while I worked in a music school and they made me wear black shoes, which was very disappointing. I didn't own any so I had to go and buy some. Obviously going out and stuff... I mean, I have worn them dancing but I have to say they're not great dancing shoes. Good gigging shoes, good jumping around shoes, but not good for going dancing. So I'll wear my rainbow platforms for that. Also formal occasions, I guess.

**Georgia**

Right, so you don't wear them for formal occasions?

**Katherine**

I don't, no. I'm not that edgy!

**Georgia**

Okay. So you're not that attached to them that you would wear them to every single thing?

**Katherine**

No. No, no, no.

**Georgia**

But you did say you have quite a large shoe collection, so you've got lots of other things to choose from?

**Katherine**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. Have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing your Doc Martens and what were they?

**Katherine**

They've always been positive. People on the tube, particularly. Not very often now but when they looked new and shiny people would tell me that they were really cool. There's a couple of girls I've seen on the overground wearing the same ones.

**Georgia**

And you said it was mostly women who comment on them?

**Katherine**

Yeah, mostly women, for sure.

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you notice when other people wear Doc Martens?

**Katherine**

Usually.

**Georgia**

Do you think that has an impact on your opinion of them?

**Katherine**

[Laughing] Automatically trustworthy! I do notice other people wearing them, especially more unusual ones. The black ones, probably not. I wouldn't make a judgement on them other than the fact that I thought they were wearing cool shoes. Unless they were a musician, like at a gig or whatever. Then I'd think they are going to be cool. Probably slightly more like me as a person than someone who wasn't wearing them.

**Georgia**

So particularly with musicians you would feel like you had something in common with them?

**Katherine**

Yeah. Probably not consciously though.

**Georgia**

Okay. Is there anything else about Doc Martens that you want to tell me that you think I haven't covered?

**Katherine**

Um... I think living here, in London, it's very easy to be poor. And I think that I don't have a Doc Martens habit purely because I can't afford to. Because they are so expensive, and rightfully so, they are good, well-made shoes. But it is a shame. I always go in and try them on – there was a turquoise pair of glittery ones that I really wanted but I just couldn't justify buying them.

**Georgia**

So you go in and try them on even knowing you can't buy them?

**Katherine**

Oh yeah! It's very close usually.

**Georgia**

Yeah, just willing yourself not to spend the money!

**Katherine**

Totally. My housemate's auntie came to stay once, she's German. We took her to Camden market to show her around and ended up going into Irregular Choice. There were a pair of shoes there that looked DM-ish, and I must have been admiring them for quite a long time because she kept saying 'You should get them! You should get them!' I was a student and had just got my student loan. They were more expensive than DMs but she basically talked me into buying them, she kept saying 'They're so you!' She had been saying that for a lot of stuff in Camden market that I didn't think was very me. Anyway, I ended up buying them and I regret it to this day because they're not at all comfortable, no matter how much I wear them, and I would have much rather spent my money on a pair of DMs!

**Georgia**

Oh no! So do you think if you had the disposable income, you would spend it on Doc Martens?

**Katherine**

I would have so many pairs, all of the bright coloured ones. I much prefer the big, bright coloured ones but without any pattern. I'm not a fan of the flowery ones or anything like that.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so for example you wouldn't be fussed by say... The William Morris ones they did recently or anything like that, or collaborations with musicians?

**Katherine**

Yeah, not so much.

**Georgia**

Do you think there's any artists or musicians that would convince you to buy a pair?

**Katherine**

Maybe Debbie Harry, but I think she'd be the only one based purely on who she is.

**Georgia**

Would it matter what they looked like?

**Katherine**

That would be the only one where I'd say no to that question! Everything else is basically just because I like the colours.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. That's it! Thanks so much.

## Kathleen

*Kathleen is in her 40s and works for a commercial real estate agency in London. She was born in Aotearoa New Zealand but has lived in the UK for 20 years. She got her first pairs of Docs when she was 10 years old, and she now has 4 pairs. I interviewed Kathleen in St James' Park, London, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Okay, so can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Kathleen**

Yep. When I was about 10 or 11, I was around my friend's house and she had a pair of Doc Martens 8-ups. I used to always wear trainers. She lent them to me, and I wore them to shock my mum, kind of as a joke. And my mum said, 'Oh, those look like excellent practical shoes! Would you like a pair?' and I said yes, so she took me around to the local shop and got me a pair of Doc Martens shoes there and then. It wasn't what I was expecting, but it was brilliant.

## **Georgia**

Amazing. So what year would that have been?

## **Kathleen**

I think I would have been about 10 so it would have been 1987 or 88.

## **Georgia**

And was that in Wellington?

## **Kathleen**

In Wellington, yeah. We had a locally owned, locally run little shoe store really close to our house. The sort of thing you don't really see anymore. And they had all sorts of different shoes in there, and they had Dr. Martens. Through school a lot of my friends got them, particularly my male friends. I've got a bunch of male friends who wear them, and none of my female friends from home.

## **Georgia**

So why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

## **Kathleen**

I don't remember actually making a decision, or even there being other brands. There must have been other brands that were similar but to me it was just Doc Martens or trainers. It felt like that. And I don't know if that was a really strong branding thing. I remember it being a big thing that they were British. They were British, not New Zealand made. And I don't know why but as a child, that made a difference: 'I've got British Dr. Martens.'

## **Georgia**

Right, so that made them kinda cooler?

**Kathleen**

Yeah, it made them cooler. And kind of, in a funny way, more trustworthy. In that they were likely to be more robust because they were British shoes and they'd been around for a while.

**Georgia**

That kind of answers my next question but I'll ask you anyway. So your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand, when you were younger compared to now, has that changed?

**Kathleen**

Yes, probably. Because I think of them now as being a lot more common than they used to be. Well, when I was growing up they were common as school shoes, but now I think of them as being funky, edgewise. The people who wear Dr. Martens are the kind of people I'd wanna be friends with. I work in an office, I wear a suit every day. There are no other women in the office who wear Dr. Martens to work every day. I work for a commercial real estate company so there's not that many other women full stop. I was talking to one of our executive directors about personal branding and leadership within the business and she said to me, 'Always be true to yourself. You wear your Dr. Martens every day, they're a part of you' and I thought that was a good thing, I was pleased to be known for that.

**Georgia**

Uhuh. So were you aware of any of your friends or peers owning or wearing Doc Martens when you were younger and did that impact on your choice to wear them?

**Kathleen**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Georgia**

Do you think there were any other influences, anything in pop culture or...?

**Kathleen**

I've always been into rock music: classic rock, 80's rock, hair metal, that sort thing. And in my mind those bands should wear Dr. Martens, but some of them wear trainers and I feel so disappointed when I see them wearing trainers. I'm like, 'You don't understand the rules!' But I don't recall if I knew at that age.

**Georgia**

Right, but as you got older did it become a part of that scene?

**Kathleen**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Georgia**

Right. So did you or do you identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Kathleen**

Yes. So... Particularly at work, I'm a strong believer of bringing your whole self to work, not trying to be two different people. Because I think you have a more fulfilling life when you're honest about yourself. And when I talk to people about me they say they always think about rock music and my rugby club. They're the two biggest parts of my life and the two big things that I spent a lot of time

doing. Now, Dr. Martens aren't a part of rugby, but they are definitely a part of that classic rock crowd. I go to a lot of gigs and I'm usually on the younger side of the people that go – there'll be a lot of men in their fifties and sixties who are wearing black jeans, a Motorhead t shirt and Dr. Martens boots. And usually the women at those concerts will be wearing Dr. Martens as well.

**Georgia**

Right, so they are quite a big part of that scene?

**Kathleen**

Yeah, I think so.

**Georgia**

Okay. Did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture when you were younger?

**Kathleen**

So I don't know, I can't recall at what stage I became aware of the punk thing, particularly with the cherry Docs. I think I might have only become aware of that sort of association when I came to the UK. Because I don't think I was close enough to it or paying enough attention. I think if I was that age now, because I'd be on YouTube and watching the videos, I would be really aware of it. But at that stage I was aware of the music and possibly the association generally, but not specifically the thing of skinheads with rolled up jeans and Dr Martens cherry boots.

**Georgia**

And when did you come to the UK?

**Kathleen**

2000. It's funny because I'm 42 now and it feels like there's two halves of my life. The life where I was growing up... I left New Zealand when I was 23. I came over here and spent a bit of time in London, then went to Scotland, then came back to London, then went home to New Zealand for a year, then went to Ireland. And then I came back to the UK permanently in 2004. So it's like there's that bit of my life in New Zealand, that bit of life in the UK, and that bit in the middle where I was doing other stuff. And you can almost say 'that's happened pre the UK and that's happened post the UK.'

**Georgia**

Right. So do you think that lack of knowledge of subculture is to do with where you grew up?

**Kathleen**

Yeah. We were just so far away, and also when I was growing up we only had 2 TV channels in New Zealand. We didn't get TV3 until I was 13 or so, and multiple channels didn't arrive until I was much, much older. Whereas now everyone has Sky TV, and with the advent of the internet, and YouTube, and everything, people are just so much more aware. It's different. When I was growing up the Dr. Who that we got was released here [in the UK] like 8 years earlier. So I grew up with the Dr. Who's from the late 60's and early 70's, even though I wasn't born until 1976. I genuinely used to think it took 8 years for them to put the tapes on the ship and ship them out to New Zealand! So everything was just a bit behind.

**Georgia**

Aw, amazing. So this is a big question: what impact has owning and wearing Doc Martens had on your identity, if any? Or do you think it was the other way around: that your identity impacted on your choice to wear Doc Martens in the first place?

**Kathleen**

I think when I was younger my identity hadn't formed yet really, it was more my mum saying that they were sensible shoes so I should get them. But when I came to the UK, particularly in my work, I felt that there was a lot more expectation for women to dress in a particular way. All of the women I worked with wore very high heels and looked very well turned out all the time. There was a period of time where I wore my Dr. Martens in to the office and got changed into heels. But I realised I really wasn't built for heels: some people are good in them and some people aren't, but I just wasn't enjoying wearing them. I kept buying different pairs to try and find some that worked for me, and it got to the point where I made an active decision to start wearing Dr. Martens in the office and just saying, 'This is me, you guys just deal with it. I'm not going to go along with what everyone else is doing, I'm just going to be myself.' So I feel like I made two choices to start wearing Dr. Martens: the first when I was a kid, and the second one here. Obviously, I was wearing Dr. Martens outside of work too, but maybe that decision to do it in the office was a different thing.

**Georgia**

Mhmm. So when was that, sort of mid-2000's? That's the height of the sort of Sex and the City era, all those really big heels. And Doc Martens were in a real slump at that time, they weren't very popular.

**Kathleen**

Yeah, and that was great for me! Because nobody else was wearing them. This was before the whole Ayness Deyn stuff had happened. And by the time that did happen, and they started to be picked up again, I felt like everyone already knew that it was a part of me beforehand. I think it worked better for me, doing it in that slump when people were like, 'Does anyone still wear DMs?' I'm like when I do, obviously.

**Georgia**

So do you wear them everyday?

**Kathleen**

I have some problems with my ankles: I fractured my ankle a few years ago, and sprained the same one when I was a teenager. So I try to mix my shoes up so that I don't wear the same pair all day, every day. I've got hiking boots that wear in and out of the office, and I change into my Dr. Martens in the office. In our two offices, I've got a pair of shoes in the West End and a pair of boots in the city. Then I have this pair that are my 'home' pair, and I have just bought a pair of 10-ups that I have yet to wearing. They're my first pair of 10-ups so it's a big step! So yes, pretty much every day. It would be rare that there would be a day where I didn't wear Dr. Martens at some point.

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you have a favourite pair?

**Kathleen**

Not really, because in the last 20 years I've pretty much always had black 8-ups. I seem to go through them faster than some people, they sometimes split across here [Kathleen indicates the crease in the centre of the boots]. I had one pair that had double thickness soles and they split right across the sole which had never happened before, or since. Actually, that pair was quite cool. I went shopping with one of my male friends and we went into the Dr. Martens store, and I saw them and tried them on and was like, 'These are amazing!' and he said 'So why don't you get them?' I said, 'I can't buy the first thing I try on!' and he couldn't understand why not. He said 'Why are you going to try on some stuff you don't like, why not just buy them?' and I thought that was a really good point! They were great, they were really great, but they were a bit more tricky to walk in because of the double thickness sole.

**Georgia**

Okay. So why do you think that you love them so much, as a shoe? Why are they special to you?

**Kathleen**

They're comfortable. They're practical. They're presentable. And I think they help identify me as a part of a certain subculture. You see other people wearing Docs and like... I wouldn't necessarily say hi to them, but you get that feeling. But for me, I'm a very practical person. Particularly living London, you don't know when the transport you're on is going to break down and you're going to have to walk for half an hour to get to the office. If you're in Dr Martens you can wear them to the office and walk wherever, whereas if you're wearing some ridiculous high heels you're just stuffed. And they're good for puddles!

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Kathleen**

I think so. I think they give me... I'm not sure if calling them a safety blanket is the right thing, but I almost feel a little bit more confident, like 'I can deal with this, this is going to be okay.' My mum always said that as long as your feet were comfortable then you could take on anything that the day throws at you.

**Georgia**

Awesome. Are there any situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens, or you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens, and why?

**Kathleen**

I don't normally wear them on the beach because I don't like the idea of getting sand in them. I didn't wear them when I got married, but if I was to do it again now then I would.

**Georgia**

Right. Why didn't you?

**Kathleen**

It was in 2004 when I'd just got that job, and everyone was wearing heels and I was trying that. And people were like, 'You can't wear your Dr. Martens with your wedding dress, that's not the right

thing to do' and I was like oh... okay, well I won't then. Whereas now I'd just be like, 'It might not be the right thing for you, but it's the right thing for me.' When I go to black tie events I always get a full length dress and just wear my Dr. Martens underneath. We've been on quite a few cruises, and I've got this really big, black, full length skirt that I got made for me, that I wear with a bunch of different tops, and Dr. Martens underneath. And people always tell me they think it's such a good idea! So really, there's not many places I wouldn't wear them.

**Georgia**

Have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing your Doc Martens?

**Kathleen**

I don't remember ever having a negative comment, which I think is tied up in that idea of them being presentable. You can't be told off for wearing them in the office because they're within any sort of dress. They might not be what they think a girl should be wearing, but they can't judge me for that. So mostly it's people saying that they wish they were wearing them!

**Georgia**

Which brings me neatly onto my next question. Do you think there's anything about gender and identity when it comes to Doc Martens?

**Kathleen**

I do, yeah. I do think that people make assumptions when they see a woman wearing Dr. Martens. She's probably going to... I don't know. Someone who's wearing Dr. Martens is clearly not, like, a girly-girl. Because I wear a trouser suit and Dr. Martens I wonder if people look at me and think I'm a lesbian. But nobody has ever said it to me, so I don't know. It's hard... I have an image in my head of what I think other people think a woman who wears Doc Martens is like, but it's hard to verbalise, you know? A lot of the women I see at gigs are like me: not that skinny, black jeans and black t shirt. But I love it when I see a girl who's got a really light, floaty summer dress and some 10-ups on. I think it looks fabulous.

**Georgia**

Mhmm. Do you think that it's a different decision for a woman to put on a pair of Doc Martens than it is for a man to?

**Kathleen**

100%, yes. Because men wear Dr. Martens or other leather shoes but for them it's like, 'Do I go for that brand or something similar?' Whereas for women you're expected to wear something much more ladylike, something sandal-y or high heels. People in Britain wear heels a lot! Am I right in thinking that's not the same in New Zealand?

**Georgia**

Oh yeah, totally. But I do also think as a rule that Gen-Z aren't really wearing heels that much. They're wearing trainers or Doc Martens.

**Kathleen**

Yeah, you're right. The younger girls in my office are wearing trainers to work. Trainers! To the office!

**Georgia**

I know, the ugly 90's sneakers? The big Fila destructors are really making a comeback. But I think in general New Zealand is a more relaxed society and there aren't quite the same stratified dress codes as in the UK still. But I wasn't sure if it was just a trend thing as well, y'know, that trainers are just fashionable now.

**Kathleen**

Yeah. Also, as I mentioned, I work in commercial real estate so the women I deal with are professional women, maybe a surveyor or something, trying to make their way in what is very clearly a man's world. And they love like... LK Bennett, they come in dressed immaculately and in amazing shoes, they're always really well presented. In my personal life because the girls I hang out with are from the rugby club I guess I don't see as much of that sort of thing.

**Georgia**

Okay. So do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Kathleen**

Yes. Particularly women. I give a little internal smile.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so the next part of that question is to ask if it has an impact on your thoughts on that person?

**Kathleen**

Yeah. It makes me happy to see someone else wearing Dr. Martens, which is a ridiculous thing to say! But I'm so personally invested in the brand. I'm pleased to see people wearing them because it means they're making a comeback. They're obviously selling more because I'm seeing a lot more around. Often, depending on how the person is dressed, I think that they might be the sort of person that I would get on with.

**Georgia**

So you like that you see other people wearing them, you don't feel protective of the brand, like it's yours and yours alone?

**Kathleen**

Sometimes I feel that way. When there's people who I don't feel are doing it properly. There are some people who just look like they're not owning it right. How would I describe it... So I have a friend who bought a pair, she's actually told me she's put them on eBay now because they're the wrong size. I'm a bit like: they're not part of you, they're not a part of what makes you who you are, so I don't think she should have them anyway. And that's clearly why she bought the wrong size – it was fate! But I honestly couldn't tell you why I felt like that. I managed to get my husband into them though. I don't think Rob ever had a pair before he met me, and now he has a few pairs.

**Georgia**

Great! So is there anything else you wanted to tell me about Doc Martens that I haven't covered?

**Kathleen**

Well, there was a pair that I'd had for more than the 30 days and I called them and said I wanted to return them and they were really amazing about it. And I've heard that when they have jobs going in head office they try and find people internally, and from within the stores. Is that true?

**Georgia**

Yeah, I think so. I think they genuinely try to hire people who really believe in the brand and have some attachment to it.

**Kathleen**

I think that's great. I think you can really feel that when you go into the stores. You know that you're being served by someone who has an interest in it. The fact that I've heard that on the grapevine makes me feel like they care enough about their brand to bother with being decent. They are the only brand that I've been consistently brand loyal to throughout my life.

**Georgia**

Amazing. Great, well that's everything. Thanks so much!

Laura

*Laura is an information manager in her late 20s who lives in Wellington. She got her first pair of Doc Martens when she was 25, and she now has 2 pairs. I interviewed Laura in her home in Wellington, in May of 2019.*

**Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

**Laura**

Yes, it was a birthday present to myself on my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and I bought them online because there weren't really Doc Martens stores in New Zealand. Actually, I think I was too scared to go into the stores and try on Doc Martens, I don't know why.

**Georgia**

Were you living in Wellington?

**Laura**

Yes.

**Georgia**

So did you know if you could buy them here, you just didn't want to go in?

**Laura**

I'm trying to think. I know what it was. I fell in love with a very specific pair of Doc Martens and you couldn't get them in New Zealand, so I had to order them from the global store online.

**Georgia**

So if they were in stores here would you have tried them on? Or were you too nervous?

**Laura**

I'm not sure. I'd been thinking about getting a pair of Doc Martens for a long time. They were aspirational for the woman I wanted to be. I saw women that I admired wearing them. A lot of women in queer culture. I had just come out as bi, and I think I was nervous because in my mind

what I had attributed to them, being openly queer, was still new to me, and I was still quite shy about it.

**Georgia**

Okay. So why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

**Laura**

Women that I admired and was attracted to and thought of as the kind of role model I wanted to be in the queer community, they wore Doc Martens, and I think I was looking for a way to visually display my queerness because I am quite straight presenting. And that was one of the features that I focused on. It was something I could try, a shoe. They communicated a sort of power and freedom that I wanted to display in my queerness.

**Georgia**

Cool. What are your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand and have they changed at all over time?

**Laura**

They've definitely changed over time simply because they came into my awareness quite late. I think I used to think of them as part of a punk/rock/metal scene, I wouldn't have been able to pick them out of a line up of just 'boots' until recently, when again a couple of people who I looked up to or admired started wearing them and they came into my circle of burgeoning queer culture. And that was when I started looking into them and they did things like Pride boots, and that really caught my attention.

**Georgia**

So the fact that Doc Martens engaged with queer culture and that aspect of themselves, that appealed to you?

**Laura**

Yes. And it made me feel good to wear them, that idea.

**Georgia**

I know you've already kind of answered this but did any of your friends or peers own Doc Martens, and did that impact your choice to buy them?

**Laura**

Yes. I also have had other friends who aren't queer who wear them, but the decision for me was massively influenced by the queer women I met and admired in my early 20s.

**Georgia**

And you didn't really have any engagement with them as a child or a teenager?

**Laura**

No, not at all. I was not part of a community that wore them, nobody had opinions on them, not that I remember. So I came to them very neutral. They just didn't factor in at all.

**Georgia**

Why do you think that is?

**Laura**

My childhood was quite controlled and specific. We were typically white, middle class, conservative. One because they were expensive and my family couldn't have afforded them, and two, I don't know if they were big in New Zealand just because it was so hard to get them here. My mother and my family, we have very specific gender roles, so I was always dressed in what you could probably call pretty things. They just weren't presented to me as an option.

**Georgia**

Okay, so they just weren't on your radar at all. Do you identify as being part of a set subculture and if yes, are Doc Martens are a part of it?

**Laura**

I don't know if you can call queer a subculture, but if yes then definitely. I set out to look the part. As I learned more about it, it became a throwback to Riot Rrrl, punk, feminism. The radical element. I wanted to be a bit more radical!

**Georgia**

So at what point did you start to learn that Doc Martens were linked to that kind of radical feminism?

**Laura**

I think before I bought them. I'm the kind of person who does a lot of research, and especially because they were so expensive, I wanted to research them. I saw them as an investment. When I learned and fully grasped feminism in my honours year at university I did a lot of my own personal research into displays of feminism, and now that I think about it, in that year was one of the first queer women I met who wore Doc Martens. And she was a big influence on my own brand of feminism and queer culture. So I learned about Riot Grrl, and 90s feminist punk, and Doc Martens featured in that but I couldn't say specifically how?

**Georgia**

So this individual person had an impact on you learning about that scene?

**Laura**

Yes. Or at the least she introduced me to other people, expanded my ability to meet other queer women. So there was a passing on of knowledge between women. About feminism, queer culture, and about a part of myself that I was then ready to verbally and visually display.

**Georgia**

So they're kind of tied up in your coming out story?

**Laura**

100%

**Georgia**

I think we've kind of covered this but did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens associations with subculture, and did that impact your choice to buy them?

**Laura**

Yes, it did. The pair of Doc Martens I bought were limited edition and I chose them specifically because they matched what I had begun to explore in the last couple of years before I bought them, in what my fashion and clothing indicated to the world. The pair I have are a pearlized shiny pattern on black, and it was a big departure from how I had previously dressed. But it still wasn't plain black, which I didn't want to get into. It was something to catch the eye. I wanted to display them as much as I wanted to display my queerness, I guess. I don't know if that really answers the question.

**Georgia**

That's okay. So you did know about Doc Martens and subculture, but that was only because of your own research?

**Laura**

Yes, and it was a connection I made myself. I didn't have any real prior knowledge of it.

**Georgia**

Okay. What impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, or do you think it's the other way around, or is it cyclical?

**Laura**

I think it's a bit all of the above! They came into my life at a time when I was looking to make a change in the way I identified. They were a way for me to, I guess, queer my image? And quite a departure from anything I had done before. They communicated to me power and resistance, both from a feminist perspective and from a queer perspective. I didn't know at the time what they would feel like to wear, but when I put them on and started walking in them, physically they also communicated that. You walk different, they are a heavier boot, you need to stride, and as such they changed the way I walked and held myself. And that reconfirmed my idea of power and resistance as a woman taking up space, walking down a street.

**Georgia**

So that physical aspect has impacted on your identity and psychology?

**Laura**

Very much so. I think it reconfirmed my choice to wear them as a component of displaying my queerness and feminism, and femininity, to a certain extent. It marked a big transition in the way I had come to think of myself and women around me. I had grown up in a very conservative household where gender roles were and are still quite defined, and I now vary from that drastically. And it's very obvious in my family because nobody else does. I would have displayed what you might think of as a very soft femininity, I was raised with aspects of being a housewife, and not being intrusive. And after going to university and learning about feminist theory, the fact that I was queer, I didn't feel that the femininity I had been raised in reflected who I was anymore. And I wanted to show that. In first buying the Doc Martens! Even spending the amount of money they cost, because its exorbitant, and I'm spending my money on me which is quite a revolutionary act in itself. We struggled for money at times and the idea that a woman would spend that much money on herself on something seen as frivolous was radical. And the fact that they're not delicate shoes reconfirmed for myself that this was who I wanted to be.

**Georgia**

Cool. So you obviously still own and wear Doc Martens. You wear them quite often?

**Laura**

Yes.

**Georgia**

How often would you say? Do you wear other shoes?

**Laura**

I wear other shoes, yeah. When I first bought them I wore them quite often, because I still had in my heart that they were expensive and I had to get use out of them! I think as I have settled into my 'new identity', my current expression of myself, I've incorporated both aspects. I wear heels quite a bit, when I feel like it. And other times I wear the Doc Martens. I wouldn't say I section them into specific parts of my life. I wear heels to the office, but I have worn Docs to the office. I wear them casually, I wear them going out at night, it's just depending on my mood and how I feel or want to feel. I think I've found a nice balance.

**Georgia**

So you're not so concerned now about displaying femininity?

**Laura**

I'm not so concerned about the need for them to visually represent the power that I find in my femininity, my feminism and my queerness. I've come to accept that those are parts of me no matter how I choose to display them, and that there are multiple ways to display that. I don't need to remind myself of that. Because of the physicality of Doc Martens, when I was young and still learning my new identity and I wasn't feeling very confident, I used them as a way to remind and reassure myself, and reassure others that I was queer and a feminist but also feminine, but now I know that is inherently a part of who I am, and I know I don't need their weight in a way in the same way that I did when I was first starting out. But I still love them and use them to reinforce that sometimes.

**Georgia**

Okay, awesome. Tell me about your favourite pair of Docs Martens. What are they like and why do you love them?

**Laura**

That's hard because I just bought a pair and I love them too! For the longest time I only wore one pair because I only had one pair. I love those ones because they came to be a big part of my identity. The funny thing about them is that because I never tried them on before I ordered them, they are slightly too big for me which at first made me very nervous because I am quite tall and have big feet and making my feet even bigger seemed so out there to me. And I was a little bit insecure about that, but in what I perceived as the spirit of Doc Martens, I wanted to wear them anyway. Now, they symbolise body acceptance to me. The fact that my body can take up space and should take up space. I'm not trying to reduce myself when I wear them, because I can't. They symbolise a time of personal growth and change for me. They played a huge part in allowing me to be the person I am now. They were a security blanket of a kind. And when I put them on now, they remind me of that.

**Georgia**

So you still feel like your original ones are your favourites?

**Laura**

Yes because I only just got the new ones! I put them on, and they almost make my feet look small because I'm so used to wearing a size too big.

**Georgia**

Weird how you get used to stuff isn't it? Okay, so how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different in them than in other shoes?

**Laura**

Yes, very. They help me feel more confident and every time I put them on I remind myself that I am intentionally taking up space. They change the way I walk. I feel the ability to be a bit more outrageous in them, and they are easier to be outrageous in because they are flat so I'm less likely to break my ankle! Wait, what was the question?

**Georgia**

Haha, how do they make you feel and do you feel different in them than other shoes?

**Laura**

Yeah, I feel like the best version of me. It's a way for me to remind people... To remind people that I am queer, both using queer as in the LGBTQ community, but also slightly different. The older fashioned use of the word. I'm not always the person in the dress and the heels at work.

**Georgia**

So you associate Doc Martens with difference?

**Laura**

Yes. And an acceptance and celebration of that different. I use them to remind others and myself that the ways in which I'm different are just as wonderful as the ways in which I am the same.

**Georgia**

So are there situations where you don't wear them or wouldn't wear them, and why?

**Laura**

[She pauses] I don't think... I don't think there are any situations where I actively would choose not to. I tend not to at the office too much... um... I don't know, maybe because I don't always think my difference is the way to get people's attention in an office space? That's not to say I haven't worn them and had meetings with people in them. I guess sometimes I don't want to come across as confrontational, at least not in that way. There are other things that are confrontational about me. I have tattoos, I sometimes I have bright hair, I wear dark lipstick. A lot of my job is about getting people on my side, or at least that's the way I choose to interact with people before launching into the rest of my job. However, I have made some really amazing connections at a management level higher than mine about Doc Martens. Particularly with men! There are two managers who know who I am because I was the girl wearing Docs in the office. And they started up conversations with me, because they were wearing them too, or they own them.

**Georgia**

So a connection was made with them?

**Laura**

Yeah absolutely, and people I wouldn't typically relate to because they are middle aged men in different sectors to me! But it was a way to start chatting, and now whenever I pass them and one of them is wearing them they always point it out to me. They say 'Docs!' [Laura points at her feet].

**Georgia**

That's really nice. So, following on from that, have you experienced any notable reactions to you wearing Doc Martens and what were they, positive or negative?

**Laura**

Yes, I've definitely experienced reactions. Case in point, the previous question! The first time I wore them in front of my family they got a mention. I think it was caught up in the fact I'd changed a lot, I'd gone away to university and come back a queer radical feminist. And that was a diversion from how I entered university! And I am quite different even because I am the first person in my family to go to uni. And that shift happened quite quickly and was an adjustment for my family. I couldn't really say whether it was positive or negative it was just like... 'Okay Laura. We get it, you're different!'. Actually, I have had men admire me, or feel like they can talk to me about my Docs. But they do approach me differently from how I would get approached if I wasn't wearing them. How would I describe it... [Laura pauses for a long time]. I don't know how to describe it. Maybe a less confrontational way? Not necessarily being in opposition to me. But... in a sense they physically or personally puff themselves up a bit. The topics they discuss with me at parties, even if they're trying to flirt with me, they're a bit more forward and obvious. A bit more in my face when I'm wearing them.

**Georgia**

Like they feel like you can take it?

**Laura**

Yes, like they feel like they need to be a bit more out there, or more assertive to get my attention. Interestingly I haven't noticed anything from women. I couldn't tell you if they have actually denoted my queerness to anyone or if they have maybe given me a bit more confidence to flirt with girls. But men respond differently to them, but with girls its like 'hey you're also a girl who wears Docs'. It just the nod of like, 'hey!' Sorry that was a bit of a long answer.

**Georgia**

It's fine! So do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens, and does that impact on your opinion about that person?

**Laura**

Yes, I do notice. I think seeing women wear Doc Martens impacts my opinion more than seeing men wear them. I'm weirdly gender dividing that though because when I see anyone who seem queer or non-binary... I basically mean anyone who's not a man!

**Georgia**

Why is that do you think? Why do you notice it less, or why does it impact your opinion less to see men wearing them?

**Laura**

I think because I associate Doc Martens with power. And men already have that. I guess I'm projecting my own experience onto other people of wearing Doc Martens where anyone from a minority culture, or who's a little bit different, might feel the need to embody and display power. I'm making gross assumptions here, but because men have so many avenues to display their power, even simply being a man in our society, it kind of fades to the background. Or in my opinion, it means less. It seems that anyone other than a man is making more of a conscious choice to wear them. Although, knowing what I know about Doc Martens I don't know why because plenty of people make a conscious choice to wear Doc Martens, now that I think about it [Laura laughs]. I will say that, actually, I don't think it changes the way I approach men and that is because of the association that Doc Martens has with skinheads and violent men? In the same that I approach any man as 'you could be violent towards me until proven otherwise'. I probably approach men who wear them in the same way as men who don't. In the back of my mind it is something that we have in common, we're both wearing Doc Martens, but it doesn't reassure me in the same way that we might be friends. It's still got that counterpoint to it. In fact, maybe even more to the extreme. You're either going to my friend because you are aware of the nicer or more open or friendly subcultures, or you're going to be a complete arsehole! And potentially racist and sexist and all of that. Yeah.

**Georgia**

But you don't feel that way about women or, womxn, or gender non-conforming people? Do you feel they're less likely to be skinheads?

**Laura**

Yes. I guess I do. Although I image that's wrapped up in a lot of different signals I get from people. Even the act of wearing Doc Martens seems gender non-conforming in and of itself. Or at least in opposition to the sort of femininity that I was raised in.

**Georgia**

Are there any other things you want to tell me about your relationship with Docs that I haven't covered here?

**Laura**

[Laura pauses] I don't think so. No, that's it.

**Georgia**

Cool. Thanks!

## Lydia

*Lydia is a television researcher and PhD student in her 20s. She is from South London but now lives in Glasgow where she is studying. She got her first pair of Doc Martens in 2012/2013 and she now owns 3 pairs. I interviewed Lydia in her office in Glasgow, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

So can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Lydia**

I'd seen them online and then they were sold out. I found them on eBay, a new pair, and then I got bought those for Christmas. They were a very statement pair. I was probably about 19. They sort of looked like 1950s wallpaper, browns and oranges, lace up boots. They're the type of shoes that every single time you wear them, someone says, 'I like your boots.'

## **Georgia**

Did you still have them?

## **Lydia**

Yeah, the soles are a bit slippy now. I tried to wear them in the snow and it was dangerous.

## **Georgia**

Okay, and why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

## **Lydia**

I don't think other people had them. Friends of mine didn't really. I've always been one of those people that likes to be different, or if I got something that other people got, I managed to get one that other people didn't have. So I think that was probably one of the incentives and I remember talking to my mum about it, because my mum used to study fashion, and my mum said in the 80s that they all had Doc Martens.

## **Georgia**

Oh, brilliant. Did your mum wear Doc Martens when she was younger as well?

**Lydia**

Uh huh.

**Georgia**

Does she have any still?

**Lydia**

No, mum doesn't have anything from when she was younger!

**Georgia**

What were your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand when you got your first pair? And do you think that's changed over time as you got older?

**Lydia**

I don't think I saw it as being alternative. I guess it is alternative in some ways, they have the more hardcore styles, for example, but there's a certain lifestyle... Like, people that dress a certain way tend to go for those ones, in particular the chunkier one. And especially now they have the vegan stuff, they're very much going for that market. But then also very mainstream. Everyone has Doc Martens. So you walk around here in the winter and everyone is in them. I bought two new pairs last winter and part of that was because you just see everyone in them and you get jealous!

**Georgia**

So when you were younger, you didn't see quite so much of them?

**Lydia**

No, it's definitely everywhere now.

**Georgia**

Okay, and were you aware of your friends or peers owning Doc Martens when you were younger?

**Lydia**

Genuinely can't remember. They may have done but I don't really remember them.

**Georgia**

So it wasn't a thing that you noticed?

**Lydia**

No.

**Georgia**

Has that changed as you've got older?

**Lydia**

Yeah, a lot of my friends, and now my boyfriend has two pairs.

**Georgia**

Cool. So I guess if you don't remember your friends wearing them it probably wouldn't have impacted your choice to buy them necessarily?

**Lydia**

No. If anything, if everyone was wearing them I wouldn't have wanted to.

**Georgia**

All right. Okay. So opposite way around. Okay. And do you know or did you ever identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Lydia**

No, no. When I was younger I thought I was an indie kid mainly because I listened to Franz Ferdinand and Fratellis all the time.

**Georgia**

Okay. Right. Cool. And did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens association with subculture when you were younger?

**Lydia**

Maybe. I can't remember but it feels like it's probably in *About A Boy*. I used to have an audio book of it and I feel like... I can't remember her name. But the girl that adopts the boy, I feel like she wore Doc Martens. She was quite alternative.

**Georgia**

Did you love that book?

**Lydia**

Yeah, I listened to it all the time.

**Georgia**

Okay. So what impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity? Or do you think it was maybe the other way around, that your identity impacted your choice to buy them in the first place?

**Lydia**

I don't think my identity is impacted by wearing them. I think it's probably more that I always go for really bold shoes. I have one pair of black trainers. These are purple and I thought that'd be problematic, matching them to things, but it's fine. I guess I'm more likely to wear something that I know people will comment on. Which is quite attention seeking really!

**Georgia**

Okay cool. Do you have any thoughts on gender and identity and Doc Martens?

**Lydia**

I think there's something about them being chunky that feels quite statement making. It's not delicate and I like that about it. Considering they were traditionally workman's shoes. And also the fact that they're very practical and I think that really contrasts the shoes that people wore when I was growing up. The shoes that people wore to school would be tiny dolly shoes. My mum's really pushing my brother to get a pair because he's buying like shoes from Next and she just wants him to get a pair of Doc Martens because they'll last longer. They're much better quality and much better for you.

**Georgia**

And do you wear them pretty much every day or do you have other shoes that you wear?

**Lydia**

Well it's the summer so I alternate. I've got a pair of Chelsea boots which I basically wore all winter but in the summer I wear these. I don't wear them every single day, I try to extend the longevity of my shoes. Whereas my boyfriend wears the same pair of Doc Martens every day. He's also not the sort of person you'd imagine to wear them, he's a property surveyor. I think he thinks it gives him some sort of like...

**Georgia**

Edgy vibe in the office?

**Lydia**

Well it's not hard when you're only surrounded by middle age property surveyors!

**Georgia**

Okay, so tell me about your favourite pair of Doc Martens. What are they like? And why do you love them? What do they mean to you?

**Lydia**

Which pair to pick... I guess these are my favourite because they're the most wearable in most situations. I don't own many plain things. I mean they are purple, but they are plain, so I feel they're actually easier to wear because I'm wearing very clashing, jazzy trousers already. But they are really comfy and wearable, and they transcend the winter/summer divide. Although it's Glasgow so you don't really... Yeah, they're good for all weathers!

**Georgia**

Okay. So it's a practical reason why they're your favourite?

**Lydia**

Mmm.

**Georgia**

Great. And how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel? And do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Lydia**

I think I maybe walk with more purpose, I don't know. Do they make me feel different? I actually feel a bit more professional, because, you know, you don't have to dress in any particular way to come to a PhD office. But I feel if I am wearing them I could go to a meeting, as opposed to wearing trainers where I wouldn't feel I could do that. Whereas these, whilst purple, are more acceptable work wear. I've worked in TV offices, you can wear whatever you want, but I'd feel better in Docs.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So you're doing a PhD but you're also involved in TV as well?

**Lydia**

Yeah. I used to work on Horrible Histories, I did 3 series of that and took a suspension last summer.

**Georgia**

And what were you doing?

**Lydia**

I'm a researcher. I've moved up each time I've done it so I was an intern, then researcher, and now head researcher. So that's what I'd like to go back to. But my PhD research is on India and Scotland in the 19th century, and museum collections.

**Georgia**

Awesome. So are there some situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens and why?

**Lydia**

Well, social occasions. Like if I'm going to a wedding I'm not going to wear them. But some people do. And actually, it was my cousin's wedding. It was a Christmas wedding and everyone was dressed for the occasion in nice heels and stuff. And my second cousins came along wearing jeans, fleece, and notably, my mum was like, 'Why are they wearing Doc Martens to this?' And they didn't get invited to the next wedding. It was deemed disrespectful for them to show up like that. They had to be in the photos because they were family.

**Georgia**

Okay, that's pretty interesting. So have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing Doc Martens? And what were they?

**Lydia**

It's always positive reactions. I've had quite a few. I think it's happened in these shoes, at least twice in shops, strangers have said, 'I really liked your shoes.' So yeah, it's always positive reactions. Actually my friend has got a photo of me in the first pair that I had at a bus stop. And this quite elderly woman was talking to me about my shoes. They're a real conversation starter.

**Georgia**

Good to hear. And do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Lydia**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

And does that have an impact on your initial thought of that person?

**Lydia**

They've got good taste? I don't know. I guess it says that you're spending a certain amount on your clothes. Because they're an investment piece. So I guess it says that. I think now the amount of people that wear them crosses so many different strata that it doesn't say as much as it used to. So it's maybe more diluted because more people have a pair.

**Georgia**

But previously, you feel like you could tell more about somebody?

**Lydia**

Yeah, for sure.

**Georgia**

Cool. And is there anything else about your relationship with Doc Martens that you think I haven't covered?

**Lydia**

I feel like I've not given you very much! I can imagine my collection growing. I look quite regularly.

**Georgia**

So how many do you have?

**Lydia**

Three pairs. But I'm trying to streamline my possessions because I'm moving house. And I'm much more aware now of sort of sustainable fashion. I'm trying to think about sustainable fashion. So if I buy things, I really think about what how many times I'm going to wear it. So I think that would impact my decision. With shoes in particular I've always said I'd rather spend more and it last longer. And I always buy leather shoes. I was taught growing up that if you're buying shoes, they should be leather. Even my trainers are suede.

**Georgia**

So have you ever bought any second hand Docs?

**Lydia**

I didn't. My sister did actually. She bought a pair in a charity shop. But I find Docs quite hard second-hand wise. They can be quite hard to wear in, and once they have I feel like they're quite personal. And I feel like the wear in them is quite personal. You almost want to make that mark yourself. So the creases that always happen on Docs across the front, I'd much rather that at least I made that mark than someone else. I think they are quite personal.

**Georgia**

In terms of like sustainability, have you ever been tempted by the Made in England ones? Because obviously they're in a smaller factory and smaller batches.

**Lydia**

Yeah, I maybe would, but it's the cost of them. I've never bought a pair full price. So the ones I got on eBay they were like 70 quid, and then both the pairs I bought in the sale. So I bought two pairs for 110 pounds last year. I'm a bit of a bargain hunter anyway, so if I saw some I liked in the sale then yeah.

**Georgia**

So you wouldn't buy full price ones?

**Lydia**

Not in my current financial situation. But I'd definitely like to have some of the lifelong ones. I'm a big shoe person. I've been losing weight since January but shoes are one of those things that regardless of how you feel about the rest of you, your shoes can always be good. So I think when I've not felt like I want to buy any clothes, I might buy shoes.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. Well that's everything, thanks very much.

## Megan

*Megan works in the radio industry and is in her 40s. She lives in Wellington. Megan got her first pair of Docs when she was a teenager and she now owns one pair, glitter gold 1460s. I interviewed Megan at a bar in Wellington, in May of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Here we go. So my first question, can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Megan**

I was in Germany, in Berlin, in fact. And it would have been... 1994? 1995? January 1995 probably. And I was in Berlin on a school exchange as a 16 year old.

## **Georgia**

Oh cool! That's really cool. That's a big trip from here.

## **Megan**

Yeah it was, it was a long way. It was for three months in the school holidays. I was 16, I'd never really left Christchurch. I don't think I'd even been to Australia at that point. It was my first big overseas trip.

## **Georgia**

Wow, brilliant. Okay, so what kind of shop was it? Or was the market? Can you remember?

## **Megan**

Nope. I can remember holding them in my hands. And I remember really wondering if I should buy them But I can't remember anything about the shop.

## **Georgia**

Okay...

## **Megan**

No, no, I can! Oh my god, okay, I didn't know I remembered this. So in Berlin... I have no idea where it is. But in Berlin there was this big department store that was like six stories high. And it was like

the biggest department store in Europe or something like that. So we were on our school exchange, we had a week... We all had our little host families and we had a week in Berlin all the Kiwi girls staying at a youth hostel in Berlin which now... I mean what the hell were they thinking! And so we had like a whole morning where we were going shopping, and we spent basically the whole morning in this giant department store. Where there was a lot of techno music playing, because it was Germany in the 1990's. And yeah... I remember it being like, the coolest place I'd ever been. Because, you know, I came from Christchurch!

**Georgia**

So what kind of shoes were they?

**Megan**

They were navy blue Doc Marten boots, 8-holes.

**Georgia**

Okay, and why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

**Megan**

Because they made me feel cool. They made me feel bad-arse. So it was the 90's; grunge was a thing, and I was 16 going on 17, and all I wanted was to be cool. Kurt Cobain had not long ago died, whenever that was... I discovered Pearl Jam when I was in Germany. And I think I was embracing my inner 16 year old rock chick, which when I look back at that now I'm like 'Aw sweetpea, you were not cool!' But that was the thing, I wanted to be cool. And they were such a signifier of what it meant to be cool.

**Georgia**

Okay. And so you knew about the brand before you bought them?

**Megan**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Georgia**

Did you have access to them? In New Zealand? You could buy them in New Zealand in the 90's?

**Megan**

Yes, but not the coloured ones. I don't remember... Like, you would be able to buy black ones with yellow laces. But I don't remember ever seeing coloured ones. And so the fact that they were navy blue was quite a big deal because they were different to everyone else.

**Georgia**

So that was important as well? That nobody back home would have them?

**Megan**

Yeah. Yeah. So I went to a private girls boarding school. And so the private girls boarding school in Christchurch was very different to what my idea of being cool was, because it was a boarding school. So it was having a horse, and wearing jodhpurs, or moleskins like, and all that kind of stuff. And so there was that kind of thing of setting myself apart, in a way? Our school uniform was also navy blue and I wanted to know if I could wear them as my school shoes.

**Georgia**

Haha, and were you allowed to?

**Megan**

No!

**Georgia**

No. I wasn't even allowed to when I was at school. I see all the teenagers wearing them to school now and I'm so jealous! I had to wear those hideous little Mary-Jane ones with the T-strap?

**Megan**

Yes, I also had a pair of those but I loved them! From a parental perspective though, thinking about it now, if you bought your 13 year old a decent pair of boots, you'd get at least a couple of years wear out of them compared to normal school shoes.

**Georgia**

Yeah, for sure. Okay, so, what are your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand? And have they changed over time from when you first bought them to now?

**Megan**

I can think of probably half a dozen stores in Wellington alone where you can buy them. And I know that I can buy them online, and I know that I can probably get them on ASOS, or at Pat Menzie's shoes or whatever. But they also still feel a little bit unattainable because they're not cheap. So they're still a little bit exclusive, even though they're not. So then they were probably well beyond my reach, and now they're not.

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**Megan**

They probably felt... And again, this would have been me as a 16 year old, they probably felt quite like... Edgy? Whereas now I think of them as quite traditional. You know, 'the traditional Docs'. I was talking to people in the office, they were all like, 'we had them in the in the 1980's.' They were telling me about wandering around London in their brown Docs. And I was like 'oh yeah, thats right, they've been around for a really long time!'

**Georgia**

A really long time, yeah. Okay. And so were you aware of your friends or your peers owning Doc Martens, or wanting to own Doc Martens, and did that have an impact on your choice to buy them?

**Megan**

I think there was one other girl who wanted to buy a pair. And I think I remember us talking each other into buying them because they were a lot of money.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah.

**Megan**

I vaguely remember them being about \$250 then, which would have been a lot of money then. So there definitely would have been peers, but I think it was more about me wanting them, not me buying them because other people wanted them.

**Georgia**

Okay. Do you think there was an influence from like, celebrity culture... You said about like, Kurt Cobain?

**Megan**

Yeah, grunge, rock music culture? Totally, yeah. Kurt Cobain, Smashing Pumpkins, the music that I was listening to then (that now I don't really like!) would totally have been an influence.

**Georgia**

So that was more of an influence than maybe your peers?

**Megan**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Georgia**

Alright. So do you, or did you, identify as being a part of a subculture?

**Megan**

Now, queer people, I guess. Is that a subculture?

**Georgia**

But you've never considered yourself to be like, a punk, or a goth or...

**Megan**

No, no. I love punk music but I don't consider myself a punk. I've owned black lipstick but I don't consider myself a goth. No, I'm extremely mainstream really!

**Georgia**

Well it's a commitment!

**Megan**

Yeah, it is. I wore these on Saturday night, I went dressed as a punk to a 70s party. My flatmate wore her sparkly ones too and we went as glitter punks together.

### **Georgia**

That's cute. And did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens associations with culture when you were younger and do you think that had any influence on your choice to wear them? Or do you now?

### **Megan**

Probably not then. Probably in the back of my head, I was like 'Oh I'm so cool because I'm a bit alternative, a bit gothy' without consciously thinking about it. Now, definitely, because I know more about history now so I know more about the role they played and the fashion history of them as well.

### **Georgia**

This is a slight aside, but was there much of an alternative scene in New Zealand?

### **Megan**

So they were definitely goth kids in Christchurch when I was a kid. I mean there must have been... I'm too young to really remember punk properly. But yeah there were definitely goth kids around Christchurch. And we would make fun of them!

### **Georgia**

Yeah when I was growing up in Scotland 'goth' was an all encompassing insult. All right. And hey, this is a big question. So what impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity? If any? Or is it the other way around? Do you think your identity impacted on your choice to wear Doc Martens?

### **Megan**

Yeah. So when I bought these ones, these bright gold glittery Doc Martens, I had been wanting to buy some for ages. There was a range maybe two seasons ago that was like black patent with flowers and I couldn't justify spending the money. And then when I saw these I was like, I don't care how much, I am buying them. As I've gotten older, in the last 7 or 8 years, I've really grown into myself. Because the joy of being in your late 30s/early 40s is that you figure out who you are, which is a delightful thing. And so I've really come into who I am. So now I have tattoos, and I wear ridiculous clothes and I have dumb 50s glasses, and I have bright pink hair. So it kind of felt like both. I was now the person I wanted to be when I was 16. So buying the Docs was kind of a deal because it was like, I wasn't the person I wanted to be then. I was pretending to be her because I was 16 I didn't know who I was yet. And so now it's like I am the person that should own these. But I shouldn't own just a black pair or just a navy blue pair. Because the person I am now owns glittery gold Docs, she doesn't own black ones. So there was that part of it. And then there's also the wearing them part of it. So I wore them today to work. And so many people commented on them.

They make me feel bad-ass, they make me feel cool, they make me feel like I'm stomping around. They make me feel like myself, which is a really nice thing.

**Georgia**

So that feeling hasn't changed? Because you said when you first got them they made you feel that way.

**Megan**

I think then they made me feel like the person I wanted to be. And I wasn't the rest of the time.

**Georgia**

So you were kind of buying the accoutrements to make yourself feel like that cool, bad-ass person.

**Megan**

Exactly. And then it took 20 years to actually become that person. So now when I put them on it's like, this is right. Then when I put them on it would have been like, I'm wearing my Docs today and it's a costume of the person I want to be. Whereas now this is who I actually am. But I could equally on other days wear ballet flats or sequin Chucks or stupid heels. But they feel right now.

**Georgia**

So was there a gap in-between where you didn't wear them?

**Megan**

Yeah but not for that reason. So my blue ones got stolen out of my car when I was 21. And I was so heartbroken. It was like when a pet dies and you don't get another because you can't deal with the heartbreak, what if it happens again. And also I was a student, I couldn't afford it. So I didn't for a really long time. And then probably from my mid-20s to mid-30s I didn't wear them because I didn't feel like I could pull them off because I so disliked myself in that time, I wasn't cool enough or bad-ass enough to wear them.

**Georgia**

So there was a process of growing over time?

**Megan**

Yeah, of having confidence and self-esteem.

**Georgia**

And do you think they've been a part of that process?

**Megan**

Yeah I do think they have, I think it's both. I think having the confidence to wear them is one thing, but wearing them also gives you confidence so it's a nice little circle. So I had depression over that period of 25-30, and I hated myself. But I felt bad about the fact that I hated myself, so I hated myself more. So that was what depression was for me; it was just an endless cycle of feeling shit and then feeling shit about the fact that I felt shit. But now it's the other way because I feel great about myself. And so when I when people say 'Oh my god I love your boots' I can say 'I know, aren't they great?!'

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**Megan**

At the beginning of the year my flatmate and I went to go and see a drag queen called Sasha Velour. She's amazing and I love her. And one of the cool things about Sasha is that she talks very openly about herself, and about the way that drag fits into kind of queer history, but also into her life. And she was talking on stage about how when she was in her mid 20s she had eating disorders and just felt really uncomfortable in her body, like her body didn't fit her. And she was trying to work through all of this and discovered drag, and the line she used in the show was 'I realised I could throw glitter at my weird parts and feel better about them.' And I just burst into my tears. Because that's what I'd been doing for years and I just didn't have a way to explain it. And I bought these not long after. Because I love sequins, I love shiny things, and that's what it is. I'm throwing glitter at the bits that make me feel uncomfortable. So I just love glitter, but I also love that these shoes are glitter in a way that's kind of subversive. Both in terms of what you might expect a pair of Doc Martens to look like, and also in terms of what you might expect someone who looks like me to wear.

**Georgia**

Yeah, I think there's something cool about wearing something SO noticeable. For myself, as a plus size woman and someone who has been that way all her life I always used to wear things that everybody told you made you look thinner. No horizontal stripes, lots of black, no bright colours, no shift dresses. I'm short as well so big, high heels, no cut off boots. I remember, as a teenager, I went into a shop and I wanted to get some army boots. And the person in the shop was like 'you're too short for them, they won't suit you.' Because I have really short legs. And they do look kinda weird,

they sit at a weird height on me, they look strange, but I LOVED them. And for years and years I never bought them. And then like as I got into my mid 20s I was like 'I don't care.' I really like these shoes and I wanna buy them. Like you say, you go through a process and you start to recognize that actually, it's more important that you're in things that you love. Because I was wearing clothes I didn't even like.

### **Megan**

Yes, and that don't even fit! I used to just put shit on my body simply because it covered my body, and I never cared what it looked like.

### **Georgia**

Yes! I insisted from the ages of like 17 to 25 that I was a size 14. Nobody can tell me otherwise despite the fact that a size 14 clearly does not fit me. So going shopping was torture because nothing looked good. And then I eventually started trying on the right sizes and it was an absolute revelation, it was just crazy to me.

### **Megan**

Yeah, I have a black sequin skirt that I was wearing in this store, I was buying a scarf for a friend. And the woman in the shop said 'Oh you're so brave. Wearing sequins.' And I was having a feisty day because I was like 'Uh, why?' and what she meant was you're a fat woman who doesn't mind standing out. And I hate that attitude, but I also understand that. We are taught to feel shit about ourselves so the idea of standing out is terrifying. But it gets to a point where the hiding is more exhausting. I'd rather just live my life, I'd rather just wear shit I like.

### **Georgia**

And also... You're not kidding anyone, right? Like nobody is gonna look at either of us and be like 'Oh she's a size 8' because we're wearing black, right?

### **Megan**

Yeah, I don't think about this very often anymore. But I do definitely stand out, and I don't mind that. It took me a long time to get there, and the world does reinforce that you shouldn't stand out, especially as a fat woman.

### **Georgia**

Yeah. So these are your favourite pair that you've ever owned?

**Megan**

Yes.

**Georgia**

We kind of pretty much talked about why you love them so much and what they mean to you...

**Megan**

The other thing I do love is that in my head Doc Martens are quite masculine...

**Georgia**

Actually that's really good, I was about to ask 'Do you have any thoughts on gender and Doc Martens?'

**Megan**

So things like the glitter and the ribbons as laces. I like that they are messing with what masculinity and femininity are. Because they still have same giant soles, they're still the same shape of shoe, but they are definitely feminine presenting. But if you showed me a black pair I'd be like 'no they're butch as hell.' Maybe not even masculine, just butch.

**Georgia**

So I think you've already said this, but how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel differently in them than you do in other shoes?

**Megan**

I definitely feel different in them than in other shoes. I feel genuinely cooler, which is a weird thing. And there's still an element of this 16 year old who wanted to be friends with Kurt Cobain who is in the back of my head.

**Georgia**

So do you think it's to do with that particular pair, or to do with the fact that they are Doc Martens?

**Megan**

Both.

**Georgia**

But there is something to do with the brand?

**Megan**

Oh yeah. These same boots but not Doc Martens wouldn't be the same. I might still love them, but I would love them in a different way.

**Georgia**

Right, yeah. Are there some situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Megan**

I mean, I probably wouldn't wear them on a long haul flight. I probably wouldn't wear them if I had to present to the board. I would only wear them to a certain type of speaking engagement. If I felt like I had to be 'grown up professional Megan' I probably wouldn't wear them. I wouldn't wear them to a funeral, unless it was a very specific type of funeral!

**Georgia**

So you said you don't feel like professional Megan would wear them?

**Megan**

Not these specific ones, no. Like a member of my team showed me his shiny red ones today, and they look perfectly professional. I also do think there is something to being a woman as well. Professional attire for women is different. And so my little black ankle boots with a two inch heel are much more appropriate for that. Which sucks and is really annoying. But we play the game.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So have you experienced any notable reactions from other people when you were wearing your Doc Martens and what were they?

**Megan**

I mean, mostly it was just 'Oh my god, I love your boots.' Like a woman literally stopped me as I was walking back to my office from lunch today.

**Georgia**

Would you say mostly positive?

**Megan**

Yeah, mostly.

**Georgia**

Do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens, and does it have an impact on your thoughts on them?

**Megan**

I definitely notice. Um... I don't know if it does. If it's a pair that I love I just kind of acknowledge it. But other than that, not really. I definitely notice them but I don't think it would change my opinion of someone.

**Georgia**

Okay. And just the last question, are there any other things that you want to tell me about your relationship with them?

**Megan**

So my flatmate who I'm very close to, my best friend. She has a pair that are also sparkly, rainbow sparkly. And I possibly wouldn't have bought these if she hadn't bought those. Because I think she made me see them lots more often. And made me go 'Oh, yeah, I really want those.. Yeah, so I think if we weren't friends I might have.... Yeah, if he hadn't have had them, I wouldn't have bought mine.

**Georgia**

So there is a connection between your friends and Doc Martens as well?

**Megan**

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

**Georgia**

Anything else?

**Megan**

Don't think so!

**Georgia**

Alright, thank you very much.

## Mhorag (Mo)

*Mhorag is a freelance human resources professional in her 50s. She was born in Aberdeenshire but now lives in Buckinghamshire, England. She got her first pairs of Doc Martens in her late teens/early 20s. When Mhorag answered my call for participants she had 15 pairs of Docs, but by the time I interviewed her she had reduced her collection to 11. I interviewed Mhorag at her house, in July of 2019.*

### **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

### **Mhorag**

I can actually. It was when I went to university and I bought them in Schuh, in Aberdeen. Which was a shop I'd never seen before because I'd come from Inverness. I thought they were really quite funky. It was a choice between them and Kickers which is quite bad to say! I decided on the Doc Martens and bought a pair of the original 1460 oxblood ones. I remember telling one of my friends a story, she was like 'How'd you keep them clean?' I told her I kept a pot of ox's blood in the fridge to keep them clean! About two years after that I became vegetarian so I never would have done that, but she believed me!

### **Georgia**

Oh my god! So when would that have been?

### **Mhorag**

That was around 1980.

### **Georgia**

Cool. Did you ever consider any other style or colour or shape?

### **Mhorag**

No. Throughout the whole thing they've been the ones that I liked. Over the years I bought shoes, and heels, but it's always those ones that I go back to. They're my absolute faves. I just like the look of them. I can't get away from them. I have had Timberlands, and fake versions of them, but it's still the same look that I choose.

### **Georgia**

So why do you think you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

### **Mhorag**

Why? Back in the day? Probably because they were cooler. And I think as a student I wanted to be cool. I can't think of any other reason why!

### **Georgia**

That's a perfectly good reason!

### **Mhorag**

I think you go to uni to break away and I think it's probably that.

**Georgia**

What were you studying at uni?

**Mhorag**

Business. It wasn't an exciting degree!

**Georgia**

Haha, aw. Awesome. So what were your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand and has that changed over time?

**Mhorag**

It's probably not changed much. I might have gone through a phase where when I first started working where they weren't elegant enough. I was wearing maybe Carvella because I'd started work. But I've always liked the brand. Always. Which is why when my friend had the possibility of getting a job there I was the most enthusiastic!

**Georgia**

Were you aware of any of your friends or peers owning Doc Martens at the time?

**Mhorag**

No. None of my friends had them. I can't think of many of my friends that have them even now. Nobody really has them apart from my friend who works for Doc Martens. One or two of them have purchased them because she's encouraged them to, but they're not fans. I even tried to get my girls to wear them, and they did when they were little. But they never got into them.

**Georgia**

So you put them in Doc Martens when they were little?

**Mhorag**

Yes Georgia, I did! But when Helen got her job they were in their teens and thought they might try them. But they just never got into it and now they've been sold on eBay.

**Georgia**

So why did you put them in Docs when they were younger?

**Mhorag**

Just because I love the brand. And I thought they looked really cute. I had a phase where I wasn't wearing Doc Martens, I had a few pairs and that was it. But we moved down to Northampton and we were in Doc Marten land. About 15 or 20 years ago they weren't in your face, you'd only get them in a few places. But when I moved down here, I thought I had to get them some.

**Georgia**

Okay. Did you ever identify as being part of any set subculture?

**Mhorag**

Probably not. I just liked them. I almost like them more now because of Helen's involvement, and Instagram as well. The social media makes me feel like I'm part of a little gang. And if I go anywhere and I have my DMs on, people will talk about them. I used to work in a shop locally and they used to

always know me as having DMs. I maybe was a bit of a punk, but not totally. I used to wear black eyeliner and go to punk concerts but I didn't have spiky hair or anything outrageous. But I was definitely in that scene and I suppose, maybe, that did influence me. I hadn't really thought about that. When you're 18 or 19 you'd never admit to being influenced. But maybe I was because punk was really in when I was going into university.

**Georgia**

Okay. So did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens associations with subculture, and did that influence your choice to buy them?

**Mhorag**

I do now but at that time they were just cool, I wasn't really thinking about any of that stuff.

**Georgia**

Do you think that subcultural knowledge now influences your choice to continue to wear them?

**Mhorag**

No. I just like them! I like the fact that they're always moving on and they have so many different choices. They keep up to date with things and they do collabs, I really like that.

**Georgia**

Great. So what impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, or do you think it's the other way around: did your identity impact on your choice to wear them? Do you think it's important to your identity?

**Mhorag**

Um... Yeah I do, actually. Because I think people identify me as a Doc Martens wearer. So I continue to wear them. But actually, as a choice, I quite like looking quite delicate and pretty but having my clumpy boots on. So I'll often wear a party dress but have my DMs on. I'll never wear 'nice' shoes. And I quite like that, I like being different to your average middle aged mother.

**Georgia**

And have you always been like that?

**Mhorag**

Maybe. I've always liked to try and not fit in with the mould totally. I'm a bit more boring now than 10 years ago. I would have been a bit more edgy but sometimes when you're going to the gym in the morning and then walking the dogs and stuff, you just don't have time. Actually, since I last spoke to you I've probably sold 5 or 6 pairs because they were just taking up space in my wardrobe. I just wasn't wearing them, and as long as I've got my favourites, I think that's what matters. I've started to like those really soft ones and a lot of the ones that I sold were the harder ones, which were lovely to look at but more torturous to wear. But that's the good thing about Doc Martens: they really hold their value.

**Georgia**

Yeah, they do. Okay. So do you have any thoughts on gender and identity and Doc Martens? Do you think it's a different decision for a woman to put on a pair of Doc Martens boots than it is for a man to put on a pair?

**Mhorag**

I've never thought about that. I don't know. For me, I've always thought that Doc Martens belong to the girls. I don't think men look as good in Doc Martens as women do. I suppose a lot of people would say that they're not very feminine but because they've had so many collabs with people like Aygness Deyn, and Fearne Cotton is a brilliant advocate for them, I think people like them. Even a few of my friends that I would never have thought would get a pair have recently purchased them. So something is filtering through. They've bought a pair of Doc Martens as opposed to Converse or Ash, which I feel are more stereotypical middle aged, middle class woman. So maybe it's filtering through that it's okay for women to wear Doc Martens.

**Georgia**

So do you wear Doc Martens quite regularly?

**Mhorag**

Yeah. I haven't worn them the last few weeks because it's been too chuffing hot. But I generally wear them in the summer because you can wear them with shorts, I actually really like them with shorts. Yeah, I would say I wear them 3 out of 7 days. And in the winter probably 6 out of 7 days.

**Georgia**

Was there ever a time in your life where you didn't wear them?

**Mhorag**

Yeah, when I was working full time. Probably for about 20 years I wasn't wearing them on a daily basis, I'd wear them at the weekend. I've never worn them in a corporate role. I did wear them when I worked at Heathrow and they asked me not to wear them because they weren't corporate enough.

**Georgia**

Oh really? When was that?

**Mhorag**

It was a consultancy role. And she said, 'I love your dress sense but it's not corporate enough.' They were the wee Amy ones with the nice laces, which I thought were quite smart but apparently not.

**Georgia**

What year was that?

**Mhorag**

Probably about 5 years ago now?

**Georgia**

Gosh, pretty recent! Interesting.

**Mhorag**

They're a brilliant company to work for, I did love it, but they're probably quite traditional. And if you're working for somebody, they're paying your wages, I think they're allowed to call the shots. If it's done in a nice way.

**Georgia**

Alright. Do you have a favourite pair?

**Mhorag**

I've probably got two favourites. One is an emotional favourite, and one is my current favourite.

**Georgia**

Okay, tell me about both of them.

**Mhorag**

So my current favourite is the Jaden vegan boots. I just absolutely love the clumpiness of them, I love the zip as well because you don't have to spend ages lacing them. I like the fact that they're vegan and environmentally good.

**Georgia**

Are you vegan yourself?

**Mhorag**

I'm not, I'm pescatarian. I was doing this 6 month diary thing where I was trying to not buy any new clothes, and think about the environment more. So I did a cull, which was quite hard for me because I'm a bit of a shopaholic, and then I challenged myself to not buy anything new for 6 months. And as part of that I had to post my outfit every day on Instagram in order to make sure I was using up all my clothes, which was kind of part of the process. So when I got the vegan ones it was kind of part of that. I just love them. I love wearing them, I can't get enough of them. And then I've got a pair of red patent tartan ones which are literally falling to bits, but they were the last thing that my dad bought me before he very suddenly passed away, which is nearly 10 years ago now. I just love them because of that – every time I put them on, I think of him. They're so tatty now, they're completely trashed. I deliberated about wearing them to his funeral but then I thought, 'Sod it, he loved them.' So I strutted up with them on. And it's actually great because every time there's a rugby game on I can put them on and say, 'Come on Scotland!', so they're great for the rugby too.

**Georgia**

That's so sweet.

**Mhorag**

How many pairs have you got?

**Georgia**

About 5 or 6 pairs I think. I've only really had them second hand because I can't really afford to buy new ones.

**Mhorag**

But second hand is great! They do so well.

**Georgia**

Yeah, they do. Okay, so how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Mhorag**

Oh, definitely. Always. I have a spring in my step. I always feel dressed when I have them on. I feel a bit different to other people, especially in certain ones. I've got a lovely pair of velour burgundy ones which are slightly higher, and Helen bought me some studs when she was in America that you just put in the eyelets at the top. They are just so pretty. I've got a pair of black and white ones that have studs all over them and I feel feisty in them. I quite often take them when I'm going skiing because they go with everything. And I get a lot of comments like, 'Wouldn't want to mess with her!' because they are quite intimidating.

**Georgia**

And you like that?

**Mhorag**

I like the bants that comes with it. They're quite a conversation starter, aren't they? They make me feel a little bit different, a little bit edgy. And when you're in your fifties it is quite nice to feel that.

**Georgia**

Yeah, totally. I guess especially around here there aren't many women who would be wearing them like you.

**Mhorag**

Yeah, I don't think any of my neighbours are wearing them! More likely to be in Gucci loafers.

**Georgia**

Definitely. So are there any situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens, and why?

**Mhorag**

No, I don't think so. Apart from that one time that I didn't wear them to work. Have I worn them to a wedding? I'm not sure. I've worn them with pretty dresses, and if we go to a ball or something I always take them with me. I can't think of any situation where I wouldn't wear them. They are my go-to. For the summer I sometimes wear Converse or Golden Goose, or Air and Grace trainers which are so soft, but I don't often wear shoes rather than boots.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah. Okay. Have you had any notable reactions from other people to you wearing your Doc Martens?

**Mhorag**

Usually good reactions. Or sometimes taking the mick! I've had photographs of my feet taken at festivals. When I worked in a shop in the village they always used to go on about my style. Like 'Oh yeah, Mo, the girl with the Doc Martens.' I'm sure some people have thought 'Christ, I'd never wear them.' But that's alright. I wouldn't wear what they wear! I think each to their own.

**Georgia**

Yeah, they don't have to wear them. Okay. So do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Mhorag**

Oh yeah. Always. I've got a thing about people tucking their jeans into the 1460s and I'm not keen on that.

**Georgia**

Does it have an impact on your initial thoughts on that person?

**Mhorag**

No, probably not. I think they should be worn in a cool, fashionable way but lots of people wear them for practical reasons. So I'd think like, 'Yeah, alright, but you could be wearing Timberlands or something.' So I don't pay much attention to people who aren't styling them in a cool way.

**Georgia**

Right, yeah. Great. So that's pretty much all my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me, anything you think I've missed?

**Mhorag**

Oh god, I don't know. I suppose for me it's been really good that they've been regenerated. It's re-inspired me to look at them a bit more. At one point I think I had about 25 pairs, but I have got rid of some because they take up a lot of space. I was buying repeats – I had about 3 pairs of flowery ones and I just didn't need that many pairs. But I really just love them. I love the brand, I love the shoes, I can't get enough of them.

**Georgia**

Great. Well that's everything. Thanks very much.

## Robyn

*Robyn is a Programme Manager for a large culinary and foodstuffs company. She is in her 60s and lives in Auckland. She bought her first pair of Docs as a young chef in her 20s and now owns 7 pairs. I interviewed Robyn in her home in Auckland, in June of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Okay, so, first question is where and when did you buy your first pair of Doc Martens? Can you remember?

## **Robyn**

1996 in London. Actually, no, I lie. Prior to that I used to wear them in the kitchen, so probably bought in the early 80's. Probably from Pat Menzie's on Queen Street.

## **Georgia**

But you do remember buying them in London as well?

## **Robyn**

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, my black velvet ones are from the 1996 wedding range. I went in to get some cherries and I came out with those, a pair of oilwash ones, and a pair of purple snake skins which are still going strong.

## **Georgia**

Okay. Why did you choose Doc Martens over other bands?

## **Robyn**

Initially because of working in the kitchens because of the soles which are oil and fat proof, blah blah blah. So initially that and then they worked for me, so I've always worn them since then.

## **Georgia**

Okay. Yeah. And in the kitchens were there other people who wore them as well? Was that quite common in cheffing?

## **Robyn**

Yeah, you wore Docs or you wore just steel caps. I've never really worn Docs steel caps. But yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. And at the beginning, when you first started buying Doc Martens, did you have any cultural associations or anything with the brand? And has that changed as time went on?

**Robyn**

Only through the punk stuff in the UK.

**Georgia**

Okay. So you did know that they were associated with subculture in a way?

**Robyn**

Yeah, of course, absolutely. And my family are from London anyway so...

**Georgia**

But that wasn't necessarily part of why you chose them?

**Robyn**

No, no, not necessarily. They're just awesome.

**Georgia**

Uhuh. Okay. Did you ever or do you identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Robyn**

Only queer, really. I was a goth at one stage but, you know, I'm 60 now, I've got to grow up eventually!

**Georgia**

So you were a goth when you were younger, in your teens?

**Robyn**

No, actually, probably in my 30's? I mean I prefer to wear black, full stop.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. Why do you think that happened in your 30's?

**Robyn**

I just liked it. I'm not sure why. Not like a true goth, but still.

**Georgia**

And did you wear your Docs during that as well?

**Robyn**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay, so you said that you did have some knowledge about Doc Martens being associated with subculture, but that wasn't a part of your decision to buy them?

**Robyn**

No, initially it was purely practical. Just based on my career.

**Georgia**

Did any of your peers or your friends wear them?

**Robyn**

Not really.

**Georgia**

Okay. Just you. So this is quite a big question. What impact has owning and wearing Doc Martens had on your identity?

**Robyn**

Y'know, it's funny. I've got bursitis in my hips, which is just wear and tear. And so one of the things I had to do this summer was wear some Birkenstocks. I really struggled. Whenever I put them on I think, 'Oh, my god, these are just nana shoes.' It's really strange. I mean, it's funny, because I'm a grown up and I'm quite comfortable with who I am. I'm very comfortable with who I am. But if I put my kickers [Doc Martens] on, in a way better headspace. It shouldn't be that way.

**Georgia**

But no, it is important, our clothes are a big part of who we are.

**Robyn**

Yeah and I've always moved better in them. They really work for me physically.

**Georgia**

So do you think that it's kind of the other way around? Do you think that your identity impacted your choice to continue wearing Doc Martens?

**Robyn**

Yeah. Definitely being queer too. Kind of... Docs are who I am. Which is weird to say, but it's true. I dunno... There's something about striding along K Road in your Docs, y'know?

**Georgia**

No, a lot of the people I've spoken to have said that they definitely see Docs as being a part of queer culture. Which is really interesting, because I think a lot of brands aren't very good at negotiating that space but Docs have done well with it.

**Robyn**

Yeah, I think it's because they've always had that iconic subculture vibe.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Even as early as the 70's they were a part of it, particularly the male gay subculture, particularly the BDSM clubs in London.

**Robyn**

Yeah. The two old boys that own the main pig club [BDSM club] in town are both skinheads. Well, they look like skinheads, really they're both sweet as. But they both stomp around in their cherries. The boots are bigger than them!

**Georgia**

Okay, so do you have any thoughts on Doc Martens and gender?

**Robyn**

I think that actually, for an article of clothing, they're really quite gender neutral. God I sound like such a wanker... They're a really strong symbol. I don't think that they are male or female. So they don't really impact on gender I don't think.

**Georgia**

Do you think there's a difference in being a man who wears Doc Martens compared to being a woman who wears Doc Martens? In how the world sees you?

**Robyn**

Maybe. Maybe it's expected that you'd wear a powerful symbol like a Doc Marten if you're a bloke. Whereas if you're a female... Actually yeah, if you think about it, if you look at some of the young girls who wear Docs now are really quite alternative and powerful people. Whereas guys would just wear them, I guess. It's more expected for them, maybe. More normal.

**Georgia**

So is it more of a statement for women to wear them?

**Robyn**

Yes, it is, I think. Yeah. Although they're selling out now with the flowery ones. But they are gorgeous though.

**Georgia**

Haha, yeah, they are cute. Okay, so how many? How many pairs do you think you have?

**Robyn**

Boots wise, I've got 5 pairs of boots. And the two sandals. But I used to have others.

**Georgia**

Right. So you've had some that you have thrown away?

**Robyn**

Yeah, worn to death. But I've kept my 15-ups.

**Georgia**

Why have you kept them even though you can't wear them?

**Robyn**

Because they're the pair that I've worn the longest. And I still think someone will be able to fix them one day.

**Georgia**

Right. So they're still quite special to you?

**Robyn**

Very. I've worn those the longest. I used to change their laces, at the moment they've got green laces. They're probably dusty as all hell. Up until this house, we're in kind of a grown up house now, my Docs have always been on a rack. Visible. In the bedroom or somewhere.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. Was that a conscious choice?

**Robyn**

Yeah, absolutely, I think they're really cool to look at.

**Georgia**

Right. So you wanted them on display. Why don't you do that here?

**Robyn**

Because we've got a walk in wardrobe here.

**Georgia**

Ah I see. And so are they your favourites that you've ever had, your 15 ups?

**Robyn**

Yeah. I love my velvets, I really do love them, but I don't wear them often. Mainly because they're not leather. It's really funny, I have one pair of 'normal' shoes. I look after a lot of baking and butchery apprentices and manage the programme so we go to a big dinner once a year. And the velvet ones will be my default ones for those occasions. I never really wear shoes, like 'girly' shoes.

**Georgia**

Okay, right. So you've only really got Doc Martens?

**Robyn**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. Those 15 ups, why do you love them so much?

**Robyn**

Because of the look of them. I used to wear them with skirts, jeans, everything.

**Georgia**

Okay, so they're your favourite ones. When did you get them?

**Robyn**

I got those from Pat Menzies and I think I probably got them in... I was living in Massey so it must have been 90's. Around 97, 98.

**Georgia**

And you said they're broken. What's wrong with them?

**Robyn**

They're split through here [Robyn points out the split in the leather]. But these ones are fantastic [Robyn points out the ones she is currently wearing], I got these in a car boot sale about two years ago, cost me about 30 bucks. Someone obviously tried to wear them, got the blisters and hadn't seen it through.

**Georgia**

Oh, yeah. That's another thing. So wearing them in is a challenge. But you persevere with it. So why do you think it's worth it? What is good about them? Because a lot of people give up.

**Robyn**

Yeah, my oldest child did and I'm so disappointed. I said to him, 'I don't care about anything else you've done in your life, I'm just so disappointed you're giving up on your Docs.' Because they're a part of me, I guess.

**Georgia**

Aw, yeah. Okay, so how does wearing Doc Martens make you feel?

**Robyn**

It's so funny, isn't it? Probably just a bit more assertive. I'm naturally a quiet person. So yeah... confident. Yeah, I hate saying this kind of thing about clothing. Because you should be more than that. But it's Docs, y'know?

**Georgia**

I dunno... It's an interesting one. Because as somebody who studies clothing, my whole academic life I've had people say that to me. But if doing this has taught me anything, it's that I think clothes are one of the most important things that we do. And the idea that clothes are not important is... Very male, and very male driven, and is kind of rooted in the idea that the things that women are interested in aren't important.

**Robyn**

Yeah, that's true. I'm just kind of coming from the angle that I should be more than my clothes. But actually, I'm not.

**Georgia**

Well if you take away clothes, there's nothing. There's no visual sign of your identity really, they're a really important part of how we show who we are. So you should not feel silly talking about your clothes and how much you love them. You should champion how much you love them!

**Robyn**

I do love them, they are a part of me. Everyone knows I wear Docs. I've always worn Docs.

**Georgia**

So people know you as somebody who wears them, they're a part of your personal brand, as it were?

**Robyn**

Yeah, along with hair that needs cutting!

**Georgia**

Okay, so they make you feel confident.

**Robyn**

And very comfortable.

**Georgia**

And comfortable. So why do you think that is? Why do you think that they make you feel that way?

**Robyn**

I guess because I've always worn them. And they're shin kickers.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So do they make you feel safe?

**Robyn**

Yeah, I think that's definitely true. You just feel like you can actually move quite fast and also you can smack someone over with them if you really needed to.

**Georgia**

Okay, and do you feel differently when you wear them compared to other shoes?

**Robyn**

Yes. Like our previous Birkenstock conversation. I mean, it's funny, I don't use mirrors or anything but if I'm going out, if I get dressed and I put on my Birkenstocks it just doesn't look right. You automatically walk taller in Docs.

**Georgia**

Okay. So you feel that they change how you hold yourself?

**Robyn**

Yeah, they definitely do.

**Georgia**

You're not the first person to tell me that.

**Robyn**

I wonder if that's part of the beauty of them as a thing, you know? The physical nature of them.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. Are some situations where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens, any like social situations or any reason you would choose not to?

**Robyn**

No, not that I can think of. I've worn them to weddings. I always wear them to graduations. I had a job interview a while back and I agonised over whether I should wear my Docs and I thought 'Fuck it' and I did.

**Georgia**

That's good to hear. So what do you do?

**Robyn**

My role is Programme Manager. But I manage the training programs for the butchery and bakery apprentices for Foodstuffs New Zealand. I work for a training company on a contract.

**Georgia**

So kind of teaching?

**Robyn**

Sort of, and paperwork and shit! I was hoping... Well, there's possibly a gig in America for two weeks, so that would be cool.

**Georgia**

Oh awesome, yeah. Okay, so, have you experienced any notable reactions with other people when you're wearing your Doc Martens, either good or bad, or had people comment on them?

**Robyn**

People comment on them sometimes. It depends on what you're wearing. If you're just wearing your plain black ones no one says anything. But if I've got my pink/purple ones on, or the diamonds, maybe.

**Georgia**

So you've never had any negative comments?

**Robyn**

No, not at all.

**Georgia**

Okay, good to hear. Do you notice when other people wear Doc Martens?

**Robyn**

Yes. Absolutely.

**Georgia**

And does that make you think something about them?

**Robyn**

I usually just think that they're cool. There's a young orator, she's only in her 20's and she's at uni. And she always wear Docs and she really owns them. And I'm just fascinated because I've been to a few events where she's been talking, she's a real social justice warrior. And I think it makes her even cooler.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so you like her more because she's wearing Doc Martens?

**Robyn**

Yeah, totally.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay. And you have kids, right?

**Robyn**

Yeah, two adult sons.

**Georgia**

And do they wear Doc Martens?

**Robyn**

One gave up. But he gave them to his mate and his mate Nate wears them now, which is cool. They're part of a socialist rap trio so it's kind of weird to see those Docs up on stage, but it's good. And my young fella has never shown an interest. He's a beige person. If he can get everything beige, he's in heaven. His partner, Natalia, she's just wearing Docs just recently. She's got two pairs already.

**Georgia**

Was that your influence do you think?

**Robyn**

Maybe. A little bit. I like to think! She came in just yesterday and she had her black ones on, and she's got some reflective stuff, like a mirror ball, that she's put on them.

**Georgia**

Really cool. Kind of DIY, which is pretty punk. That's really cool. But neither of you kids particularly took to them?

**Robyn**

No, the big fella tried really hard, but he just couldn't hack it through the pain.

**Georgia**

Right. That's pretty much it. Do you have anything else that you want to tell me? Any other anecdotes, anything that you think I should know about?

**Robyn**

No, just that they are a part of me, which is really strange. If I was rolling in money, I'd have several things. More than two bras, for a start. And more Doc Martens.

**Georgia**

Awesome. Cool. Well, that's us.

## Sam

*Sam is the senior category manager of originals and kids at Doc Martens. She is in her 40s and lives in Northamptonshire. She got her first pair of Docs when she was a teenager and she currently has 17 pairs, having owned at least 70 pairs over her 20 year career with the company. I interviewed Sam at the Doc Martens head office in Camden, London, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Sam**

Yes. I was 15 years old, so this would have been back in 1995. Showing my age! All of my friends had Dr. Martens, and obviously growing up in Northamptonshire, the home of Dr. Martens, everyone knew the brand. And it was the only brand that I knew at the time to come out of our county. At that time the hippy look was very in: long floral dresses, band t shirts, and cherry red 1460s. So I begged my mum for a pair. She thought they were clumpy, she didn't really want me to wear them because she thought they were associated with the punk scene, and I had to really beg her for them. So she did eventually buy me a pair from a shoe shop in Northampton and they were a pair of cherry red 1460s.

## **Georgia**

So was there a specific Doc Martens shop in Northampton at the time?

## **Sam**

No, it was just a multiple shoe shop. I think it was something like Shelley's. There were no Dr. Martens stores at that time apart from the factory outlet, but I didn't really know that that existed at the time.

## **Georgia**

How long did it take to wear your mum down?

## **Sam**

It took quite a long time. It must have taken the majority of the school year. I remember getting them just as the school year finished because I wore them on a school field trip that we had right at the end of the year. I was very proud of those boots. I was 15 when I got them and then in my GCSE year I did an art project around my boots. I drew my boots, all the detail and laces, did it all in a fine ink pen. I was very proud of my boots.

## **Georgia**

Oh amazing. So why did you choose doc Martens over other brands do you think?

## **Sam**

I think at that time that was just the look. We didn't really understand at that point why, or how it made us feel. It was more about wanting to look like my friends. So now looking back I can see that when I'd got the boots, you felt braver in the boots than you did in your trainers. Back in those days you wore trainers or DMs, and maybe a bit later Kickers came along. But I definitely felt braver in my

DMs and I would do things in them that I wouldn't have done if I was wearing my trainers. But yeah, it was definitely 'the look'.

**Georgia**

Right. So it was to do with fashion and trends?

**Sam**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. This is probably going to be quite a complicated question for you because your work for Doc Martens, but what are your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand, and has that changed since you were younger?

**Sam**

Yes, I think it has probably changed. Because when I got my first pair it was about the fashion. But looking back now I've realized the sense of empowerment that Dr. Martens can give you. The sense of individuality – which sounds strange because with my first pair I just wanted to be like everyone else. But the sense of individuality by customising them, and by using different laces to mix up your looks, and also the fact that you can keep those boots for years and you don't have to have 'one look' that suits them, those boots would go with everything you had. At that point I just liked them because of how they looked, but now it's more the way they make you feel.

**Georgia**

And do you think the brand has something to do with that?

**Sam**

Yes. I definitely think that as a brand we have a connection to our consumers that other brands don't. We are definitely the champion of that individual spirit, that freedom to be whoever you want to be. When I put on a pair of trainers I almost feel guilty that I'm not going out for a run. But with Dr. Martens you don't feel that – you can be whoever you want to be. It doesn't matter what you're using them for: skating, music or just because they make you look cool. That's Dr. Martens.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So obviously you were aware of your friends owning them and wearing them?

**Sam**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

And do you think that had an impact on you wanting them?

**Sam**

Yeah. It did at that point. Back in those days, it was the mid-90s, and it was all about indie music and Britpop and stuff. Everyone was the Same – we were all just cookie cutters of each other. I mean you had the indie kids and then the kids more into heavy rock, and that was about it. There wasn't even that many hip-hop kids at that time. Later on you got into some RnB influence, but that was it. I

remember being at 6<sup>th</sup> form and everyone was the same, there wasn't really anyone that stood out. But today it's more about standing out and expressing yourself; we were too scared to stand out in those days.

**Georgia**

So in the 90s you feel like there was a set way to look?

**Sam**

Yeah. It's almost like we were a little clan. But now there's so many looks, so many different trends, no one needs to stick to one thing. And you don't need to stick to one thing yourself: today you might dress like an indie kid but tomorrow you could be a goth, or an emo kid, it doesn't really matter. But Dr. Martens can fit with all of that... It's not that subcultures don't exist anymore, it's just that there's blurred lines now. You don't have to exist in one subculture, you can exist in several.

**Georgia**

Yeah, absolutely. I think as we get older we stop paying to what teenagers are doing, we just stop noticing. There's probably subcultures that we don't recognise, but to them those lines still very much exist that they will see and we don't. Did you ever identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Sam**

Yeah, I was an indie kid. I was very much into Britpop: Blur, Pulp, very much into that. But then during the late 90s I found RnB and realised that actually you don't need to fit into one subset. So then me and my small group of friends blurred the lines between Britpop and RnB and hip-hip.

**Georgia**

So you moved away from that set way of being. And music was a big part of that?

**Sam**

Music was a massive part of that. It's always been a huge part of my life. But again, apart from that Britpop scene, I've never really fitted into one subset. I have such a range of music in my collection, I've never wanted to conform to one particular stereotype.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So were Doc Martens a part of that indie subculture would you say?

**Sam**

To some extent, yeah. Blur loved the brand and it helped that my favourite band was Blur. But then you had Oasis, who were all about Clarks originals. So with indie music Clarks originals were probably more prevalent, but it just so happened that my favourite band wore DMs, which probably influence my love of the brand.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So when you were younger did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens associations with subculture?

**Sam**

No. And I hadn't really connected it until I joined the brand. I had no knowledge about the whole punk subculture. I knew that it was more of a working class boot, and it was borne out of industry.

But apart from that I just thought it was a cool, trendy boot. I had no idea about the historical counter-cultures that Doc Martens were associated with.

**Georgia**

So that only changed when you started working here. How long ago was that?

**Sam**

It's been just over 20 years. I joined a week before my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Georgia**

Wow, amazing. So you said your mum wasn't so keen on your having them, do you think that's because she knew about the subcultural association?

**Sam**

She's still not that keen on me having them! I think part of it was the association. But it wasn't so much that they were associated with subcultures. Being an adult during the 70s and 80s when all the football violence was going on, she'd seen a lot of thugs – for want of a better word – wearing Dr. Martens. So she associated them with violence. Also, my mum is quite feminine and girly, and she thought they were clumpy. She also thought they were what she called 'sensible shoes' which you can read into as meaning 'for gay women'. Which is ironic, because I am gay. So she proved that right! But no, she didn't like the fact that they were really clumpy, she wanted me to wear more feminine things. But it's strange because my brother – who is also gay – loves DMs, and is a sample size so is always asking me for samples. That must really rile my mum!

**Georgia**

Haha, yeah. They were always a big part of the male gay scene though, particularly in the 70s and 80s.

**Sam**

Yeah, I think certainly the gay male scene has had a lot of almost skinhead look with the tight jeans rolled up, and the big boots, and skinny white t shirts. There's a lot of similarities in their fashion.

**Georgia**

Yeah, absolutely. Okay, this is quite a big question: what impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or do you think it's the other way around: that your identity impacted on your choice to wear Doc Martens in the first place?

**Sam**

That is a big question. It's a little bit more difficult for me because being with brand in terms of employment since the age of 19, it's almost intrinsically linked now. The brand plus the look. So for me, the reason I wanted to work for them was because they were so well known for being a good company to work for, and somewhere that looks after their employees. Somewhere you can work at until you retire. Another 20 years and I'm there! So at the age of 15 I knew they were fashionable, and cool, and made you cool. At 19 I thought, not only can I continue to be cool by wearing DM's but I can work for a cool brand that will also look after me. It was the dream. Plus they were two miles down the road from my mum's house.

**Georgia**

So did you start working in Northampton, that's where the office was?

**Sam**

Yeah. We didn't have any office in London at that point, everything was based in Northamptonshire, including all of the factories. The whole lot was done within the county. So I just thought it was massively cool at 19 to be able to go down the pub and be like, 'I work for Dr. Martens.' Even though at that stage the brand was starting to decline in terms of sales, but I was still hugely proud to be working for them. Ironically I mainly wore sneakers at the time but obviously working for the brand you got a phenomenal discount, so I did acquire quite a lot of DMs and started to wear them more and more. Also back in those days we had to wear office attire [Sam gestures around the office], ironic, I know. So I had to wear trousers and a blouse and quite smart shoes. In those days it was still very much 'if you look like this you should be wearing these shoes', so we mainly wore dress shoes. And then they relaxed the policy and we all started wearing our DMs. But if you look around the office now, even if people are dressed formally then they still wear their Doc Martens with their suits or trousers. So whilst Doc Martens did suit my personal style, it was also about the way they made me feel.

**Georgia**

So would you say it's fairly cyclical, in terms of identity?

**Sam**

Yeah. Obviously, my looks in the last 20 years have changed dramatically. In my mid 20s I had very short hair and used to dye it all sorts of colours like pink and blue and purple, and wear Miss 60 baggy jeans and tight Diesel t shirts. And DMs have fitted in throughout all of those looks, they've always worked with everything I've got. And even if they didn't work, I made them work! I didn't really care. And that's the thing: when you're wearing Doc Martens, you just don't care what anyone thinks. You're wearing a cool shoe so, up yours!

**Georgia**

Totally! So do you have any thoughts on gender and identity and Doc Martens? You said your mum's dislike of them might have been more to do with gender than any subcultural associations?

**Sam**

Yeah, it definitely was. I think that's something that's changed though. Back when I was growing up for females there was a sense that unless you were part of a subcultural tribe then you wore slimmer, tailored, feminine shoes. Obviously there was the Kickers phase, and then everyone wanted J-Lo's Timberland boots, but as I moved into my late teens when I was going out on a Saturday night, you wore heels. That was the expectation. But I think that's changed now. If I turned up down the pub on a Saturday night (not that I would because I've got kids!) but if I did, and I was wearing flats or DMs, no one would bat an eyelid. I went to a wedding on Saturday in a pair of bright orange suede Dr. Martens with a pair of bright orange trousers, and everyone kept saying how cool they were. But if that was 20 years ago everyone would have been saying, 'Where's your dress? You're at a wedding'. Now, anything goes. Everyone can have their own look. I don't think there's an expectation that women should have to dress a certain way, and why should they? I've got 6 year old twin girls, so my house is going to be fun in 10 years' time with four women living in it! Obviously they have a lot of questions about gender and we're trying to teach them to have a very open minded and broad approach. And living in a place like Northamptonshire which... it's not backwards,

but it's not as far forward as a city like London or Manchester. So we might be teaching them one thing and they might have friends at school that might tell them something else.

**Georgia**

Yeah, you can't really control what they encounter outside of your house.

**Sam**

Exactly. For example, the whole idea that only women can wear dresses or skirts. We've had to teach them that men can wear skirts and dresses if they want to, it's entirely their choice. It actually helped when we turned up to the wedding and there was a Scottish man in a kilt! So that kind of thing has opened my eyes into how, although I think we're much more moved on than we were 20 years ago, there's still a way to go to teach future generations that actually you don't need to stick to this rigid format. But I think they will be better at understanding than I was as a kid. So in terms of gender with Dr. Martens, we are truly a unisex brand. It's interesting that you've come at this time because we had a meeting with our brand team – marketing, design and product – last week. To talk about the fact that, considering we're a brand who had predominantly male appeal for the first 15 or so years of its life, we're heavily bought into by the female population now. So our question was, 'Are we losing the male consumer? And what can we do speak to him?' But I think that some stereotypes i.e. women buy more fashion, clothing and shoes than men do, I think it will be a way before that changes completely. But from the feedback we've been getting from our stores, it is starting to change. Men are starting to shop like women now: they come in in groups, they browse for much longer, and they try things on. Previously it was a kind of 'grab and go' approach where they'd come in, pick up the first thing they saw that they liked, ask how much it is and often leave the store without even trying it on. So I think it is starting to change and I feel like Dr. Martens are almost an enabler of that because we do have mass appeal to both sexes.

**Georgia**

Yeah, absolutely. That's really interesting about consumer behaviour changing so much. I've seen it myself. My partner bought his first pair of DM's recently but he bought them online and I'm starting to see him get more interested in getting some other pairs, so I've tried to encourage him to go to the shop and try them on. I'm starting to see a lot more men beginning to consider shopping as a leisure activity. I wonder if the actual Dr. Martens stores have anything to do with that change in behaviour because they obviously are very well organised and decorated, to ensure consumers feel like they're in a space where they can spend time and try things on.

**Sam**

Yeah. Retail's not having a great time of it at the moment because so many people, like your partner, are shopping online. So we're trying ensure that even if you shop online it's mainly for research and then you come into the store for that face to face connection. We're trying to make our stores somewhere you can just be. You can express who you are without judgement and talk to staff about their passion. And if the consumer doesn't know Dr. Martens, they can hear from the staff about their own passion for the brand. That's something that, as a brand, we've been very good at. We try and employ people who have a connection with the brand and if they don't necessarily have much knowledge of the brand, like I didn't, then at least they have a connection. The knowledge can come later.

**Georgia**

Yeah. There's been quite a lot of events in stores too, right?

**Sam**

Yeah, we did gigs, we do customisation tours which have been super popular. We've had things like barber shops. In our Camden store we have what's called 'The Boot Room' which is an event room with space for about 60 people. It's super intimate. We've had some up and coming artists but also some really great signed artists who just have a love for the band. So that's packed out pretty much every month.

**Georgia**

Yeah, because the Camden store's not that old is it?

**Sam**

No just a couple of years.

**Georgia**

Was there ever a Camden store?

**Sam**

Not our own store, no.

**Georgia**

I didn't think so!

**Sam**

There's lots of little independent stores that stock them.

**Georgia**

Yeah, there's one by the tube, right?

**Sam**

Yeah, Brit Boot.

**Georgia**

It's funny, I was doing an interview and the person I was speaking to was convinced she had been to a Doc Martens store in the 80s in Camden and I was certain there hadn't even been a store there. But she was so certain that Doc Martens and Camden went together in that way that she had always thought it was Camden.

**Sam**

Well, funny you should say that. I used to work on customer services, and the reason she might have thought that is that the man who owns it used to tell people that he was the original store in Camden. He had in the window 'the original stockist' and loads of little stickers and stuff, and we actually had to close him because he was using the branding illegally.

**Georgia**

Oh wow. This woman was describing this massive store to me and I knew that she was talking about the Covent Garden one. Is there still one there?

**Sam**

Yeah, we had an office there too. There is still a shop but it's not on the piazza anymore, it's down near the tube, up towards Seven Dials.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay. So you obviously do still wear Doc Martens. How often do you wear them?

**Sam**

I wear them every single day, apart from on the weekend when I will occasionally wear trainers. My wife recently bought me a pair of Nike IDs so I do intersperse them with those. I own one pair of flip flops that only come out on holiday, I never wear sandals. So I am a Doc Martens wearer through and through.

**Georgia**

Does your wife wear Doc Martens?

**Sam**

So... again, not a lover of the brand! Because she thinks they're too clumpy. But also she had quite big feet. She's only 5 foot 5 but she's a size 7 in foot, and she's always thought they'd make her feet look really big. I'm a size smaller so she can never really try mine on. I did buy her a pair last winter though, we bought out a new slip resistant range for the snow and she has a real thing about slipping over. They're fur line Chelsea boots, they're really nice, and she's worn them to death and now she loves them. She's a proper convert. She's already telling me she's needs a new pair for winter.

**Georgia**

Aw brilliant. It's taken that long though!

**Sam**

It's taken 19 years but we finally got there. Well, we've been together for 15 years, so it's taken 14 years. But the kids wear them.

**Georgia**

Oh yeah?

**Sam**

Yeah. Although they're both girls we've got what in old money would have been called a girly girl and a tomboy. So the girly girl loves all the glitter boots and the tomboy is more into plain colours and superheroes. She's not into pink. She loves olive green actually because it goes with her camo stuff.

**Georgia**

Very on trend!

**Sam**

Yeah she's quite on trend. Those two we've raised exactly the same but as soon as they were old enough to make a choice, Esme would go straight to superheroes and Mila would go straight to princesses. But one of the first things that Mila asked for when she was old enough was a dinosaur, but a pink one. So she still loves things that aren't traditionally considered 'girly' by the old guard. It really annoys me as a parent when you go into a store for kids and it is split up by gender. The colour orange is classed as a boys colour! It's so weird. My girls have got a bright wall in their room which they wanted blue and then they got to school and someone told them blue is a boy's colour. Even now, it's still happening.

**Georgia**

Yeah, it's so bizarre. Okay, so, can you tell me about your favourite pair of Doc Martens?

**Sam**

At the moment it's my orange suede shoes. I'm going through a real shoe phase because it's been so hot, but also I used to think that shoes didn't suit me because I've got tiny little spindly ankles. So I felt like I had to cover them up with boots. This is going to sound really shallow, but when that whole phase of short trousers came in... I've got a really long inside leg, so when I was at school I used to get the mickey taken out of me for having short trousers, because they weren't supposed to be short. So I was a bit unsure about that trend. But now I've really got myself into it and all my trousers are short, and I'm wearing really loud socks, and I like to show them off. And shoes work better for that. I also love those orange shoes because they're really comfortable and bright and they stand out. I've got to the age now where I quite like to stand out.

**Georgia**

Are they the favourite pair you've ever had?

**Sam**

At the moment, yeah. Until another range comes out! And that's the pair I wear the most.

**Georgia**

How many pairs do you think you've had?

**Sam**

Had? Ever? Blimey! Well we get two pairs a year free as staff, as well the pairs I've bought. And because I work in the product team and we have a launch twice a year that we have to present, we get a pair from that launch. So for about 10 years of my career I've had about 4 pairs a year given to me. So I would say definitely over 70 pairs in my 20 year career. At the moment... My wife's pretty ruthless, so if she doesn't see me wearing a pair for a couple of months she'll start to move them towards the door. Because obviously there are 4 of us with a limited amount of shoe space. She counted the other day and I've got 14, plus 3 pairs of trainers.

**Georgia**

That's still pretty good going. How long did you keep your first pair for?

**Sam**

I kept my first pair for quite a long time and then my mum threw them out because we needed space. At that point I was acquiring shoes quite a lot. I kept them for about 10 years, and I think she threw them out when I moved out.

**Georgia**

Would you liked to have kept them?

**Sam**

Yes. But not just in terms of Dr. Martens. Being a football fan, I wish I'd kept all my football shirts. But you just don't think you're ever gonna need them again. With the trend for retro and vintage now I wish I'd kept it all, especially the 90s stuff. I had a smashing pair of tartan trousers that I wish I'd kept! Wouldn't be able to fit into them but, y'know.

**Georgia**

Yeah you'd have a full wardrobe bang on trend. Okay, so how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel, and do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Sam**

Yeah, I definitely feel different in them than in other shoes. Not so much my Nikes because I designed them so they're quite loud. But if I wear a pair of normal Nikes or Normal Adidas that are just off the shelf, my Doc Martens make me feel much more confident than my sneakers do. But I think that's also because of what the brand stands for, it just makes you feel more empowered and confident. Also it makes me feel more of an individual than a sneaker brand that every other person is wearing. When I was younger my mate had a VW Beetle, and whenever she passed another Beetle they would do a little VW sign to each other like they were in a club. And with DMs it's almost like that. Though not so much now because there are a lot of them on the street.

**Georgia**

Yeah, I was gonna say. It's got to be one of the biggest shoe brands in the world, one of the most recognisable.

**Sam**

Yeah. I think we've got the most intellectual property that you can't rip off. There's like 8 things on our 1460 boot that if someone uses then we can sue. But definitely, if you pass someone wearing DMs then you know they've had to go through that rite of passage of breaking them in so you give them a little nod. And even my eldest, we walk past people and she'll point out if they're wearing DM's. But yeah, I think it makes you feel empowered but it also makes you feel part of something. Not necessarily a subculture, but more of a community.

**Georgia**

Yeah. There's an interesting dichotomy there where you feel like an individual, but also part of a club. Which is probably not entirely unique to Doc Martens but there's certainly not many brands that have that feeling.

**Sam**

Yeah. And I think that a lot of the other brands that have that are also heritage brands like Levi. They, like us, have one product that they're most well-known for so I would imagine they're quite similar in that respect.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Great. Are there any occasions where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens and why?

**Sam**

No. Not anymore. It used to be that I wouldn't wear them to any event where I was required to wear a dress, like weddings. Or if I ever had the unfortunate need to go to a funeral I almost thought that DMs weren't respectful. But that was years and years and years ago. Now I wouldn't think twice about wearing them anywhere. Obviously there are certain looks that you couldn't wear them with, like I would never wear them with a slinky little dress. But then I would never wear a slinky little dress! So for me, with my personal style, there's no reason I wouldn't wear them. Even when it's really hot I'm still in shoes, I don't wear sandals unless I'm on the beach. So the only time I wouldn't wear them is on holiday, on the beach.

**Georgia**

Uhuh, right. So when did that change you think? Because you said you wouldn't have worn them to more formal occasions.

**Sam**

Probably not as long ago as you'd think, maybe about 5 years ago? But even 2 years ago we went to an awards ceremony where Dr. Martens were given 2 awards by a fashion magazine called Drapers. It was a swanky black tie event so I bought a floor length gown to wear and teamed it with a pair of glitter DMs. I went to the wedding in DMs. Even when I wear a dress that in the past I might not have teamed with DMs I'll now try and make it work as much as possible because my feet are not made for heels. I think I only have two pairs of heels.

**Georgia**

Yeah, and I think the longer you go without wearing them, the harder it is to get used to them again.

**Sam**

Yeah. You look like a deer because you're trying to walk around like, 'I don't remember this!' But yeah, I can't see any opportunity where I wouldn't wear them. But that's only in the last 5 years or so.

**Georgia**

Why do you think that's changed, do you think?

**Sam**

I think there are two things. Most of it is about me: I just got to the age where I felt comfortable in what I was wearing. I wasn't dressing to please other people anymore so I didn't feel the need to have to wear heels just because other people were. I've got a friend who works here who is always in heels, she's never in anything else. But I just decided that if I didn't want to wear heels then I wasn't going to. I was just going to wear what I wanted to and what I felt comfortable in. I'm really

awkward in social situations and I'm quite shy, so I wear what I want to wear and be comfortable in in order to make me feel more confident.

**Georgia**

Yeah, it's even worse if you're wearing clothes or shoes that you don't trust. If you're already feeling anxious then having one more thing to worry about is just not worth it.

**Sam**

Yeah, exactly. But also our range is so much bigger now that you can find something to wear with everything which has helped. Back when our range was just boots and shoes there wasn't as much flexibility for your outfit choices.

**Georgia**

Yeah. And there are some now that don't even have the sole, right? They're just slip on trainers. It must be such a challenge to design something that still feels like a Doc Marten without all the accoutrements of a Doc Marten. Without the label, without the stitching, without the sole. How do you put that into the shoe so that someone can still recognize it as a Doc Marten, without all the traditional markers? That must be such a challenge?

**Sam**

Yes. It is. I'm lucky, I work on originals so if it looks like a Dr. Marten then it's probably mine! In terms of that product it sits within our casual range. You'll find that with all of those there will be elements of it that are Dr. Martens. With these ones [pointing to her own shoes] they've got the grooved out sole which makes it recognisable. There isn't anything in the range that looks like an Adidas or a Nike. It still has to have what we call 'Doc Martens DNA'.

**Georgia**

Mhmm. Yeah, okay. Have you experienced any notable reactions to you wearing your Doc Martens? Positive or negative?

**Sam**

Yeah. All of them! Being in Northamptonshire we've had elements of people turning up their nose at DMs, being a bit snobby about them.

**Georgia**

Which is interesting because they're from there!

**Sam**

Yeah, they get really snobby about it. Or they go, 'Do they still exist?' But on the flipside people who say 'I like your shoes' and you say that they're DMs, and they'll say 'Wow, that's amazing!' So there's a real large contingent of people who have no knowledge of the fact that we do anything except a black or oxblood 8-up boot. Still. Especially, ironically, in Northamptonshire.

**Georgia**

That blows my mind. You'd think if you were from there you'd be really proud of a brand like Doc Martens, knowing that they were so important and so beloved.

**Sam**

Yeah. Although we are having some trouble at the moment. We're looking for people to work in the factory, to make the Made in England brand, and we're looking for school leavers.

**Georgia**

Yeah there's an apprenticeship programme, right?

**Sam**

Yeah. And we really struggle to fill it because Northamptonshire is now home of the warehouse. Kids want beer money, they aren't really thinking about longer term career prospects. So that baffles me. But then I've also had the flipside where you say you work for DMs and people regale you with hours of storytelling about how Doc Martens have empowered them, how they've impacted their lives, and what their first pair was. Everyone has a story about their first pair. So I've had it all. And obviously people trying to tap me up for a staff discount!

**Georgia**

Yeah, I bet. You're so right because whenever I mention my research to people, there's always a reaction. Everyone has a story about Doc Martens.

**Sam**

Yeah. I think it's that affinity with our consumers. Dr. Martens just make you feel something. Whether you work here or whether you're a consumer, it's that that makes them great.

**Georgia**

And do you think that that's the case for most of the people that work here? That they really do believe in Doc Martens?

**Sam**

Yeah. Absolutely. I probably shouldn't say this but you can see the people that don't, and they don't generally last that long. The people that last a long time, or are successful, are the people that have a real love and passion for it. And those people don't tend to leave unless they really need to, so unless they're stuck in a rut in terms of their career and have nowhere else to go in this company. I have a friend who left 18 months ago after about 15 years because he just had nowhere else to go in terms of career progression here. But every time I see him he asks me about how we all are and what's going on. So even if you do leave here, if you have that love then it remains with you. It touches you, it really does. To be honest, there are people who have been here as long as me and the time goes by in such a blur. It doesn't feel like I've been here for 20 years. It helps that I've worked in different counties – this is my 5<sup>th</sup> office and my 9<sup>th</sup> job. But it doesn't feel like I've been here since I was 20.

**Georgia**

Uhuh. And you've never wanted to leave?

**Sam**

Oh, no, don't get me wrong. There have been a couple of occasions where I've looked for another role. I've even had one interview outside of this company. But generally, when I've been unhappy in the role I've been doing, there's always been an internal opportunity. This company is very good at retaining people. This wasn't meant to sound braggy but now it does! They're very good at retaining

the good people. So if they get wind that someone is unhappy then they will try and do something about it. It's still retained that reputation of looking after their employees, even after all this time.

**Georgia**

Yeah. And having been here for such a long time you must have seen the peaks and troughs of the popularity of the brand?

**Sam**

You mean the shit time? And it was really, really shit.

**Georgia**

Yeah. When I was doing my post-grad I tried to get some information about the life of the brand in that way and it was really hard, which I assume will have been deliberate?

**Sam**

Well, some of it might have been. It will probably mostly be the fact that even though we've always been a fairly big brand, we've never really been a big company until now. So when I first joined the company we had factories all over Northamptonshire and 3 offices. We had about 500 people for us, including the factories, so still quite small. And then the sales dwindled. I'd been working here for about 3 years when the decision was made to move production off shore.

**Georgia**

So when did that happen?

**Sam**

That was around 2002, 2003. We got a new CEO who made the decision to cut all the production and move it to Asia. We closed all the factories and made hundreds and hundreds of redundancies, and basically started the company all over again. So that was the most awful time because we all had to reapply for our jobs, regardless of whether or not you knew your position existed, we all had to reapply to make it fair. The company was phenomenal in that time. There were entire families that were being made redundant from the factories because mum and dad might have met at the factory, had a child, and then the child grew up and came to work with them. Shoe making was in their blood. So the company got some outside agencies to come in and help people with their CVs, help people find new employment, help people retrain. We spent quite a lot of money that we didn't have – that's why we had to move production offshore – to help those people get back on their feet and make sure that as few people as possible were being made redundant with nothing to go to. But we had TV companies and media on the doorstep all day long wanting interviews, asking us how the atmosphere in the office was. I mean, how do you think it is? It was awful. And doc Martens were made out to be a really crappy company that had not looked after their staff but everyone inside knew that it wasn't the case. This was the last chance saloon for DMs as a brand – if they hadn't done that then we would have gone out of business. For me, that was really hard. Coming out of that we went down to about 100 people and it was probably the best thing that could have happened because that is where the culture of rolling up your sleeves and getting stuck in came from. It didn't matter if you were the CEO or a part-timer, if there was a job that needed doing then you got on with it. It was hard work though because all those jobs still needed doing but there was about a quarter of the people doing them.

**Georgia**

And you kept one factory open, right?

**Sam**

We closed them all initially. And then that one [now the Made in England factory] was reopened about 5 years later. That one is where our Cobbs Lane office is and it's on our original site. It was the Griggs family's house and they built the factory on the back of it. The family cottage is still there and so is the factory, but we've extended it out to another building now because Made in England is getting so big.

**Georgia**

Yeah, it's probably bigger now than it was when I visited in 2015.

**Sam**

Yeah. The other site is probably 3 times as big now as that one and it's all shiny and new. It's really exciting.

**Georgia**

Yeah. When I visited they had that tiny little heritage centre which was really cute.

**Sam**

Yeah, they're actually redeveloping Cobbs Lane now and they're building a brand new heritage centre. So you'll be able to go in, have your factory tour and visit the new museum.

**Georgia**

Amazing, so you'll actually be able to book tours and stuff?

**Sam**

Yeah. You can do that at the moment but we just don't tell many people about it.

**Georgia**

Yeah. That's really amazing.

**Sam**

Yeah. When I was in customer services they used to send us on a college course one evening a week after work and learn footwear manufacture. We got to make our own pair of Doc Martens from start to finish.

**Georgia**

That's incredible. So in terms of the heritage centre, is that something the brand is moving towards in terms of it being like... an event?

**Sam**

Yeah, an experience for people to participate in. One of the really great things about that is that Northamptonshire doesn't really understand Doc Martens still. The factory tour is mostly filled with OAPs at the moment on their afternoon out so I think it is an opportunity to get schools and school leavers in, which would feed into the apprenticeship programme, and get them to be consumers much earlier as well. Opening the doors, a bit like Willy Wonka, will enable the Northamptonshire

community to understand us a bit more and see that we aren't the company that laid everyone off and then shut the gate.

**Georgia**

Do you think there's still that reputation in Northamptonshire?

**Sam**

Yeah. I still get that sense.

**Georgia**

But it wasn't unique to Doc Martens, was it? Factories were closing in their droves in Northamptonshire at that time. All over the country, really.

**Sam**

Yeah. We were one of the last ones to do it. Dyson did it about a year before us and didn't seem to get as much backlash. Maybe the heritage of the brand is why, people just found it distasteful. But I don't think there was any understanding that if we hadn't done it then we would lose Doc Martens for good.

**Georgia**

Yeah. It's so cool that there's going to be a bigger heritage centre. It's my suspicion that even if consumers don't know it, the heritage of the brand is a huge part of what makes Doc Martens special. It bleeds into the shoes and the branding and the people that work here. You don't even really need to know anything about subcultures to recognise it.

**Sam**

Absolutely. You don't necessarily need to have the word subculture around it, it's just the feeling that they get. Which unfortunately for our marketing team is very hard to equate to a marketing campaign!

**Georgia**

Yeah it's hard to quantify! So do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Sam**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Does it have an impact on your opinion about them?

**Sam**

Yeah. Usually I think, 'Great!' From working here I try to put them into one of our consumer boxes, which is really bad and goes against everything that I've said! I am very much an advocate of not putting our consumers into boxes but sometimes we need to in order to know what to design next. Even if it's very broad boxes like streetwear or whatever, we sometimes do still need to do that. What I like about our consumers is that they never cease to take me by surprise. I will see men in what we've deemed as women's product, and women in men's product, and people wearing product that we never thought they'd wear with their look. Which is everything the brand stands for

so it really shouldn't take me by surprise but it still does, after all these years. In a great way because it reinforces everything that we want to do with the brand. We want to involve everyone no matter what your race is, what your sexuality is, which god you pray to, everyone can wear Dr. Martens and feel something. So yes, I notice them, I spend half my life looking down at the ground and tripping over. I go to different countries to look at the ground and trip over! Last week I was in Asia going around shoe shops and looking at consumers. So I see a lot of different consumer types and they never cease to amaze me.

**Georgia**

Yeah, and you said your little girl has started pointing them out?

**Sam**

Yeah, at the wedding we went to one of the bar staff was wearing them. It was up north so we visited Blackpool for a few hours and there was a little boy wearing them that she spotted too. So that's great – maybe she'll start working here when I retire!

**Georgia**

Aw, yeah. So when you design new shoes or new ranges is that driven by the consumer, or does it start at the top and you say what the next season is going to be?

**Sam**

So there's a twofold approach where we try and come to a happy middle place. Our product team will come up with some concepts that we know we'll need to have in the next season. We're currently briefing spring 2021 so it's a really good time. We know there'll be concepts that we need to anniversary the previous year which have been really successful, so we'll tick those off and then we know that there are other options which can be filled by more creative areas. The design team will come up with a creative direction document for each season which will have the stories that form the basis for the designs for the season. It will also have the colour palate. So for spring 2021 we have two: one's called Future Metal and one's called Summer Haze. Future Metal is all about heavy metal, so taking the influence of band t shirts and literal metalwork and hardware. Lots of neon pop colours and iridescence.

**Georgia**

So kind of Bladerunner vibes?

**Sam**

Yeah! That would be a great way to describe it. In some ways quite futuristic. So that will be the more alternative range. Summer Haze is more easy to wear, casual, everyday and is a more washed out colour palate in suedes and nubuck. So we'll come together and see what portion we need covered off by the easy stuff, and what portion they can go off and have fun with.

**Georgia**

Okay. So in your designs you said there's kind of the two sections, is there always one section that speaks more to what might have been called the subcultural history of the brand, and one that speaks to the more fashion and trend based consumer?

**Sam**

Interestingly our fashion consumer is quite alternative. So we have area that we call fusion which is the alternative but contemporary lens. So that will be the Future Metal story. Within originals I have the happy job of sitting across both. So Future Metal will be heavily alternative, but also heavily fashion too.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so it's still wearable.

**Sam**

Yeah, there will be the piece at the top that's really alternative and then we'll dial it down into the more commercial options.

**Georgia**

So where do the collaborations fit into this?

**Sam**

We have a lady who sits on the product team who head sup our collaborations. Back in the day we had to ask people to collaborate with us but we've never paid for a collaboration. We're very lucky in that respect that even when the company wasn't doing very well people still wanted to work with the brand because they loved them. Now we have emails, phone calls, texts every day asking to work with us, from some really big brands that we've said no to. So we would never do collaborations in the same way that Vans have with people like Disney or Harry Potter because it doesn't mean anything to our consumers. It might mean something to a consumer, but it's not really a Doc Martens fit. We've had people like Warner Brothers contact us and say, 'Use anything from our archive.' We've had Disney come to us before. But it's not us. We have done those in the past, we did Adventure Time and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and it just doesn't work.

**Georgia**

Didn't sell?

**Sam**

Adventure Time was okay.

**Georgia**

Yeah, there was a real moment for Adventure Time.

**Sam**

And it was quite our consumer because it was quite on the fringes. The most novelty we'll get is an upcoming collaboration with Hello Kitty. But that's also because we did one 10 years ago and it anniversaries that. So Mina, the collab lady, will look at it is if they're a good brand fit, and then if they have a consumer that fits our brand as well. So a lot of our collaborations are around streetwear and a lot of them will be Made in England ones. And the Made in England consumer tends to be a streetwear kind of kid – they're shopping in places like End in London, or Essence in the US, and they're buying bands who are cool and trendy but also mean something. So she is currently looking at 2021 and deciding all the collaborations and who we want to work with. Then their design

team and our design team will work together on coming up with a concept, which can be quite a fraught process.

**Georgia**

I can imagine! So does that sit separately from your stuff?

**Sam**

Almost, yeah. The music collaborations are what we call 'inline collaborations' because they're not with another brand, they're usually with a band. So they sit within my area. But Mina will do the relationship management and then the product gets handed off to me. In those areas we work with the management agents and we see what bands they have on their listings, and we'll go through and have some great conversations. Do they fit with us as a brand? Did they wear us? What art did they have on their album covers? Is there a great storytelling piece? How relevant are they to now?

**Georgia**

Yeah, so the only Doc Martens my partner has are the New Order ones with the roses and he absolutely loves them, but I think he only really loves them because he loves New Order. But then that brought him into wearing Doc Martens.

**Sam**

Yah, exactly. I got my brother the New Order t shirt because he loves them.

**Georgia**

Yeah so I've seen that working in real life. I guess having those heritage band collaborations are good because then you get consumers from an older age group coming back to Doc Martens.

**Sam**

Yeah, and also you still get those kids who are wearing band t shirts but don't know the band, don't really know what they sound like, they just think it's cool.

**Georgia**

And that's fine too!

**Sam**

Yeah, exactly.

**Georgia**

So in terms of your streetwear collaborations the one that I'm really interested in is your Lazy Oaf one. They've done so well haven't they, didn't they sell out?

**Sam**

Yup. Twice! And the last time they bought about four times as many as the first time.

**Georgia**

Why do you think that's been quite so successful?

**Sam**

Because it's a more accessible brand. So Lazy Oaf compared to say, Yogi Yamamoto, the price point is more accessible. And the brand is a bit more mainstream than some of the other collaborations. So we allowed people to buy a bigger volume than those Yamamoto or Supreme collaborations that we've done. Also, the Lazy Oaf consumer is an alternative but mainstream consumer, they already know Doc Martens and Lazy Oaf, they want to stand out, and so it ticks all of the relevant boxes for today. Now that's not to say that in 10 years' time Lazy Oaf will still be here or will still be as big, it might be someone new. But at this time that is probably the most successful mainstream collaboration that we do.

**Georgia**

So as long as things continue to be successful will you keep going with it?

**Sam**

No. This is the second one and I doubt very much we'll do another one. What we've learnt with previous collaborations is that the consumer doesn't want more than two. So even though this one has been very successful, we will still look for what's new.

**Georgia**

Right. So that's kind of it for my list of questions. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your relationship with Doc Martens? It's interesting that your children are wearing them as well. It's probably hard to know but was that guided by you, or see you wearing them or...?

**Sam**

Obviously their first pairs were enforced on them. They were gifted the tiny ones when they were born, two little floral pairs of crib boots. But then we did a Beano collaboration not long after they started to walk so they both got a pair of them. Again, probably not one we'll repeat but it was good at the time. But now, because of the different looks that we do even within kids, they're finding styles that they like. They will often go onto the website to look at which ones they want next. Back 10 years ago hardly anyone used your staff discount, and now I hardly ever buy any pairs apart from for the kids. They're actually sample size at the moment so we can get away with giving them samples. But now, my staff allocation is used up by my friends. And it's a surprising mix of people I never thought would be asking me for them which is really good. It's why I don't really like putting our consumers in boxes, because we're the brand about individuality and rebellious self expression so you don't want to put people into a box, because tomorrow they might be a different consumer. And we're not here to judge. Next year we're 60, and the 1460 is 60, so it's going to be a massive year for all of us but my section in particular. No pressure! We recently had the spring 20 launch which was the best launch ever. The marketing team came up with a great video to get everyone pumped and the tagline was 'we make the boots, but you make us Dr. Martens.' And I think that epitomises everything about this brand. We just make great footwear, but the consumers make us the brand that we are. And that's never changed, and I think whilst some brands have changed or evolved what they stand for, we have always continued for empowering whoever wants to wear us.

**Georgia**

So we were talking earlier about the ups and downs of the company. At what point did it really start to kick off again?

**Sam**

It's strange really. Sometimes you create your own hype and it starts to come true. About 10 years ago there was only 3 of us in the product team, and the product director had a conversation with the marketing director who had said, 'We think it's coming.' And that was the message we needed to convey to everyone. We were seeing sales pick up. At that point we had a white board on the wall in the office in Covent Garden where we would write down the consumers that we saw walking to work, that's how few we saw. Now if you had that you'd fill it in one morning, but back then we'd wipe it off every week. So we could actually see the rise ourselves.

**Georgia**

So that's what, 2008, 2009?

**Sam**

Yeah. And at that point we had just got a design consultancy come on board to help us speak to the streetwear kid, so that's when we started doing streetwear collaborations. I was lucky enough to be involved in some of the first collaborations we did with Stussy and with Bathing Ape. They were really exciting because we'd never done anything like that before. We'd never spoken to the streetwear consumer, we'd only ever spoken to the alternative or the young teenage girl who wants glitter. So those times were really exciting because you could feel something bubbling. But in terms of the complete change, it was probably when we got bought out by Permira which was about 3 or 4 years ago now. Up until then we were still severely lacking in resource and there was only so much we could do. That's not just about cashflow, it's about headcount, office space and retail. And all that changed when Permira took us over so we could open more stores, moved offices, the headcount tripled so we were able to sit back and take stock of the situation. Up until then we had just been fighting fires. You were never able to be proactive or forward thinking, which we are now. So that was probably the most pivotal moment for me. With no disrespect to what we did before, because obviously I lived through that and it's what has made our culture what it is, but that changed this company. And that's when it started to feel like a proper professional company. We're not corporate by any stretch of the imagination, as you can see, but it felt more like a business. There was a time when if you saw HR in your department you thought, 'Oh god, what's happening?' but now it's completely different, it really feels like there's longevity in the brand again now.

**Georgia**

Do you think it's going to be better this time around in terms of branding? Because I know with the dip last time there was a feeling of the brand just throwing their name on everything?

**Sam**

Yeah. Sunglasses, pencil cases, umbrellas. Funnily enough yesterday I had a meeting where Permira bought a couple of interns with them yesterday and we presented to them, and they asked a similar question because he said 'Would you ever do clothing again?' and I was like no no no! They said about the sustainability of the trajectory that we're on, and it is definitely about knowing where we're heading. At that point before when we were starting to dwindle we just had no idea how to get it back, so we thought we'd just throw everything at the wall and see what stuck. I used to have an American friend who called it 'spraying and praying' and that is exactly what we did. Now, there are much more resources including research and data. Back then we never looked at data, it was just all done on gut feel. We didn't have the systems and we didn't have the knowledge. And that is why when you go back and try and find out what was happening with the brand, there's nothing there: it's because no one kept a record of it. There's very few records that you can find from that time

because nobody thought to keep it. In those days we were about trying to keep the brand alive, and now we're about future thinking.

**Georgia**

Which is great. The other thing I wanted to ask is if you think celebrities picking up on doc Martens had anything to do with their resurgence, outside of your collaborations I mean?

**Sam**

Um... Not at that point, I don't think. I think the celebrity endorsement has only really come in the last 3 years. I think with the blow up in social media in the last 3 years, images of celebrities are a lot more accessible globally, you can't get away from them. Celebrity endorsement is done and often we don't find out about it until about 6 months later! I think people like Gigi Hadid, Kendall Jenner etc. definitely has an influence. Beyoncé's dancers wore us in the Superbowl half time show and so has Nicki Minaj. Miley Cyrus in Wrecking Ball.

**Georgia**

Yeah. I always think they must be so hard to dance in!

**Sam**

Yeah, really hard. I always feel so sorry for them! But I think with those kind of things, the consumer looks at them and wants to emulate their favourite celebrities. We did a piece of research a few years ago in Europe on what the uplift was if consumers in store saw staff were wearing product vs when they weren't and it was something bonkers like a 30% uplift in terms of sales. And it's because if you see someone, and they look cool, it's reinforcing that you might look cool in that as well. But the important thing is that we don't push it, celebrities just choose to wear us.

**Georgia**

Have you ever seen anyone wearing them and thought, 'Oh no!'?

**Sam**

I don't think so. There's been people who I was surprised to see in them. Obviously if Boris Johnson turned up in a pair I'd be like '...Please can we have them back?'

**Georgia**

Haha, yeah. Cool. I'm done with my list of questions, I've had you for a long time! So thank you.

### Sarah-Mary

*Sarah-Mary is a library worker and historian in her late 20s. She is from the North-East of England but lives in Brighton. She wore Docs as a child but first bought a pair for herself in her early 20s, and she currently owns 2 pairs. I interviewed Sarah-Mary in her house, in July of 2019. As we were chatting post-recording, we discovered that we actually had a friend in common – she had been to school with someone who I met while I was working at a summer camp in the USA in 2012.*

### **Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

### **Sarah-Mary**

I was talking about this with my mum. Her Uncle Ken used to own a shoe shop in the Grainger Market in Newcastle, so I don't remember exactly, but I can remember going on trips there and that's where I got my school shoes. And it was only years later that my mum said, 'Oh, those are Doc Martens' and I kind of knew what they were. Whereas at the time I was familiar with them, but I just always associated them with school shoes. And I remember not really getting why they had yellow lacing. And I always wanted smaller schools like all the other kids had. I remember finding them really clunky and big. My mum would say, 'Oh, no, you don't want those shoes, because they'll ruin your feet forever. These are the proper shoes, and my kids are always going to have proper shoes.' I remember that I must have been six or seven, and I got a lot of hand me downs when I was growing up, and we got this hand me down pair of boots and they were black and white gingham. I was a very girly girl, you know, bright pink and all that, and I remember thinking how ugly they were. My mum said, 'Oh, do you want these? Or maybe you'll grow into them?' I was like, no way! And now I'm kicking myself because they would have been gorgeous.

### **Georgia**

So you were quite young then?

### **Sarah-Mary**

Yeah, definitely like primary school age.

### **Georgia**

Your mum was buying them for you as school shoes?

### **Sarah-Mary**

Yeah. My mum didn't wear them herself now think of it. So it was just me and my brothers. I've got two brothers. They would have the proper shoes and then I would have t-bar ones.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Yeah. So she just thought that they were really good quality shoes basically?

**Sarah-Mary**

Exactly. I don't know if she had some mates rates from her Uncle Ken or anything. That was her bar: they've got to be this good. They're not going to fall apart. I remember shining them, I grew up shining my shoes. She really wanted us to have long lasting shoes, stuff that we can look after.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Awesome. So when did you begin choosing them for yourself?

**Sarah-Mary**

Probably in the last few years. The first pair I bought myself was, like, seven years ago or something. I'm 27 so I would have been 20 or 21 when I got them. I knew of them at that point as quite an edgy footwear. I couldn't afford the black ones so I got a pair of white patent leather ones on sale for like 40 quid or something. And they just didn't look good on me at all. They never broke in.

**Georgia**

Were they the boots? The 1460s?

**Sarah-Mary**

Yeah. And they were the shorter ones. I think I was going through a bit of a phase, I'd just cut all my hair off because I wanted to look like Rihanna. I think I was having a bit of an identity crisis. And then I ended up just not wearing them. They were too painful. And I felt a bit silly in them after a while. And then I didn't go back until I think three years ago? I went through a bit of a bad break up, to the point my mum came down to stay with me in Brighton which was amazing. She just stayed with me for a little bit. But we were just having a wander around Brighton. You know, she must really love the idea of Doc Martens because we were walking past the shop and she goes, 'Sarah! There's a Doc Martens shop!' Because we didn't have one in Newcastle at the time. We've got one now but it's only newer. So I had a bit of a look around and I found these quite nice slingback shoes, they're suede. I wanted a nice pair of shoes that I could wear to work. And I've kind of got this reputation, at least with my mum, that I always buy everything at charity shops. So my shoes are already looking raggedy or I wear them into the ground and they get holes in. She was like, 'Why don't you get a nice pair of shoes?' So she got me a pair of them new. And I wear them all the time because they're gorgeous, I got so many compliments about them. Then just a few months ago, I always have a pair of boots for the winter and usually by the summer they've completely worn out because I buy them secondhand. I was saving up at that point, and I thought I'm going to buy myself a new pair because

I'm working full time, I can put that money away every week. I work in the library and I was sitting on the help desk with a colleague on a quiet day, and she gazes over and I've got the Doc Martens website up and she's like, 'Oh don't buy them without telling me!' She got really invested in my search for a pair. I was planning which ones to get and how many weeks it would take me to save. And then when on a charity shopping day with my boyfriend and just happen to find a perfect pair that fit me in a charity shop for like 20 quid. When walked in the next day, my co-worker came in, she did a double take and was like, 'Oh my god, you got them! You're wearing them! Now don't take this the wrong way but you must let me show you how to shine them.' Because her dad was in the army and he taught her the proper way to shine shoes. So she was like, 'I'll bring in my stuff. I'll show you how to shine a shoe. And then I'll let you borrow it and you can shine them until you get your own.' So now I'm shining my shoes again!

### **Georgia**

Full circle! Brilliant. Okay. So when you started to choose them for yourself, why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands?

### **Sarah-Mary**

It would be because of the reputation. I really didn't look into other brands of shoes, or if I do look at similar brands, things like Timberlands or Rockports, I'd grown up with certain associations of what kind of people wore them and why they wore them. And I always kind of resonated with the idea of the British brand and it's got that history punks and all this alternative culture that have aligned themselves with the boots. Also I was getting to the point where I just thought, 'Fuck it, I need a pair of shoes that are not going to fall apart on me.' And if I can do that and look cool, then brilliant. Because it was either those are hiking boots! So it has always been more of an association with the idea of Doc Martens before the practical concerns.

### **Georgia**

Yep. Cool. Alright, awesome. So what are your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand and has that changed at all over time?

### **Sarah-Mary**

I don't know. To be honest, I haven't looked that much into the brand and what they do today. I think my idea of the brand surpasses who they are today. I rely more on the idea of them than the reality of them. I've never looked at their social media or what they do online. I'm aware that they do a lot more promotional stuff, I think they were my freshers fair even. They seem to do a lot with the music industry. If there's festivals, I've seen them having booths and handing out vouchers. But I've never looked further than that.

**Georgia**

Cool. Were you aware of your friends or your peers owning or wearing Doc Martens and did that impact on your choice to buy them?

**Sarah-Mary**

Not really when I was younger. In the town I was growing up in, at least until I left there, I think I knew one or two people my age who wore them and they were metal heads.

**Georgia**

Is it actually Newcastle you're from?

**Sarah-Mary**

It's a little rural town outside of Newcastle called Hexham. Have you seen Shaun of the Dead? It's like the town in Shaun of the Dead. It's one of those places. I used to work in a pub and there was a guy there called Jimmy, and he was a punk. He must have been easily in his 50s or 60s, had a grey mohawk going all the way down his back, he'd make his own clothing. He's Welsh, and when he was in Wales when punk was happening and they used to just tape bin bags together and sell them to people as punk clothing. He knew about Scorpio, where my Uncle Ken worked, and he always wore Doc Martens. He'd always tell me about when he used to go out in Newcastle that was the only shop in Newcastle that you could buy Docs from. And they didn't make them high enough, he wanted the platforms, so you then had to take them to the cobblers and they wouldn't want to touch them. So you'd have to go home and just get a sole and hammer it in with a nail. So I had these really fascinating stories of Doc Martens, and the myth of how people used to wear them. And then when I moved away, I moved to Surrey first and I was studying fashion, and loads of people had Doc Martens because they're quite a creative, alternative sort of footwear. And I remember seeing those and thinking, 'Oh, I want some of those. I want some of that. I want to look like that.' And then I moved to Brighton where it's like a compulsory uniform. There's a real Brighton look and Doc Martens are vital to it in all weathers. There's people wearing Doc Martens today and it's what, 36 degrees? So yeah, I think definitely living down here I've got an impression of them and seen different ways of styling them. And that was what led me on to be like, 'I can wear them and I know different ways to work them into my wardrobe, and make them look cool.'

**Georgia**

Cool, cool. And so do you or have you ever identified as being part of a set subculture?

**Sarah-Mary**

I mean, I used to be an emo. When I say that I mean a very softcore emo. I wasn't allowed to dye my hair or anything. It started and ended with stripy t shirts and crazy eyeliner. I think I must have been between 14 and 16.

**Georgia**

Were Docs a part of that?

**Sarah-Mary**

No, no. I definitely admired people who wore them at that time, but no I think I probably still had this association of them being too edgy, or they would signify too much that I'm part of this. I probably felt a little uncomfortable myself, like I couldn't carry them off.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. Did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens' associations with subculture when you started buying them for yourself? And did that have an impact on your choice to buy them?

**Sarah-Mary**

Yes, massively. So like I was saying, Jimmy the punk. Through the kind of bands I listened to, rock music and metal and that sort of genre. I used to buy Kerrang magazine and NME, and I used to see a lot of bands wearing them. I didn't really see that many subcultures growing up where I do. But I got it mostly through being interested in music and having that sort of association. And then as I got older, and I met more kind of people like Jimmy, actual punks who were there and went through it, that definitely made me feel more of an allegiance to them. Like, I'm not part of this group. I'm not part of this culture. I'm not living this life. But also I want to have that little bit so that I'm aligned with them.

**Georgia**

Do you think that kind of celebrity, for lack of a better word, had something to do with it as well? Because it was bands that you liked? And people in the public eye that you admired as well?

**Sarah-Mary**

Totally.

**Georgia**

Because you mentioned Rihanna?

**Sarah-Mary**

Yeah, and I think Superbass by Nicki Minaj. As well as being a rocker at heart I'm also so into my pop music.

**Georgia**

Yeah, same.

**Sarah-Mary**

In the video for that she had a line up of all these dances, they look sexy as anything, but then they've got these patent pink Doc Martens. I think I was trying to look like that when I got my first pair. So yeah, it's definitely influenced by seeing famous people wearing them.

**Georgia**

Yeah, cool. Alright. What impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity, if any? Or do you think it's maybe the other way around: that your identity impacted on your choice to buy them?

**Sarah-Mary**

As someone who quite recently went to seek them out, I always feel like a bad-ass when I wear them. A total bad-ass. I ended up studying history and now I work in a library - I'm not a bad-ass! I don't break any rules, I'm not that crazy a person. But even when I was wearing my slingback shoes, I could go to conferences or job interviews and I'd instantly feel that much better when I put them on. The slingbacks make me look like I've got my shit together and I love that feeling. There's just that satisfaction of, 'Yeah, I'm wearing Doc Martens.' With my boots, some days I do put them on and feel like I could conquer the world. They're proper arse-kicking boots. Last week I had to change the tyre on my bike and I was out in the back and I had all my tools out, proper strong, independent woman. I had my boots on so that I could have firm footwear whilst I'm working. And again, I just felt great. Kicking ass!

**Georgia**

So that kind of feeling, that feeds into your identity, you would say?

**Sarah-Mary**

Totally. I like to look how I'm feeling. And I draw a lot of confidence out of wearing something that I feel comfortable in and confident in. When I put an outfit together that I feel just captures my personality, I'm great. I can wear this and forget I'm wearing it and just let the personality come out.

And I definitely feel like the Docs just sort of feed into that kind of attitude. I'm a grown ass woman getting shit done. And I feel like they support me in that.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay, awesome. Do you have any thoughts on gender and identity in relation to Doc Martens, so being a woman who wears boots like that?

**Sarah-Mary**

See, I don't think of that very much. But again, I think a lot of that comes from the fact that I've spent so long in Brighton now where everyone wears them. So I'm familiar with seeing many women wearing them. And a lot of the influences for me to get them were women also wearing them in the public eye. So I've never really thought of them as a gendered footwear. I think when I saw that pair of gingham ones when I was a kid, I didn't like them because they weren't girly. But since then I've never really considered them as a male item. And to be honest, I probably see more women wearing them than men around Brighton.

**Georgia**

So do you think that that would be the same if you were still in the northeast?

**Sarah-Mary**

Well, I think they've got growing appeal. A few years ago I went back to one of the other pubs that I used to work in, and I had a new barmaid and she was wearing Doc Martens. Some of the patrons were giving her a bit of stick for wearing them, saying they were rigger boots or she'd just come off the construction site, because they were bright yellow. She was a very petite, very stylish girl. And I remember being surprised seeing someone like that wearing Doc Martens in a place like Hexham. But I know that Newcastle now has got a Doc Martens shop and I reckon when I go back there I'm going to see a lot more around. If you were doing this research 5 or 10 years ago, I probably would have said something totally different.

**Georgia**

Yeah, absolutely. So do you feel as though it's a different decision for a woman to get up and put on a pair of Doc Martens than it is for a man?

**Sarah-Mary**

No, I don't think so at all. But I'm somebody who's got very few pairs of shoes. So I don't have that kind of trope of a woman opening a wardrobe and shoes falling out on her.

**Georgia**

Okay, cool. And so you obviously do still own Doc Martens, and do you still wear them quite regularly?

**Sarah-Mary**

Yeah, I mean, obviously not at the moment, it's too hot. Yeah, they're both kind of my go-to shoes at the moment. Definitely over winter I lived in them, they were just an absolute godsend, especially when it's snowy or raining. The bane of my life is getting water in my shoes. And my slingbacks just go with so much so I wear them all the time.

**Georgia**

Do you have favourite pair?

**Sarah-Mary**

Oh, I couldn't choose between them. Both of them mean different things to me in different ways. They're such different pairs of shoes, the shoes the boots, they serve different purposes and I feel different when I'm wearing them.

**Georgia**

So what is it that you love about each pair?

**Sarah-Mary**

The boots, like I say, they're just so functional. They're appropriate to wear to work and if it's cold. I've heard stories from Jimmy that back in the day if you wore Doc Martens they wouldn't let you in. Whereas today, I can wear them to go to a tutorial at uni or I can wear them around the shops, or I can wear them meeting my boyfriend's parents. They're just a default boot that I can always rely on and they go with everything. And then the slingbacks are just so pretty, and I can't remember the last time I had a pair of shoes for three years that haven't broken, so I'm impressed with how well they wear. They don't hurt me anymore, which is beautiful. I do think of them as my smart shoes. I want to feel professional today so I'll wear my smart shoes.

**Georgia**

Are there any situations where you don't wear your Doc Martens, and why?

**Sarah-Mary**

I don't wear the boots at the moment because it's hot. I've seen a lot of people wearing them in this heat, but I can't. I had to do a presentation at work to quite a big group and I remember being a little bit concerned that I should have polished my boots, and I was worried that people would see them looking scruffy. So I'd say if they look at on the scruffy side, I might not wear them. It's not so much the boots, it's more the whole outfit, but if I'm going out for a nice meal or a nice night, and I want to dress up a bit, I don't think I would wear them just because I'd want to wear my dainty shoes.

**Georgia**

Cool. And so how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel? And do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Sarah-Mary**

Yeah, definitely. I've got a pair of shoes for every purpose. I've got one pair of trainers, one pair of heels, a pair of gold boots, and then these two pairs. So usually at work it'll be either the boots, the slingbacks or my trainers. And I will feel differently about how my entire outfit looks, or what kind of impression I give off. Yeah, I think I feel more put together when I'm wearing Doc Martens. They complete outfit in some way or they just add a special something. Even if it's just in my head where I'm thinking, I know I'm wearing them and I'm feeling good.

**Georgia**

Yep. Okay, awesome. Have you experienced any notable reactions from other people to you wearing Doc Martens?

**Sarah-Mary**

With the slingbacks I get so many compliments from across the board, from all kinds of people. It's not necessarily people who I'd associate with wearing Doc Martens. They might be like, older ladies or just some of the people I work in the office with. And then when I saw they're Doc Martens, they're really quite surprised by it. and then with my boots, especially with KB because she was on the journey with me trying to get them, but all my friends and all my co-workers were like really genuinely quite happy for me. I was so happy to have found a pair for cheap and second hand. And I think I was just beaming the first day I wore them to work. And my mum's really pleased, I'm wearing them, she thinks they're really cool.

**Georgia**

But you said your mum doesn't wear them herself?

**Sarah-Mary**

No, I don't think she's ever worn them. Bless her, she really lives vicariously through my style. She'd always be very invested in what clothes I was wearing. So I don't know where that comes from in her but she just really supports my wearing of Docs. It's not her style at all. She's very kind of soft and a bit boho chic.

**Georgia**

Okay, do you notice when you see other people wearing them? Do you clock it on other people?

**Sarah-Mary**

I'm kind of immune to it now because I see so many. Now I only tend to notice if it's an especially fabulous pair. Especially somewhere like Brighton it is pretty much like seeing somebody wearing white trainers. They're really quite ubiquitous. If I go elsewhere, I'll usually clock it. If I'm not seeing that many.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Would that have an impact on your instant thoughts on that person?

**Sarah-Mary**

Yeah, I tend to assume they're creative. I don't know if that's because at uni I'd usually see people from the art campus wearing them. If I see a girl wearing them I will normally assume that they're a feminist. A bad-ass woman wearing bad-ass boots. I don't really have any opinions on men wearing them. So yeah, I tend to think alternative, creative, musician. Has some kind of creative outlet going on. I definitely get the impression that they'd probably be left wing and quite liberal. When I think of the kind of person I see wearing Docs around Brighton, I automatically get the whole outfit. I bet they've got piercings or tattoos, wearing a quirky, put together outfit.

**Georgia**

Okay, great, that's pretty much it. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your relationship with Doc Martens?

**Sarah-Mary**

Nothing I can think of.

**Georgia**

Great, I'll stop the recording there.

## Sharon

*Sharon is a university lecturer in her late 40s who lives in the Wellington region. She got her first pair of Doc Martens when she was 18 and had just moved to Auckland for university. She now owns 3 pairs. I interviewed Sharon in her home, in May of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

So, we will start off our conversation with my first question. I know you told me in your email, but if you can tell me where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Sharon**

I was 18. It was 1989 and it was from Pat Menzies shoe store in Queen's Arcade, off Queen Street, in Auckland. And it was a pair of cherry red shoes.

## **Georgia**

Hmm, right. So not boots. Okay. And why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands of shoe at that time?

## **Sharon**

I think I associated it with being an art student, which I was at the time, I also did sociology and it was what we wore if we were a bit alternative, we wore Docs and our op-shop clothing.

## **Georgia**

So it was very much part of the scene that you were in?

## **Sharon**

It was the scene that I was in at university, art students and my discipline of sociology and anthropology. If you were into alternative music, alternative dressing, then you wore Docs.

## **Georgia**

So that's quite interesting because you said you got a lot of op-shop clothes, which are obviously very cheap.

## **Sharon**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

But Doc Martens... very expensive!

**Sharon**

Yes, and they were then!

**Georgia**

And did you have to save up for them?

**Sharon**

I did, I saved up. In the olden days student allowance kind of covered all our costs, so I was able to just save a little bit until I could afford them in the middle of the year.

**Georgia**

Great. So you kind of always wanted them?

**Sharon**

Yeah, it was like a goal to own those Doc Martens.

**Georgia**

Um, why didn't you go for the boots?

**Sharon**

Um, I think at the time the shoes sort of suited the look that I was going for. I just wore the shoes. It was the late 80's, I used to often wear really long socks with the shoes. I guess it was just the look that I wanted, rather than the boots.

**Georgia**

It's not that dissimilar to now is it? That's kinda come back around again.

**Sharon**

It's come back. And I do look at the kind of jeans people are wearing, and the jeans that I wore. It is exactly that early 90's grunge fashion that's come back in.

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**Sharon**

And I see people wearing the shoes and socks with the jeans, and I think 'Wow that's exactly what I looked like.'

**Georgia**

And so were you into that kind of music scene?

**Sharon**

Yeah, alternative music, grunge music, New Zealand music.

**Georgia**

I know I'm not an expert on New Zealand music, obviously, not being from here but I guess it was pretty similar to the global movement but with its own little flavour?

**Sharon**

Yeah I think it was it's own, you know. There was the Dunedin sound and the Christchurch sound, and there were sort of bands in Auckland, people like The Abel Tasmans, some of whom lectured at university! But it was probably the Dunedin and Christchurch sound which was really unique to New Zealand.

**Georgia**

A lot of fashion came out of Dunedin didn't it? Like NOM\*D...

**Sharon**

NOM\*D, I think Zambesi as well? That sort of black, semi-goth influence.

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay. And what were your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand back then? And do you think that's changed as you got older?

**Sharon**

Yeah, I mean, cus you associated it really with being a very strongly UK brand and they were made in the UK back then as well. Yeah, I suppose I always associated them quite strongly with the punk scene as well with the whole boots and Union Jack. Um, so now I guess, you know, I recognize they're much more of a global company, like I'm aware those [pointing to her Doc Martens] were quite probably made in Thailand and not in the UK as they were then.

**Georgia**

So has your perception of the brand itself changed, or do you think you've just learned more as you've got older?

**Sharon**

I think I know a little bit more about how global companies change. It just wouldn't have been something I would have been aware of as a teenager buying these things. Like I think it probably wasn't even that important to me that they were made in the UK, as opposed to you know, in the Global South. It wouldn't have been something that mattered to me. Whereas I suppose it's a little bit more of a consideration for me now. Even though I've bought boots not made in the UK. I don't think it makes me trust them any more or less as a brand, I think it's just the nature of globalisation.

Yeah. Okay. And were you aware of your friends or peers owning or wearing Doc Martens?

Yeah! I was probably one of the first ones out of a group of us from my hometown of New Plymouth that had gone to Auckland University together that bought Docs. I suppose a few of us did wear them. But again, like I think that expense thing was a bit of a factor. So if my friends were in that arty alternative scene they'd be more likely to have them but then there were friends in the med school, in business and law, you know, the different people doing different degrees. Some of them did that whole preppy dressing.

**Georgia**

Yeah. And do you think that your friends, you know, being in that scene impacted your choice to buy them?

**Sharon**

No, I think I just was always going to get a pair.

**Georgia**

So even before you went to uni?

**Sharon**

Even before, yeah. I think it was like 'Oh I can afford to buy my own clothes now.'

**Georgia**

Um, so do you think there was any influence from maybe bands or music or that kind of thing?

**Sharon**

Probably. Probably bands that were coming out of the UK more than any? Yeah, yeah. Maybe those earlier punk bands that I might have seen in my early teens.

**Georgia**

And did you identify as being part of a subculture at anytime?

**Sharon**

What would I have been? Not a strong subculture so...

**Georgia**

The answer can be no, haha!

**Sharon**

I'm just trying to think... Not like a very strong... So not punk, not goth really. I guess that alternative grunge look would be my strongest identification.

**Georgia**

Right. And you've said Doc Martens were an important part of that look.

**Sharon**

Oh yeah, yeah.

**Georgia**

And did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens associations with subculture?

**Sharon**

Yeah, I think the punk thing was the strongest link.

**Georgia**

Okay. And did that impact your choice to buy them at all?

**Sharon**

No.

**Georgia**

Okay. So this is quite a big question, but what impact do you think owning and wearing Doc Martens has had on your identity, if any? Or do you think it was maybe the other way around, that your identity impacted your choice to buy them? Or a bit of both?

**Sharon**

Yeah, I think probably the latter, that it would have been my identity as an alternative art student that influenced the type of clothes and shoes that I wore to identify as that look around University. Um... just say the second part of the question again sorry?

**Georgia**

Was it the other way around? Did your identity impact on it...

**Sharon**

Yeah, I think it was that my identity impacted me choosing to buy Docs rather than the other way around.

**Georgia**

And you've continued to buy them?

**Sharon**

Yeah! So that pair lasted me for 19 years.

**Georgia**

Which is pretty good going.

**Sharon**

Which is amazing. So I guess you know, that gives you sort of that brand loyalty. When you're buying another expensive pair of shoes, you look to a brand that's lasted a long time. So I think there's probably a period where I didn't really wear them heaps... When I went back to study again, as a mature student... Again, it was just that I'm going back to university. I'm going to wear Docs! And I went and bought new Docs.

**Georgia**

When did you go back to uni then?

**Sharon**

That was 2013.

**Georgia**

Okay. Yeah. And you bought a new pair of Docs when you went back? Aw, brilliant. So what did you do between graduating and then?

**Sharon**

So I graduated, I then worked in the international development sector for a large NGO, and then had children. I was at home with my children full time for about 13 years as a full time mum and then jumped back into post-grad study to finish a Masters degree I'd started just before I had my kids, and ended up doing a PhD instead.

**Georgia**

And did you wear Doc Martens in-between?

**Sharon**

Um... Probably on and off, but not regularly. Like I probably went a bit stay at home mum. Sneakers, jeans. Like just comfort and ease of putting things on and off quickly, not lacing up boots when you've got small children? Yeah, I think probably that period when the kids were really little I wouldn't have worn Docs at all, much more quick to wear zip up boots or something like that.

**Georgia**

So it was a purely practical decision?

**Sharon**

Yeah, you do not want to be lacing boots on and off when you're going in and out of the house all the time with kids in tow!

**Georgia**

Great. So do you have any thoughts or feelings on gender and your identity, and wearing Doc Martens as a woman?

**Sharon**

Um, I think perhaps there's an understanding... A wider societal understanding that Docs may not be the most feminine type of footwear that you would wear. And I suppose in choosing to wear them, I do make a statement about not caring about those sort of rules. Yeah.

**Georgia**

So there's a kind of...

**Sharon**

And little bit of a protest? I think it's a rejection of those ideas about feminine and professional dressing as well. Like, what you dress like as a professional. As a professional woman. What you should be wearing. Yeah. So rejecting those emotions, and always sort of being true to myself. As I've always been.

**Georgia**

Yeah, uhuh. So do you think that's got anything to do with sort of the way the boots look? Or is it to do with the brand? And the ideal of the brand?

**Sharon**

Yeah, I think it's both things actually, because... You know, I associate Docs with staunchness. You know, like, if you wear them, you're a little bit staunch, which is perhaps how I want to project myself. I mean, mine have pretty colours, I think they're beautiful, but they don't look like a feminine piece of footwear. So I think it's a combination of their physical appearance and the idea of Doc Martens being staunch.

**Georgia**

But I suppose in the early 90s, as well, in that grunge look it was quite common to see girls wearing like tutus and short skirts.

**Sharon**

True. So the sort of hyper feminine with the grungy.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. Yeah. So there's a kind of juxtaposition between the two isn't there?

**Sharon**

Yeah, well I do wear dresses with these boots.

**Georgia**

So there's a maybe slightly more 'grown up' version of that grunge look.

**Sharon**

Yeah! Make up, hair, dress, boots.

**Georgia**

Haha, yeah. Okay. And so you obviously do still own Doc Martens. And you still wear them?

**Sharon**

All the time.

**Georgia**

All the time. Okay. And do you have other brands of shoe that you're loyal to?

**Sharon**

No, this would be the only one regularly. I used to also own Mini Cooper shoes which were a New Zealand brand made here. So I guess I had quite a lot of loyalty to them as a shoe. Once I'd finished study, so in that initial time going into the work force, I thought I needed to wear something more professional. But I didn't want it to be too pretty-ish looking. So I went for these New Zealand made shoes which were also quite expensive. So I still own some of those which I was lucky enough to buy just before they stopped production in New Zealand two years ago, because they had to close the factory.

**Georgia**

Right. So there was a sense of you kind of needing to adjust your style when you went into the workforce?

**Sharon**

When I was younger. But not so much now. I don't care so much about that now!

**Georgia**

Why do you think that is? Do you think it's to do with you, or do you think it's to do with the world?

**Sharon**

I think it's a little bit of an age thing. I think having spent so much time almost out of the workforce coming back into it. It's like, you have to take me as I come. I'm professional, highly educated, lots of experience. This is what I wear. And I suppose in my sector, you know, because I teach at university, so I guess our dress code (certainly in the social sciences and humanities) can be quite relaxed. So I guess I don't have that pressure that I might if I was in a business environment.

**Georgia**

Okay. So there's a little bit more leeway you think?

**Sharon**

I think so. I mean, if I have to go to government departments I still wear them and don't care.

**Georgia**

But then I've got quite a few friends who work in government and they wear their Doc Martens.

**Sharon**

Yeah, I think it's pretty relaxed now.

**Georgia**

Yeah, I think it's definitely changed a lot.

**Sharon**

Yeah. I don't feel I'm climbing some career ladder which means I need to look a certain way to move up.

**Georgia**

Yeah, for sure. Okay. Can you tell me about your favorite pair of Doc Martens? Do you have a favourite?

**Sharon**

Um, do I have a favourite... I think the ones with the blue and white pattern are the ones I'm most attached to for a number of reasons. Because when they were first released, I had so many friends messaging me... So I have a blue and white sleeve, a tattoo. So my friends were like 'Oh my god, Sharon. Look at these Docs! You wear Docs, they're blue and white, you have to buy them.' So I guess they were the one pair that I knew I had to buy or I would have non buyers regret for the rest of my life. And they say 'Sharon'. Blue and white says 'Sharon' to my friends. I collect the china, I've got the tattoo, so you know, there's sort of an association there. It would have been really dumb to not buy them.

**Georgia**

That's so cool! When did you get the tattoo?

**Sharon**

The tattoo I've had for 9 years.

**Georgia**

Great. And the shoes, when did you buy them?

**Sharon**

The shoes I got in 2015.

**Georgia**

Cool. So they're your favourite because of that. Is that the only reason?

**Sharon**

Yeah, that attachment. They look like they were made for me. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. Okay. Yeah. And do Doc Martens mean something to you other than that singular attachment?

**Sharon**

Yeah, I think so. Because I got the purple pair, then the navy pair, and then I guess there was sort of a sense of almost... Extravagance to have a third pair. And I know... Like when I was looking at the people that responded to your call on Facebook, the number of pairs some people had! Whereas for me it was like 'Oh my god 3 pairs of Docs is so excessive.' So it still represents a little bit of excess to me. But then I justify it by saying that they'll last me forever because they're Docs.

**Georgia**

Absolutely. Yeah. And I guess because the other two pairs are... I mean they're not the kind of standard colors but they are just one block color. So those blue and white ones are just a little bit more fancy. Yeah. So how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel?

**Sharon**

Yeah, staunch. That's the thing for me. I feel like I am looking like what I want to project to the world.

**Georgia**

Little bit tough?

**Sharon**

A little bit tough, slightly alternative, just slightly less mainstream than other people I suppose.

**Georgia**

And do you feel different in them than you do in other shoes?

**Sharon**

Oh, definitely, yes. Yeah, it feels like putting on a uniform for me, putting those on.

**Georgia**

Right, okay. And are there some situations now where you wouldn't wear your Doc Martens?

**Sharon**

I didn't wear them when I graduated last year, I wore my Mini Cooper shoes. So I'm not sure what that decision was about, whether I thought I needed to look extra fancy when I graduated. And I do wonder if I was going for a job interview in public service if I wouldn't wear them. But it's not a situation I've encountered yet. Obviously when it's hot, I don't wear them. But luckily in Wellington I can wear them most of the year so that's not really a problem. If I travel overseas, like I went to a conference in the UK, I didn't take them just because of the weight so I took my Mini Cooper shoes. But at conferences here in New Zealand I wear them.

**Georgia**

Yeah, so not many situations then. And that's different from when you were younger?

**Sharon**

I think I would have been more cautious about wearing them to people's weddings or something like that. Whereas I'd quite happily put a dress and boots on it wouldn't bother me now. Whereas I would have felt maybe that was dressing down too much but I don't feel that now.

**Georgia**

Okay. And have you experienced any notable reactions from other people when you're wearing your Doc Martens? And what were they?

**Sharon**

Yeah, only ever positive. People at work definitely did once they'd figured out I had quite a few different pairs. And people comment on the blue and white ones because they're different, a bit more noticeable.

**Georgia**

But only positive?

**Sharon**

I've never had any negative comments about them, even when I was younger. Oh wait, no! No, that's not true. I remember now. My first job out of university I started in the customer service of an aid agency. It was a Christian aid agency. And there was a perspective by some of the staff... And this relates to gender as well, it does relate to that. So I'd wear long dresses, but to all appearances quite masculine looking shoes. And there was some talk amongst the more conservative members of staff that I must have been a lesbian because I was wearing these Docs shoes. So that was an association that they had with women wearing masculine clothes.

**Georgia**

[Laughing] And did you feel any great need to correct them?

**Sharon**

Confirm or deny? No, no, no, you just let it happen.

**Georgia**

It's funny actually. I have experienced that myself. Even now, like, in the last three or four years I've experience that.

**Sharon**

You must be a lesbian because you're wearing Docs.

**Georgia**

Yeah, exactly. It was that and also I shaved my hair, cut my hair really short and just had a little quiff on top and it was astonishing. Like almost overnight. Everyone I came across just assumed that I was gay.

**Sharon**

I had completely forgotten about it until you asked me that, yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. Interesting! So do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens?

**Sharon**

Yes, yes, absolutely, straight away.

**Georgia**

And does it have an impact on your opinion of them?

**Sharon**

I guess, you know, you just sort of think they're a bit of a kindred spirit. There's something that's made them decide to wear Docs that might be a similar reason to myself, y'know?

**Georgia**

So you kind of automatically feel like there's a connection?

**Sharon**

Yeah, mmhmm.

**Georgia**

Okay. And over the course of you owning your Doc Martens have you ever had any other style other than the boots and the shoes?

**Sharon**

Nope, just the boots and the shoes. When I was a stay at home mum, because we were only on one income, I admired the beautiful long zip up boots and thought 'I'll get a pair of those one day', but really I've always been very happy with my reliable 8-ups.

**Georgia**

So you've got kids?

**Sharon**

Yeah, I've got three kids.

**Georgia**

Do any of them wear Docs Martens?

**Sharon**

Yes! My husband and I bought a friend's daughter a pair of Docs when she was about 2 years old. They were flowery Docs, they were so cute, these little boots, and they came back to us when she outgrew them and both of my girls wore them. But we've never bought the kids them through their teens just because it's expensive for fast growing feet. So we're sort of at the point now where the girls, at least, have stopped growing so it might be something I would buy them.

**Georgia**

Have they showed an interest in them?

**Sharon**

One of them really loves the rainbow ones. Which are stunning. So maybe that's in our near future!

**Georgia**

I saw them recently, they are really, really cool. They've got sparkly rainbow ones back in the UK. I think they do a Pride collection every year which is really cool. Okay, so, when it comes to Doc Martens do you see yourself continuing to wear them?

**Sharon**

Yeah I don't see myself changing at my age! I don't know if you need to know but I'm 48, too old to change my style. I just feel very comfortable with them.

**Georgia**

And you find them comfortable? Do you have to break them in?

**Sharon**

A little bit with the blue and white because they're the harder leader, but the navy and the grape ones, they're the soft leather so they were just perfect straight away.

**Georgia**

And what about the shoes? Was that painful?

**Sharon**

Yeah I had to break them in. They were the good old tough ones that you have to have a plaster on the back of your heel. And I had to always wear thick socks with them.

**Georgia**

But worth it?

**Sharon**

Oh yeah!

**Georgia**

And they're the ones that lasted...

**Sharon**

19 years.

**Georgia**

Which is pretty epic!

**Sharon**

Really amazing. Yeah.

**Georgia**

And so is there anything else you want to tell me about your Doc Martens? Any other things I should know?

**Sharon**

Oh, gosh. You know, I did my fieldwork in Thailand and I'd always hoped I'd get to see one of the Docs factories there but it never happened unfortunately.

**Georgia**

Yeah, I was quite lucky, when I was doing my Masters which was looking more specifically at skinheads I got the chance to go to the factory in Northampton and see them being made there which was really cool. I don't know if you ever get to go to the UK but...

**Sharon**

I've been once in my life and it was last year for a conference. I spent some time in London and a friend of mine took me to Camden Town.

**Georgia**

Oh brilliant, did you love it?

**Sharon**

My god! I saw this big Docs sign up on the wall, and the shop just full of them, and I resisted bringing them home. But it felt like a little bit of a pilgrimage into this huge shop full of them.

**Georgia**

It is amazing, yeah. So it's quite new that shop actually, it's not been there for very long, only a couple of years. Because there used to be a shop in Covent Garden, which was the big shop in the 90's, and there was a bit of a dip with Doc Martens in the 90's because they just... Started stamping their name on everything and the market got a bit fatigued with the brand. So that's when they moved things overseas because they couldn't afford to keep it in the UK because they became unfashionable really quickly. And a friend of mine's mum who worked in the factory told me that in this big shop on the third floor they had a stage, and on the fourth floor they had a cafe, and they used to stamp the logo into the pie and mash! Which is not very on brand for them now, they're quite careful with their marketing now.

**Sharon**

Isn't that interesting? I was gonna say to you, when my husband had to buy work shoes, in the past I've made him buy Docs because they're so long lasting.

**Georgia**

What does he do?

**Sharon**

He's an IT architect in Wellington. That place has a very casual dress code now so he normally wears sneakers rather than Docs. But he has a lovely pair of boots which I make him dress up in! They look good but they last a long time too.

**Georgia**

And that is something that's come out in my interviews a lot is people saying you know, I love them because I like the way they look, but also they're just really practical and they last for ages.

**Sharon**

Exactly, yeah. I've never owned another pair of shoes that's lasted that long except for my New Zealand made ones.

**Georgia**

Yeah, brilliant. Okay, well if that's everything then thank you very much!

## Silvia

*Silvia is a museum professional in her mid-30s. She is from Italy but has lived in Glasgow for 7 years. She bought her first pair of Doc Martens when she was a teenager and she now owns 4 pairs. I interviewed Silvia at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, in July of 2019.*

## **Georgia**

First question is can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

## **Silvia**

Okay. I think it was my home town in Italy and I was 15 maybe? I bought a pair of purple boots and my best friend bought a pair of green boots, and then we'd exchange them, so I had a pair of purple and a pair of green and so did she. And I think I wore them until I was maybe 17 or 18, I was wearing them so much that they got destroyed.

## **Georgia**

Oh, really? Did you keep them after they were broken?

## **Silvia**

No I didn't, I would have liked to but my mum likes to throw everything away. So unfortunately not, but it would have been nice because there was that thing with my best friend which was quite cool.

## **Georgia**

Does your best friend still have hers?

## **Silvia**

I think so, I think she does. Yeah, she was a little bit more careful with hers than me.

## **Georgia**

And so you said you were 15, and you're how old now?

## **Silvia**

Now I'm 34.

**Georgia**

Okay. Right. So 20 ish years ago. So why did you choose Doc Martens over other brands, do you think?

**Silvia**

Well, I think that when I bought my first pair it was because they were fashionable. But now, here, I think they are the best shoes to have in Glasgow, in Scotland. They're amazing because they're super waterproof and they're just very cool. I really like them. What I don't like is that you have to suffer a little bit when you buy them new, but I think there are no better shoes. They are perfect for the Scottish weather.

**Georgia**

Okay. So originally it was because you just thought they were cool. Why do you think it was them and not say, you know, Timberlands or something like that?

**Silvia**

Well, because there is something punk about them. Now they're super in fashion, everyone has them, but I think that even 10 years ago they were more niche in a way. So maybe for me it was a sort of... Not rebellion, that is a big word, but a way of not conforming to the ideal standard of what a nice girl should wear. But now everyone has them so that's been a bit lost. But I'm sure in maybe 10 years time they're going to go back to Doc Martens not being for everyone.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah. This is sort of related to that question. So what are your feelings on Doc Martens as a brand? And has that changed since you were younger?

**Silvia**

Well, I think that when I bought my first pair they were very, very fashionable. And then there was that maybe 10 years where no one had them and they weren't in fashion anymore.

**Georgia**

Were you still wearing them?

**Silvia**

I think that maybe for 5 or 6 years I didn't wear them and then when I moved to Glasgow seven years ago I bought my first pair and they still were... I mean they were famous, but they weren't how

they are now. I think it started out as work wear so of course it changed during the years. And then they were adopted by all the punks. So yeah, I think it has changed and evolved in a way. But I'm sure it's going to go back to where it was before. It's just a cycle.

**Georgia**

Okay. All right. So you said you bought your first pair with your friend, were you aware of any of your other friends or your peers wearing them at the time?

**Silvia**

Oh, yeah. I still remember all the different colours. A friend of mine had the yellow ones, and then another friend had the blue ones, and my sister had the burgundy ones.

**Georgia**

So you kind of associate the colours with different people. Do you think that the fact that your friends were wearing them had an impact on you wanting to buy them?

**Silvia**

Yeah, absolutely. When I was 15, absolutely. Yeah. I was ready to sell my soul to have them! I was wearing them in summer, like 30 degrees.

**Georgia**

Were your parents okay with you having them? Did they have any strong feelings at all about you wearing them?

**Silvia**

Yeah, they were okay. But when I was wearing them when it was summer, they were like, 'What are you doing?!'

**Georgia**

Yeah, absolutely. Okay, so do you or did you ever identify as being part of a set subculture?

**Silvia**

Yeah, when I was a late teen, maybe 17 or 18, I identified myself as a punk. But I think I was a very mellow, mellow, mellow punk! I would say for a couple of years.

**Georgia**

And Doc Martens, were they a big part of that scene?

**Silvia**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Georgia**

Did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens associations with subculture when you were young?

**Silvia**

Yeah. Yeah. And even though everyone has them now I still think that they have a meaning and if you wear them you're part of something in a way. I still feel like when I see people, a fellow Doc Martens wearer, I'm like [Silvia tucks her chin up in approval].

**Georgia**

So you did know about Doc Martens associations with subculture when you were younger? And did that have an impact on your choice to buy them?

**Silvia**

Yeah, that. And as well, the fact that all my friends were wearing them. A combination of the two.

**Georgia**

Do you think that there's any difference between Doc Martens' presence in Italy and in the UK?

**Silvia**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Georgia**

What difference do you think that is?

**Silvia**

Well, I think that the main difference is that a lot of the things that Italian people do are based on fashion and looking cool. A sort of cultural appropriation. It's all like, trying to look cool. I think that for sure Doc Martens had a role in this. Whilst I always notice that in Glasgow, in England as well, when you're part of something, like when you are punk or whatever, then it's for real. You don't do it just for fun or because it looks cool. So I think that Doc Martens are a little bit more real. It was more of a trend in Italy. In Italy, there are very few people that are like, 'I dressed like this because I believe in this'. Like, when I was at uni, there were I think 80% of the guys had dreadlocks only because it was cool. I went back to Pisa - where I was at uni - last week, no one had dreadlocks anymore.

**Georgia**

Okay, brilliant. This is quite a big question so take your time thinking about it. What impact does owning and wearing Doc Martens have on your identity? Or do you think it's maybe the other way around, that your identity impacted on your choice to buy them in the first place?

**Silvia**

I think it is a big circle in a way. They are part of my identity now. During winter, I only wear Doc Martens, I don't own other shoes. In the same way, it's a practical reason because they are the best shoes ever. They are amazing. They last years, they go with everything, and they're just amazing. They have a thick sole so you don't get wet. I can jump in puddles! So I think it's a matter of the two: a matter of practicality, and as well now they are part of my identity. When it is about to buying a dress or a bag or anything, I always think, 'Would it look good with my Doc Martens?' So they are part of me. I'm still thinking about buying the sandals but they feel very extreme. But I think about them every day!

**Georgia**

Okay, so you do consider them to be quite a big part of your identity. Do you think other people think that about you too, that you are a Doc Martens person?

**Silvia**

Yeah, I think so. I think that my husband thinks about me as a Doc Martens person. He's a Vans person so he always tries to give Vans to me! I feel that now I'm so used to like the thick sole, and I'm quite short so I like the soles. When I wear other things I'm like, 'Oh my god!' Particularly Vans or Converse. I don't feel like myself. But he tries!

**Georgia**

Does he wear Doc Martens at all?

**Silvia**

Yes, yes. Yes. Two pairs. He's quite obsessed with shoes.

**Georgia**

Haha, okay, cute! So do you have any thoughts on gender and identity and Doc Martens?

**Silvia**

I think that for a woman it's more of a statement because they're not really what is considered feminine or delicate. They're quite... Manly? I mean, it's not the right word, but they're not what is considered delicate or feminine so I think it's more of a statement for a woman.

**Georgia**

Okay. Yeah. Did you ever wear heels, are you a heels person?

**Silvia**

No, I'm not. I was wearing heels at my wedding and other people's weddings. Last year I got a new obsession, the Swedish Hasbeen clogs? The wooden clogs. They're heels but they're not really heels. They're amazing. They're very comfortable. So that's the only exception.

**Georgia**

So not any stilettos or anything?

**Silvia**

No because I don't agree with being uncomfortable. I don't see why I should be uncomfortable in my life. I think that in a wear I wear Doc Martens because they are comfortable and they are practical, because I feel very annoyed that I should be wearing tight things that are uncomfortable. Or I should be cold or I should be hot or whatever. I think I'm evolving in a way that I'm just going to wear jumpsuits and Doc Martens and no make up.

**Georgia**

Yeah. You said your mum's quite traditional. So does she wear heels?

**Silvia**

Always. Not stupid high heels but yes. She always makes an effort. In Italy, it's totally different. And I think this is something that I'm developing just now but I think that my obsession with being comfortable has something to do with all the pressure from Italy of being nice, and feminine, and thin, and all that bullshit. It's maybe a bit late for that rebellion!

**Georgia**

Better late than never! And I guess when you come to another country where that's maybe not quite so much the case, it takes a while to sink in that you don't have to do that anymore.

**Silvia**

It's one of the big reasons why I love Glasgow because no one cares. No one judges you. You just can be whatever you want to be and just be yourself without being judged for what you wear.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So how many pairs do you have?

**Silvia**

I think I've got four.

**Georgia**

And what are they?

**Silvia**

I've got the Chelsea boots, the ones that I'm wearing now, and then I've got three pairs of just the normal Doc Martens. A brown one, the black ones with the thicker soles which are my elegant ones, and then another one with embroidered flowers.

**Georgia**

And what's your favourite pair?

**Silvia**

The ones I'm wearing now. They are the more comfortable. And maybe because not so many people have them, they're a little bit different from the regular ones.

**Georgia**

Okay. And how does wearing your Doc Martens make you feel? Do you feel different wearing Doc Martens than you do wearing other shoes?

**Silvia**

Yes. I feel different. During the summer I can wear sandals or trainers and I'm fine. But during the winter I only wear Doc Martens and I feel weird if I don't. Like, what other winter shoes do people wear? I don't know. I tried to buy different things and to wear different things but I kind of feel that I'm not myself. It's like something isn't right in my appearance. They are a part of who I am.

**Georgia**

Right. Okay. So it is kind of dependent on the weather?

**Silvia**

Yeah, when I was in Pisa last week there was no way I was going to wear them, it's too hot. I went to a concert there and it was about 33 degrees, and I noticed some girls wearing Doc Martens, the super high ones. They looked very cool but I just don't think it's worth it.

**Georgia**

Yeah, okay. So is there any kind of social situation where you wouldn't wear them?

**Silvia**

Not really. I always wear them to work

**Georgia**

What do you do?

**Silvia**

I work in museums, I've been working for the National Trust for Scotland for the last two years. So yeah, they were perfect for that. And I wore them for interviews. Maybe for more formal occasions like weddings I wouldn't. I fantasised about being the bride in Doc Martens, I really like the idea, but they just didn't go. I got married in Italy, and then we had another party here in Glasgow and I was wearing Doc Martens to that party.

**Georgia**

So you still wore them at the wedding celebrations here? So do you feel that maybe there's a slight separation of... Not who you are, but how you portray yourself?

**Silvia**

Yeah, absolutely. When I'm in Italy I... I guess... I don't change my personality or what I do, but I sort of try to accommodate. Try not to create fights. Before, it wasn't like this, but now I'm like, what's the point? For one week, during the summer, does it really make sense? I'm 34, I can still do whatever I want, but for sure there are things that I pick to wear in Italy. I don't buy a new wardrobe, I'm not a different person, but I maybe adjust a bit.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah, for sure. Okay. Have you experienced any notable reactions from people whilst you're wearing Doc Martens?

**Silvia**

Yeah, yeah. I think so. Not in the last like two or three years when everyone is wearing them but particularly with the Chelsea boots. A lot of men, actually, being like, 'I like your boots.'

**Georgia**

Anybody say anything negative?

**Silvia**

No, no, no.

**Georgia**

Good. Do you notice when you see other people wearing them?

**Silvia**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. And does that have an impact on what you think about them?

**Silvia**

Yes. And I think he's quite easy to understand who the real Doc Martens wearers are. The ones who love them and want to wear them every day, and the ones that are wearing them as if they were any pair of shoes. I think it's very easy to understand who is who. Don't you think?!

**Georgia**

I think you probably can.

**Silvia**

Yeah, and it's no judgement. I think everyone wears things that they like without thinking about the message.

**Georgia**

How do you think you know?

**Silvia**

I don't know. I don't know. I think they kind of complete a look and I hate when they look super new.

**Georgia**

Okay, right. So you don't like them being shiny, you like them being beaten up and worn in?

**Silvia**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Okay. Interesting.

**Silvia**

Yeah. I don't know. Maybe it's the job I do but I have a very creepy eye for detail.

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah. And what is it that you do in museums?

**Silvia**

I'm doing any inventory project.

**Georgia**

Ah, cool. I used to do that for The Hunterian! I wanted to ask you actually, you said previously the fashion was more important. Was there a big subcultural presence in Italy?

**Silvia**

In the big city, yeah, there was. Particularly in Bologna and Milan I think there was. But not where I am from, I'm from a very small town.

**Georgia**

I find it so interesting when I see that British subcultures have moved into other countries because they become their own thing when they go somewhere else. They have roots in the UK, but even in New Zealand, the punk scene there was very different from the one in the UK.

**Silvia**

I think that probably the one in Italy was very intertwined with politics. Politics in the 70s and 80s in Italy was quite a big thing. There were a lot of riots, particularly in Bologna and in Milan there were quite a lot of big things happening.

**Georgia**

Anti-government or...?

**Silvia**

Yeah. Now it's all... No one tries anymore!

**Georgia**

Yeah. Okay, brilliant. So is there anything else that you want to tell me about Doc Martens, any other things that you think are important for me to know?

**Silvia**

Well, I think that when I moved here they made me feel part of this culture, part of Glasgow. I think there is a big relation as well with the weather when I'm wearing them. I'm in Britain, I'm wearing them on the 18th of July. Mental!

**Georgia**

You don't mind it?

**Silvia**

No, I don't mind it. They make me feel like myself here.

**Georgia**

Okay, brilliant. I think that's it!

Yana

*Yana is a photographer in her late 30s who lives in Wellington. She was born in the former USSR but has lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for most of her life. She got her first pair of Docs in 2003 and she now has 8 pairs (not including the pairs her daughters and husband have). I interviewed Yana at her home in Wellington, in May of 2019.*

**Georgia**

Can you remember where and when you bought your first pair of Doc Martens?

**Yana**

Yup, it was in 2003, in Tawa. And they were samples so they were cheap.

**Georgia**

Mmhmm, and what kind were they?

**Yana**

I'll show you [Yana fetches her black 14 ups]. So yeah, 14 ups, black, with purple laces.

**Georgia**

Brilliant. And why did you choose them over other brands of shoe, do you think?

**Yana**

Oh, I always wanted Docs. And these were affordable.

**Georgia**

Mmhmm. So why did you always want them?

**Yana**

Um... They had a reputation for being quality footwear, and I had bought shoes and boots prior to having Docs and the only ones I could afford didn't last, they fell apart pretty quickly. I think the longest one was maybe a year and a half that it lasted and that was just unacceptable. I wanted something that was going to last for ages.

**Georgia**

And did you know anything about them as a brand? So maybe apart from the fact that they lasted for ages.

**Yana**

I guess I knew they had a pretty massive following, like a pretty dedicated consumer base.

**Georgia**

Mm hmm.

**Yana**

And some of my friends had Docs, like old school ones, like my UK ones. Yeah, I dunno, they just seemed like a good quality brand.

**Georgia**

Yeah, mmhmm. And so you said that you had some friends who owned them as well. Were they from the UK? Your friends?

**Yana**

No, no, no, it's my school friends. I don't know where they got those from.

**Georgia**

So you kind of hung around with people who wore them?

**Yana**

Yeah, I had a few Doc Marten fan friends.

**Georgia**

And do you think that had an impact on your choice to buy them?

**Yana**

Vaguely. Also from just I guess, partly from going to lots of gigs? Just about everybody wore Docs.

**Georgia**

And you were kinda part of that scene?

**Yana**

Yeah, by osmosis you just absorb an inclination towards a particular brand because of the choices of the people who surround you.

**Georgia**

Yeah. And now your kids have Doc Martens as well. And was that something that you chose for them?

**Yana**

Yeah, yeah. They actually had Doc Martens boots before they could walk probably! I was like 'Yeah, my kids should have Docs.' And again, even kids Docs are pretty decent quality. Kids shoes are... Well, I don't buy new shoes, it's far too expensive. But they often don't last. Kids shoes are often brandless, and not very good quality. So I find it's better to buy normal adult brands but that are made for children. So Doc Martens are pretty good.

**Georgia**

[Asking Yana's eldest daughter] And you like your Doc Martens? [She nods and says yes].

**Yana**

I think she's on her third pair.

**Georgia**

And so did you ever identify as being part of a particular set subculture?

**Yana**

Not really, no. I went to lots of gigs as a music photographer.

**Georgia**

All right. And what kind of music was it? Just everything?

**Yana**

Oh, no more like mostly goth gigs. Yeah, more underground ones.

**Georgia**

Mmhmm, okay. And that was here in New Zealand?

**Yana**

Yep.

**Georgia**

And so would you say that Doc Martens were a part of those scenes as well?

**Yana**

Vaguely, not so much though, no. I'd say it was mostly New Rocks.

**Georgia**

Okay. Yeah. They've been mentioned before.

**Yana**

Yeah. Probably 60% New Rocks, 20% something else, and 20% Doc Martens.

**Georgia**

And did you have any knowledge of Doc Martens being associated with subculture as part of their brand?

**Yana**

Only like... I suppose, I knew that in the UK it was part of punk subculture but it wasn't something that I identified with. To me it was just more common sense footwear, it was just practical. Because my New Rocks were great, but they were on the heavy side. And after a while, they just became impractical because I walked too much.

**Georgia**

So you walk around most places?

**Yana**

Well I used to. I don't have time to walk anymore. So I just run!

**Georgia**

Okay. And do you think that owning or wearing your Doc Martens has been a part of your identity? Do you think it's impacted on your identity?

**Yana**

I suppose so, considering the amount of pairs I now own! And I might buy some more, if I see something I like.

**Georgia**

And how many pairs do you have?

**Yana**

I think 8? The thing is, most of my Docs are lace ups and I've become really, really lazy. So if something comes up with a zip then I might just get them.

**Georgia**

Okay. So you said you got your first pair in 2003?

**Yana**

Yeah. And I mean, they still look great. They've been around the world. I've worn them through mud, rain, forests. They've been like, everywhere, and they're still perfectly fine.

**Georgia**

Yeah, they still survived.

**Yana**

Yeah, they're totally fine, just really dusty so if I polish them they'll look amazing again.

**Georgia**

Yeah. Do you think other people know you as somebody with Doc Martens?

**Yana**

Uhh they used to. I don't get to wear Docs as much anymore because I'm always running places so I have to wear running shoes, I don't have much of a choice. And I have to wear steel caps at work. So I don't wear my Docs as much now. I only wear them if I'm walking somewhere, not running, which only happens every now and then. Yeah, people definitely I reckon would have known me as someone who wears boots all the time because I lived in my 14 ups. And I have... 4 pairs of 14 ups? So there's always something. Boots for any occasion!

**Georgia**

Yeah. Uh huh. Um, and do you have any thoughts around identity and gender in relation to Doc Martens? So do you think there's anything to do with being a woman in Doc Martens?

**Yana**

Well, my mother had an interesting take on it. It wasn't particularly in relation to Doc Martens but it translates to Docs I suppose. When I had New Rocks they were very heavy and had lots of bits of hardware on them. And my mother thought they were the best because I'd be out all night, I usually wouldn't come home until 4 in the morning, and I'd walk everywhere. She thought they'd keep me safe because they were really heavy. I did actually get attacked once but she doesn't know that. I wasn't wearing my New Rocks, I was wearing different boots, but they were great for self-defence. But yeah, she considered my heavy boots to be like a self-defence mechanism in a way, almost like a physical barrier. Like, 'Don't mess with me.' And Docs in a way have a similar function, like if you kick someone in Docs then they'll know about it. So I guess it was partly a self-defence thing.

**Georgia**

So you were aware of that when you were wearing them? It was a part of the decision?

**Yana**

Yeah. Great for kicking!

**Georgia**

Hahaha, yeah. And I guess in the kind of scenes you were in, if you're photographing goth gigs in the middle of mosh pits and stuff...

**Yana**

Yeah that was the other thing, because I did a lot of moshing and I got assaulted pretty much every single time. But they also actually kept my toes safe. I would see people going into mosh pits... Actually, one of my friends went into a mosh pit wearing Roman sandals, what an idiot. And she came out with black toes. And at the end of a gig you might find like, jandals scattered round the place? And it was just like how do you... what are their feet like?! I definitely damaged my favourite pair of Docs in a mosh pit because people were constantly standing on my toes so they got really scuffed. And I was quite sad, like 'I only just got these and I loved them so much!' My perfect pair of boots and now they're ruined. But yeah, just good toe protection. And also the steel caps? Because I have a pair of steel capped Docs but they look like regular boots. So you can still get into places and nobody picks them out as being unsafe footwear.

**Georgia**

Yeah, alright. So do you have a favourite pair of Doc Martens?

**Yana**

Yes, I'll get them. [Yana fetches her favourite pair whilst I explain to her daughter how the Ottr app that is recording us works]. Yeah so they're the standard 14 ups, and they're the ones that got scuffed.

**Georgia**

Ah so the ones that got scuffed are still your favourite?

**Yana**

Yeah, so the first ones I bought were quite soft leather, I never had to break them in they just moulded to my legs and my feet straight away. Whereas these will sometimes give me grief, I have to make sure I wear thick socks with them.

**Georgia**

Yeah, uhuh. So you said that sometimes they give you grief. So have your other ones been hard to wear in as well?

**Yana**

Well the thing is it's not like they took ages to break in, I don't remember them being a problem... And it's not round my feet, it's more that they press weirdly on my ankles. And it's more a problem now that it was years ago. I've had them for ages, I've probably had them for more than 10 years. But it seems like it's more of a problem now because I'm so used to wearing running shoes so anything else I wear now I notice the discomfort.

**Georgia**

So you think you kind of got used to wearing something other than Docs?

**Yana**

Yeah I got used to not wearing them. I used to not understand how people could wear anything other than Docs. Like I'd look around at people wearing other shoes and be like 'Why are people wearing other shoes?' I don't like the way they look. Just wear Docs! What's wrong with Docs!? They're perfect for everything! But it turns out they're not so good for running in...

**Georgia**

True!

**Yana**

And now it's like, oh I love my Docs so much but they're just not very practical for my lifestyle.

**Georgia**

Uh huh. And so, those are your favourite pair? Why do you like them so much? Like, why do you think they're your favourite out of all of them?

**Yana**

I just feel like they have a lot of substance to them? They also elevate me, which is not necessarily a good thing, I like being short... Even if I was shorter than I am now, I wouldn't have a problem with it. But yeah maybe because they make me feel taller, even though I don't WANT to be taller, maybe that gives me some kind of a psychological boost that I'm not quite aware of?

**Georgia**

Uh huh. Okay. And I know you say you don't wear them quite as much because of your lifestyle, but previously, would there have been any situations in which you chose not to wear them? Or did you just wear them all the time?

**Yana**

That's a good question. I wore them to weddings... So probably... At my wedding I didn't wear Docs. But not really, no, I just wore Docs pretty much everywhere.

**Georgia**

And you were you said you're a photographer?

**Yana**

Yeah.

**Georgia**

Yeah. So that probably allowed you as well, in that scene, to wear boots like that because I guess... You know, some of the other people that I've interviewed have had very corporate jobs so I guess they may have felt that they had to change...

**Yana**

Yeah, but you can get... You know, Docs come in so many different appearances, they can look completely corporate but they're still Docs, you know?

**Georgia**

I think so too. Yeah. So how do you feel when you wear Doc Martens? How do they make you feel when you're in them?

**Yana**

Like me. They make me feel like me. When I put them on it's like, right, this is totally me. Because also when I wear Docs I'll wear my normal clothes, I won't wear my running gear. And I pretty much live in my running gear. Which is fine! At least it's comfortable, it gets me places, I guess. But when I wear Docs I won't wear my running gear. So I have this thing, right, where if I see somebody wearing Docs and they're wearing track pants or yoga pants, I find it absolutely obscene. Like what is wrong with you? You cannot mix athleisure and Docs, it's disgusting. So basically when I wear my Docs I get to wear my normal clothes, and I just feel like myself.

**Georgia**

Haha, yeah, absolutely. And do you, or did you, get any notable reactions when you were wearing your Doc Martens?

**Yana**

Nope, not that I was aware of? I mean, I've always worked in environments where if I wore like, a potato sack nobody would notice or say anything so it just didn't matter.

**Georgia**

Do you think they would notice if you weren't wearing your Doc Martens?

**Yana**

Probably! Like 'Oh, you've gone short! What's wrong with you?' Like 'Agh, I can see your legs, put them away!'

**Georgia**

And do you notice when you see other people wearing Doc Martens? Do you clock it?

**Yana**

Yes definitely. Yeah. Cus I always wonder why people pick a certain style of Docs, like there's so many to choose from. I used to not understand why people would wear 10 ups, or 8 ups. Why? Why don't you just go up? I used to really want 20 ups until I realised they didn't suit me. And I thought the taller the better. 14 ups are a good size, especially if they have zips. Though none of mine have zips. So yeah, now I just want to know why people go for a certain style over the standard, in inverted commas.

**Georgia**

Yeah.

**Yana**

So like, why are yours [pointing to the Docs I am wearing] short and purple? What was your thought process in choosing those over something more conventional?

**Georgia**

Yeah, yeah.

**Yana**

And everybody has them! Even at my daughter's school, lots of little kids have Docs, you see them everywhere. Last school holidays she was at WilderKids which is like a school holiday programme. An outdoors one, you can get mucky and stuff. And it's usually kids from fairly affluent families, like it's not cheap. Kinda Mt Victoria, Kelburn families. And there was this little kid there and she was wearing really pricey, new, glitter Docs. They were silver and pink. It's one of their newer styles. I mean they're really cool but it's like, wow you can afford to send them to an outdoor programme in those. Like, we were there in gumboots.

**Georgia**

Yeah, well I probably wouldn't send my kids to an outdoor programme in sparkly anything!

**Yana**

Yeah like they are really nice boots! Just maybe not for playing in dirt?

**Georgia**

Yeah, that's what I would think as well. So, do you think it would change your opinion of someone if you saw them wearing Doc Martens?

**Yana**

Yeah I guess. Like at some point in consciousness you're on my page. There's a relateableness, a link.

**Georgia**

Okay, yeah. So you said you got your kids Doc Martens when they were really young. Was that a decision that you made because... Because they were sturdy or...?

**Yana**

Well, really it was more like 'Well I have Docs!' So, I make most of my children's clothes. Less now, but because I made their clothes and I made stuff I liked. So if I am making little versions of myself, then they need to have Docs! Or at least something that looks like Docs. It's actually quite hard to find little children's Docs that aren't floral, and they don't do floral.

**Georgia**

So do you think that the sort of... Prevalence of Doc Martens has changed? Like you said you see them all the time now?

**Yana**

Everywhere, on everyone, on all different kinds of people. They're just so ubiquitous now. And I don't know why because they haven't got any cheaper. The price hasn't gone down, they're still \$250 which is pretty crazy money for a pair of shoes. Especially if they're not made in the UK and they probably won't last as long.

**Georgia**

So you know there's the Made In England brand that they do now which is even more expensive than the other ones. Do you feel as though the ones that aren't made in the UK are different?

**Yana**

So I have one pair that are made in Thailand and they're definitely different. I buy all of my Docs on TradeMe for very very cheap, and I didn't realise that there was a difference. I got them because they were in my size but they were actually really big. I mean they're fine, I'll still wear them, but they don't feel the same. They're definitely a size and a half bigger than UK sizing and something about them just doesn't feel right, but I didn't know that at the time. I also didn't realise that there was a difference in where they were manufactured. All I knew was that when I got them, they were just not the same. Not what I expecting from Docs. Not the way I imagine Docs to be, even though in appearance they are pretty much the same. But they just don't feel the same.

**Georgia**

Cool, interesting. And is there anything else you want to tell me about your Docs? Any other stories for me?

**Yana**

Well I'll show you my most comfortable ones.

**Georgia**

Yeah, great! [Yana fetches her most comfortable pair of Docs, some canvas style boots with brass studs on the toes and heels.]

**Yana**

So the canvas stud ones are really comfy.

**Georgia**

Oh, hey, they're really cool!

**Yana**

They're probably my most comfortable shoes. And also, the tall boots, they're super comfortable and they're zipped! They don't have laces. I'm always running out of the house in a hurry, and if I have to wear smart footwear (not running shoes) I'll put them on. I'll show you a couple of other pairs too. [Yana fetches more shoes whilst I talk to her daughter about taking photos of the Doc Martens.]

So my Doc Marten heels... [Yana shows me a pair of plain black shoes with kitten heels.]

**Georgia**

Cute!

**Yana**

I've only worn them a couple of times because I don't understand how people walk in heels. And then these ones... [Yana shows me a pair of silver padded high top style boots.]

**Georgia**

Shiny!

**Yana**

I'm going to get rid of them, I decided, because they're just not me. They don't feel right, they're just not me. [Yana's daughter suggests she could give them to me!]

**Georgia**

I don't know if I'd wear them either! When would you wear them?

**Yana**

Well actually I wore them to a pretty muddy forest party last weekend and they didn't get dirty, they're very easy to clean which is nice. I don't mind shiny, I don't mind silver, I don't mind the shape but they're just not me. Something about the padding on top, something about the shape just doesn't feel right.

**Georgia**

Yeah they're kind of like high tops aren't they?

**Yana**

Yeah, a bit like high tops. Just not for me, yeah.

**Georgia**

Not for you. Fair enough. Well that's all of my questions! Done. Easy. Thankyou.