

EMERALD STUDIES IN CULTURE,  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THE ARTS

# MUSIC, MATTERING, AND CRIMINALIZED YOUNG MEN

EXPLORING MUSIC ELICITATION AS A FEMINIST  
ARTS-BASED RESEARCH AND INTERVENTION TOOL



JADE LEVELL

FOREWORD BY IRIS LUARASI

# **Music, Mattering, and Criminalized Young Men**

# **EMERALD STUDIES IN CULTURE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THE ARTS**

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This series aims to take criminological inquiry in new and imaginative directions by publishing books that represent all forms of criminal justice from an 'arts' or 'cultural' perspective and that have something new to tell us about space, place and sensory experience as they relate to forms of justice. Building on emergent interest in the 'cultural', 'autoethnographic', 'emotional', 'visual', 'narrative' and 'sensory' in criminology, books in the series will introduce readers to imaginative forms of inspiration that deepen our conceptual understanding of the lived experience of punishment and of the process of researching within the criminal justice system, as well as discussing the more well-rehearsed problems of cultural representations of justice.

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## Praise for *Music, Mattering, and Criminalized Young Men*

'[This] is a reminder that in the melodies of the marginalized, we might find the keys to understanding and change.'

**Iris Luarasi,**  
Tirana University, Albania

'A powerful demonstration of the methodological capacity of music to evoke memory, a sense of mattering and a means of making space for those we work with to share their narratives with agency. *Music, Mattering and Criminalized Young Men* is sufficiently detailed to provide a how-to for replicating multi-agency research projects, focused on music elicitation amongst criminalized people. In some senses, this is a story about navigating systems and gatekeeping in unfamiliar terrain to explore the constraints of masculinity. Yet it is in the interweaving of individual narratives with those of Albania's history, and in the stories and experience of the participants, that the book is most potently compelling.'

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'For a discipline so focused on the letter of the law, thinking with music about "crime", as this book does, opens up our ears to what our eyes can't see—inviting us to rethink how, why and who criminological research is undertaken for.'

**Lambros Fatsis,**  
City, University of London, UK

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# **Music, Mattering, and Criminalized Young Men: Exploring Music Elicitation as a Feminist Arts-Based Research and Intervention Tool**

BY

**JADE LEVELL**

*University of Bristol, UK*



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*For Frida, Brooke, and Astrid*



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## About the Author

**Dr Jade Levell** is a Senior Lecturer in Social and Public Policy (Criminology and Gender Violence) at the University of Bristol. Her research interests include adverse childhood experiences, childhood domestic violence, on-road and gang subcultures, organized crime, masculinity theory, DVA perpetrators, and feminist praxis. She has expertise in Music Elicitation as both a social research tool and an innovative way of listening and working with marginalised groups. She is a co-editor of the *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* and has published widely on issues related to GBV. Her book, *Boys, Childhood Domestic Abuse, and Gang Involvement: Violence at Home, Violence On-Road* was published in June 2022 with Policy Press. She has also co-edited a collection published in 2023 with Tara Young and Rod Earle entitled *Exploring Urban Youth Culture Outside of the Gang Paradigm: Critical Questions of Youth, Gender and Race On-road* (Policy Press). Dr Levell has experience of working internationally on issues of gender equality, gender-based violence, masculinities, vulnerability, youth adversity, and crime.

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# Foreword

*In Music, Mattering, and Criminalized Young Men: Exploring Music Elicitation as a Feminist Arts-Based Research and Intervention Tool*, Dr Jade Levell takes us on a compelling journey, exploring the intersections of music, masculinity, and marginalization. Through her innovative use of music elicitation, Dr Levell grants us access to the often-silenced voices of young Albanian men caught in the complex web of criminality and societal expectations.

The opening quote, 'We were beaten by life', poignantly captures the essence of the narratives within these pages. This book is not just a collection of academic findings; it is a tapestry of human experiences, woven together by the universal language of music. It's a narrative that digs deep into the heart of what it means to be a young man in contemporary Albania, struggling under the weight of patriarchal norms and economic hardships. What sets this work apart is its innovative approach of using music elicitation to uncover the emotional and psychological landscape of these individuals.

Dr Levell's work is ground-breaking in its approach. She transcends traditional research methodologies using music as a tool to unlock the inner worlds of these young men. In doing so, she sheds light on the societal structures and pressures that shape their journeys towards criminalization. This book, thus, serves as a critical lens through which we can view the multifaceted nature of masculinity, adversity, and the quest for a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing world. The journey of this book begins with an international development collaboration aimed at understanding the undercurrents that drive young men towards criminality. Through the power of music, a medium often laden with unspoken emotions and untold stories, this project reveals the deep-seated pain, courage, and struggles faced by these men. Their selections of music tracks become a gateway to their souls, exposing the raw wounds inflicted by a patriarchal society that demands unattainable standards of masculinity and honour.

The stories of these young men, articulated through their musical choices, are stories of pain, hope, resilience, and the human yearning for significance. They challenge us to rethink our perceptions of criminality and to see beyond the labels society often hastily assigns. Dr Levell's empathetic and nuanced approach reveals the complex interplay of societal expectations, familial pressures, and personal aspirations that these young men navigate. Moreover, this book is a testament to the power of arts-based research in reaching into the depths of human experience, unearthing truths that conventional methods might miss. Dr Levell's pioneering



work in music elicitation stands as a beacon for those seeking to employ more inclusive, empathetic, and holistic approaches in social research and intervention.

As we turn these pages, we are invited not just to read but to listen – to really listen – to the melodies of lives that are too often unheard. In listening, we are compelled to reflect on the broader societal and cultural contexts that shape individual trajectories, particularly those of marginalized groups. This book highlights music’s role as a catalyst for connection, healing, and hope amidst adversity.

In conclusion, *Music, Mattering, and Criminalized Young Men* is an essential read for scholars, practitioners, and anyone interested in the transformative power of music and the human stories behind societal labels. It is a reminder that in the melodies of the marginalized, we might find the keys to understanding and change.

Iris Luarasi PhD

Former President of GREVIO, Council of Europe 2015–2023

CEO of Executive Director of Counselling Line for Women and Girls and  
Counselling Line for Men and Boys, Albania

Professor at the Department of Journalism and Communication in Tirana  
University, Albania

# Preface

## Sounds

We heard the soundtracks to young men's lives,  
Men who had survived  
Despite,  
Or because.  
Boys who had been gifted,  
And taken,  
Risks.  
On the promise of *becoming somebody*  
Yet slept behind bars.  
We created spaces for silence and sound.  
Ears open to their  
Lamented arias of pain and pride  
Their hurt  
Their grit  
The deep-cut wounds  
Of abandonment.  
Refugees from the patriarchal family.  
In lands where trauma seeps from Communist concrete  
Walls of silence,  
Silencings.  
Hopes buried in the bunkers.  
We asked professionals to open their ears  
Sonic – mattering  
We carved a circle;  
Hearing, heard,  
Hearing, heard.  
The search for connection to understand  
Masculinity.  
without the resources the patriarchy promised them.  
Scars glistening on the surface,  
Of men left in the bodies of boys.

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Overall, I owe a big thank you to Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers for being an excellent mentor, collaborator, and role model. It was in combining her expertise on Albania and mine on music elicitation which founded this whole project from a seed idea we discussed many years prior. It was an honour to work together, and I am glad that we were able to see our ideas come to life.

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*xx Acknowledgements*

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This project has been an absolute privilege for me. Getting to know the people and lands of Albania has been a real honour. I have kept the little fortune cookie note from the neighbourhood coffee shop in my purse ever since: *ëndrrat e mëdha, kanë fillime të vogla*/big dreams have small beginnings.