



## Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth

Helena Mills

**To cite this article:** Helena Mills (2016): Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth, Contemporary British History, DOI: [10.1080/13619462.2016.1206822](https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2016.1206822)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2016.1206822>



© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 12 Jul 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 437



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth

Helena Mills

Faculty of History, University College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

### ABSTRACT

Popular memory depicts 1960s young adults as affluent, permissive, promiscuous, delinquent, sub- or counter-cultural rebels. But these stylised images do not reflect the lived experiences of ordinary young adults, particularly young women, in the 1960s. Using Mass Observation and oral history interviews, this article examines how women who were young adults in the 1960s remember their youths and how they negotiate the gap between popular memory and personal experience. It argues that women can readily critique the popular memory of 1960s youth where it does not match their own lived experience. The popular memory is powerful, however, and so still shapes their understanding of the experiences and concepts of youth more generally. Moreover, the way women negotiate between popular and personal memories of youth is conditioned by their attempt to create composure and by subsequent life experiences.

### KEYWORDS

Youth; 1960s; memory; experience; women

In 1966, *Time* magazine coined the phrase 'swinging London', suggesting that areas of 1960s London had witnessed sociocultural shifts in art, culture and morality.<sup>1</sup> Via media transmission, this concept came to describe more than just London; it was the 'swinging sixties' more generally and youth culture was at the centre of this.<sup>2</sup> The idea of the 'swinging sixties' took multiple forms and could be understood in subtly different ways by different people, but was primarily associated with sexual permissiveness, drugs, pop music, fashion, the rise of a visible youth culture and with sub- and counter-cultural movements.<sup>3</sup>

Despite nuances in how popular images of the 'swinging sixties' have been depicted, there is, nonetheless, a core set of assumptions and popular images about British youth culture in the period. Young adults in the 1960s were (and often still are) depicted as leisure oriented, affluent, free, permissive, promiscuous, delinquent, drug fuelled, Beatles mad, mini-skirt clad and in deep generational conflict with their parents. They were, supposedly, sub- or counter-cultural rebels in an age of Mods, Rockers and Hippies.<sup>4</sup> These ideas about the 1960s have been circulated widely throughout society from the 1960s to the present day in political discourse and a variety of media outlets. They have become the collective understanding of what youth culture in 1960s Britain was 'all about', making these images a popular memory. This article examines how women who spent their youths in the 1960s remember the period.

**CONTACT** Helena Mills  [helena.mills@univ.ox.ac.uk](mailto:helena.mills@univ.ox.ac.uk)

© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

It argues that they do not passively accept this popular memory of 1960s youth, but actively critique it where it does not fit their lived experiences.

Indeed, the popular memory of the 'swinging sixties' and 1960s youth culture is necessarily stylised and simplified. As Mark Donnelly has argued, it was largely a 'myth'.<sup>5</sup> Before and during the 1990s and early 2000s, histories of the 1960s commonly presented the decade as a period of liberation and progressiveness. Perhaps most notably, Arthur Marwick argued that the 1960s had witnessed a 'cultural revolution' in material conditions, family relationships, morals and personal freedoms for ordinary people.<sup>6</sup> Since roughly the mid-2000s, however, historians have taken a revisionist turn, arguing that the 1960s were conservative rather than revolutionary and that there was as much continuity with earlier periods as there was change. Marcus Collins, Trevor Fisher and Frank Mort, for example, have challenged the idea of the 1960s as a permissive watershed, while Nick Thomas has reassessed the myths of student protests.<sup>7</sup> Though controversial, Dominic Sandbrook's work is perhaps the best-known example of this reappraisal and has certainly had the widest reach in changing popular notions of the 1960s more broadly.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, histories of the British 1960s often still remain polarised between these two camps and popular images of a 'swinging sixties' youth culture remain widespread. This article, however, offers a new understanding of the 1960s in Britain by demonstrating that though older, more conservative attitudes and behaviours continued to influence everyday experience and while many women could be sceptical of ideas of the 'swinging sixties', some youthful experiences were shaped by more permissive and liberal impulses and changes in the period. The 1960s, particularly in terms of the lived experience of ordinary young adults, were much more complex than simply either a period of revolution or stasis. Nevertheless, as Mark Donnelly, Trevor Harris and Monia O'Brien Castro have argued, few people participated completely in the 'swinging sixties' and most instead led broadly more 'ordinary' or 'mundane' lives.<sup>9</sup>

The lived experiences of young adults in 1960s Britain were no exception to this. For the majority, their lives incorporated some elements of the 'swinging sixties'—many young men and young women keenly followed pop music and fashion, for example—but their experiences, and particularly those of young women, were generally more 'ordinary' and remained influenced by older moral and behavioural codes. The history of 1960s young adults' lived experiences is underdeveloped, but existing works show that few were members of sub- or counter-cultures, few were sexually permissive or promiscuous and little real generational conflict existed.<sup>10</sup> This article complements and adds to these works. Given the mismatch between the popular memory and the experience of youth in the 1960s, this article asks how women who were young adults during the period remember their youths and how they negotiate the gap between popular images and personal experience.

In line with recent reappraisals of the 1960s, Harris and O'Brien Castro have suggested that 'the Sixties—in the sense of an *avant-garde* or innovative set of political, aesthetic, social and sexual practices—were experienced by relatively few people'.<sup>11</sup> They contend, however, that people wish they *had* experienced that *avant-garde* lifestyle in the 1960s and so claim that

for many people today, the relationship with the Sixties is dominated by nostalgia: the desire to re-create the past, or an idealized version of it, from extant materials in the present which are used to generate ... a cosy, flattering fiction of a 'moment' drenched in revolutionary behaviours, oozing with self-fulfilment and individual pleasure.<sup>12</sup>

They suggest that, when remembering the 1960s, people only recall the 'swinging sixties'. This article, however, argues that this is not the case. It shows that many women readily critique and reject the popular memory of 1960s youth culture where it does not fit their lived experiences. This also challenges Penny Summerfield's suggestion that when women's narratives do not conform to public discourses they have difficulty articulating their experiences since the women studied here easily and confidently asserted that the 'swinging sixties' had passed them by, though some regretted this more than others depending on how they viewed their youth in the context of subsequent life experiences and their attempts to create a composed life narrative and sense of self.<sup>13</sup>

However, while women critique these popular images, this article also argues that popular memories of 1960s youth still shape how they understand the concept, experiences and meanings of 1960s youth more generally. This shows that while women do not passively accept popular discourses, they are, nevertheless, powerful frameworks that shape women's memories and knowledge. Women may draw on the stereotypes and tropes of 1960s youth and these may influence how they understand, interpret and present their own experiences. Moreover, how women negotiate between the popular memory of the 1960s and their own personal memories and experiences, particularly in oral history interviews, is linked to their desire to create a composed narrative and self, and affected by subsequent life experiences that shape their understanding of their youths. This reinforces Summerfield's point that people selectively draw upon public discourses to create a coherent narrative and a comfortable version of the self.<sup>14</sup>

Joseph Maslen has explored how, in their auto/biographies, Carolyn Steedman and Luisa Passerini negotiate their personal narratives with the 'master narratives' of the '1968 generation'—a set of popular memories and discourses linked to images of the 'swinging sixties', but also containing distinctive political connotations. Maslen concludes that,

These people can use auto/biographical narrative to escape from, or add nuance to, the social master narratives about 'their' generation. Perhaps it is this process of negotiation between personal and social narratives of generational belonging that is most worthy of study.<sup>15</sup>

Maslen's work goes some way to uncovering the relationship between personal and popular memory for the 1960s and to showing how women critique popular images, but he focuses on only two women known for their scholarship on selfhood and reflexivity, and on the politically inflected memories of 1968 rather than on memories of 1960s youth culture more generally. This article expands on Maslen's analysis to ask how ordinary women negotiate personal memories of youth in the 1960s with the popular memory of youth culture. It also adds to the growing literature challenging the idea of a straightforwardly 'conservative', 'progressive' or 'revolutionary' 1960s as well as offering insights into the hitherto under-explored lived experiences of young women in the period. Furthermore, this article adds to scholarship exploring the relationship between experience and discourse and to works examining the memory and selfhood of women in relation to public discourses by analysing how popular memory, contemporary and subsequent life experiences and attempts to create composure in oral history interviews shape the recollection and narration of lived experience.

The interaction of popular and personal memory for women who were ordinary young adults in 1960s Britain is examined using women's responses to post-1981 Mass Observation (MO) directives and oral history interviews with three women, Marilyn, Jacqueline and Diana. Jacqueline's interview comes from Paul Thompson's, 'Families, Social Mobility and Ageing' study in the late 1980s. I interviewed both Marilyn and Diana in 2015. These women's

experiences and narratives were similar to many other women in the 28 other interviews and responses to 12 MO directives I have analysed. All names used are pseudonyms. Due to their subjective and retrospective nature, and their privileging of the subject's voice, both MO and oral history offer invaluable insight into women's personal experiences and memories. The women considered here were from working- or lower middle-class families and were born between c.1940 and c.1955 across Britain. They predominantly fitted into the typical 'youth' lifestyle in 1960s Britain by leaving school at or near to the statutory leaving age of 15, entering into the labour market and then marrying, often in their early 20s. Youth is taken to mean the stage of life between school and marriage, spanning roughly the ages between 15 and 22–24.

Women are the focus of this article because the gap between the popular images and personal experiences of 1960s youth is often greater for women than men. Stereotypes of sub-cultural, rebellious and delinquent young adults are male dominated.<sup>16</sup> Young women were subject to stricter parental control than their brothers and were often subordinated by the sexual double standard that still idealised virginal brides in a time of supposed sexual permissiveness.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the post-war period, and particularly the 1960s, witnessed new opportunities for British young women both in the workforce and as the ideas of late modernity encouraged them to pursue self-fulfilment and self-expression.<sup>18</sup> However, these new possibilities often conflicted with older values and expectations that privileged duty, self-sacrifice, marriage and motherhood.<sup>19</sup> For young women, therefore, the 1960s were a period of conflict between new and old in both values and practices. Examining how women reconcile 'ordinary' lived experiences with ideas of the 'swinging sixties' offers, therefore, valuable insight into the under-explored day-to-day lives of young women and into how women understand their lives in the context of ill-fitting public discourses. This article will begin by briefly exploring the concepts of both popular and personal memory. It will then analyse the memories of women in MO directives before examining how women remember their 1960s youths in oral history interviews.

Of course, not *all* women who spent their youths in the 1960s actively critiqued or rejected the popular image of 1960s youth. A minority actively associated with it and claimed that their lived experiences were like the popular memory. Yet, like their more critical peers, this was not a passive acceptance of the popular memory, but a strategy to achieve both narrative and psychological composure. Analysing these women's memories would provide further insight into the relationship between discourse, experience and identity for post-war British women. Moreover, it is possible that young women (and men) who had been university students in the 1960s experienced lifestyles closer to images of the 'swinging sixties', given that most lived away from home and so enjoyed more freedom from parental control and were potentially more exposed to drugs, counterculture and radical politics. Of course, the majority of young adults did not attend university in the period but lived at home until marriage, and Thomas has shown how many assumptions about 1960s students are also heavily mythologised.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, though outside the scope of this article, further research into how (usually more middle-class) 1960s students negotiate between popular and personal memories of the period would be fruitful. This article, however, focuses on 'ordinary' women who did not attend university and who critique the 'swinging sixties' image of youth because this was a much more common refrain in their personal testimonies and because this analysis touches upon the important question of how ordinary women relate to male-dominated and therefore usually ill-fitting public discourses.<sup>21</sup>

## Popular and personal memory

Underlying the idea of popular memory is the assertion that social groups and sociocultural discourses condition the recollection of and 'knowledge' about the past. Maurice Halbwachs' *The Collective Memory* is seminal to this concept. Halbwachs argued that memories are only possible through the social groups to which a person belongs as 'the individual memory could not function without words and ideas, instruments the individual has not himself invented but appropriated from his milieu'.<sup>22</sup> In other words, social groups construct a shared knowledge of the past, which conditions how people within the group remember that past.<sup>23</sup> Their memories are, therefore, collective.

The collective memory of 1960s youth germinated from a fertile bed of media attention increasingly being devoted to young people as those born in the post-war 'babyboom' came of age and were more affluent than their predecessors.<sup>24</sup> During the 1960s, academics, politicians, commerce and the media sought to understand, analyse and market to young adults in a time of social change, and in doing so, they necessarily stereotyped those young adults and their lifestyles.<sup>25</sup> Harold Wilson gave the Beatles MBEs in 1964 in an attempt to gain political capital from what was seen as exciting and modern youth culture.<sup>26</sup> Newspaper reports and sociological surveys investigated and lamented perceived (though often misguided) assumptions of rises in juvenile delinquency, promiscuity, drug-taking and sub-cultural rebellion. Popular television shows, magazines and films—such as *Jackie*, *Honey*, *Ready Steady Go!* and *Up the Junction*—also developed and disseminated stylised images of fashionable, permissive and hedonistic young adults, as well as marketing products and services to them that emphasised these stereotypes. Together, these contemporary depictions presented 1960s young adults either as 'fun' or 'trouble', making them a metaphor for both the perceived hopes and fears of society.<sup>27</sup> This, in turn, led to even more exaggerated stereotypes and put these images of youth high on the public agenda.

These popular images of 1960s young adults continue to be widely circulated to the present day and so have become memory rather than just contemporary representation. Films like *Quadrophenia* (1979) and *The Boat That Rocked* (2009), popular histories such as Jon Savage's 2015 book *1966: The Year the Decade Exploded* and even BBC documentaries and dramas have all contributed to the popular idea that 1960s youth was rebellious, sub-cultural, permissive, hedonistic, free and 'swinging'. Even 1980s anti-permissive, Thatcherite denigrations of the 1960s served to strengthen the idea of the decade as a period of moral revolution and permissiveness.<sup>28</sup> Given their sustained circulation and the reach and appeal of the media disseminating them, these stylised images have become the collective, popular 'knowledge' about 1960s youth. Donnelly has even argued that historians have played a significant role in creating the idea of the 'sixties' according to their political and moral contexts and principles.<sup>29</sup>

This article argues that these collective images are, therefore, a popular memory since they are still widely circulated throughout society through both high- and low-culture media and are held by both elite and subordinate cross-generational social groups, rather than just by those who were young adults in the 1960s. It is the dominant memory about 1960s youth culture. This is evidenced by the fact that while women can critique popular images of 1960s youth, their narratives and understandings of youth more generally remain shaped by those images. Throughout the article, the terms popular memory, images, idea, narrative and discourse are used interchangeably to address the same concept.

However, the concepts of collective and popular memory minimise the role and nature of personal memories and individual experience by assuming that collective memories are the only possible type of recollection. While acknowledging that groups construct collective images of the past, James Fentress and Chris Wickham have critiqued Halbwachs' theory for making the person 'a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorized collective will'.<sup>30</sup> Anna Green also disagrees that people always conform to cultural scripts.<sup>31</sup> She argues,

surely the interesting issue is not that individuals draw upon contemporary cultural discourses to make sense of their lives, but *which* ones, and *why* ... Oral historians need to re-assert the value of individual remembering and the capacity of the conscious self to contest and critique cultural scripts or discourses ... to explore those points of conflict and rupture in people's lives that create confrontations with discourses of power ...<sup>32</sup>

This article explores those critiques, conflicts and ruptures in the memories of 1960s youth held by ordinary women.

Michael Roper has shown that personal memories are affected by collective discourses and subsequent life events, meaning that personal memories and their meanings can shift over time.<sup>33</sup> Roper argues that this does not render memory useless, however, and shows how these shifts in memory can be interrogated to reveal the underlying contemporary meanings of an event or period as well as the emotions of the subject.<sup>34</sup> This article examines how both popular memory and subsequent life experience affect women's memories of youth to show that exploring subjective and personal experiences of youth in retrospective personal testimonies requires consideration of a woman's whole life story and personal circumstances.

The personal memories this article explores are, therefore, not raw or unmediated versions of the experiences of youth. They are the recollections of youthful experience seen through a lens of popular discourse and subsequent life events. Personal and popular memories are therefore distinct but inextricably linked: each informs and shapes the other. Exploring this deepens our understanding of the under-researched lived experience of 1960s youth by revealing why certain elements of the popular memory frame women's narratives and why some elements were not experienced, usually due to gender, location, money, parental authority and the persistence of older, more conservative attitudes and behaviours.

Each woman engages with popular memory in her personal testimony—most obviously in oral history interviews—to produce composure. In personal testimonies, people seek composure by creating both a coherent life narrative and a psychologically comfortable version of the self.<sup>35</sup> A composed life story therefore involves sifting, selection and omission of both experience and public discourses.<sup>36</sup> This means that women negotiate their personal memories of youth with popular images and their subsequent life experiences to narrate their youth in a way that best fits with how they want to appear in the present.

## **Mass Observation and the critique of popular memory**

In a number of post-1981 MO directives, female respondents who had been young women in the 1960s openly critiqued the idea of the 'swinging sixties' because it did not match their experiences of youth. Indeed, they often used the phrase 'swinging sixties' as shorthand for the popular memory of the 1960s and its youth culture. Many suggested that older, more conservative values and parental authority restricted their access, as young women, to a



'swinging' lifestyle. Moreover, some women identified that the popular memory of the 'swinging sixties' was, in fact, an artificial construct.

More so than oral history interviewees, female MO respondents evaluated and critiqued the popular memory of 1960s youth without direct prompt. In oral history interviews, women often had to be asked to compare their experiences of youth to popular images of the 1960s. This is explained by Anne-Marie Kramer's argument that the 'dual vision' of Mass Observers, as both the observed and the observer, makes them particularly reflexive about comparing their experience to the 'typical' case.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, many MO directives called for both personal experiences and a generalised view of the 1960s, such as the Spring 2003 directive on 'Images of the 50s and 60s'.<sup>38</sup> The directives never prompted respondents to comment on the 'swinging sixties', but did, particularly in the 'Images of the 50s and 60s' directive, ask what respondents' dominant memories of the period were, where they thought images of the period stemmed from and whether or not they felt nostalgic for that period. As such, the directives actively encouraged the evaluation of both popular and personal memory.

In MO responses, women most frequently critiqued the 'swinging sixties' based on its depiction of permissive sexual freedom for young adults, commenting that older, more conservative moral standards still prevailed. This suggests that sexual permissiveness has become a dominant image within the popular memory of the 1960s and its youth culture. However, these critiques did often come from the Summer 2001 and Autumn 2005 directives, which asked, respectively, about courtship and sex.<sup>39</sup> These directives encouraged respondents to offer personal experiences and to think about moral standards during their youth, creating perhaps an artificially developed and numerically large critique on this topic. Nevertheless, their responses are useful in exploring how women engage with popular memory and why it does not reflect lived experience.

For example, Susanne, born in 1947, did not have pre-marital sex and asserted that, 'I don't think we were so unusual in this, despite the reputation of the Swinging Sixties. We both grew up in conventional families with conventional attitudes, formed during the 50s'.<sup>40</sup> Susanne even commented that she and her friends 'looked down' on girls who did have pre-marital sex. The popular image of sexual freedom for 1960s young adults was therefore critiqued, as by Susanne, when it did not match the lived experience of women whose behaviour reflected older and more conservative values that frowned upon pre-marital sex. Her comments also suggest that access to sexual freedom was conditioned by gender in the 1960s; pre-marital sex was seen as less acceptable for young women than young men.

Alice, born in 1950, also refuted the idea of the 1960s as permissive: 'This was, of course, the Swinging Sixties which, we are all told in documentaries these days, was an age of sexual freedom and rampant drug-taking. Well, not in the circles I was moving in'.<sup>41</sup> Like Susanne, Alice noted that pre-marital sex and pregnancy were taboo among her peers and that 'My generation was brought up with a set of rules about life and behaviour that we were expected to follow'.<sup>42</sup> Despite this, Alice *did* have pre-marital sex as a teenager, suggesting that though moral codes remained conservative in the 1960s, behavioural practices were changing among some young women, potentially bringing their experiences more in line with the popular memory. Yet, her responses also suggest that sexual mores had not become as permissive for everyone as the popular memory implies. That Alice had and enjoyed pre-marital sex at a time of continuing sexual conservatism therefore shows that there was no neat handover from old to new values and practices, but that the two existed simultaneously.



As Pat Thane has highlighted, pre-marital sex was not uncommon in twentieth-century working-class communities and as Claire Langhamer shows, attitudes to pre-marital sex were softening post-war.<sup>43</sup> In particular, in the 1960s, it was becoming less controversial, and possibly more usual, to have sex with a fiancé, though sex with more casual acquaintances remained taboo.<sup>44</sup> That Alice had pre-marital sex is, therefore, not necessarily surprising, although her sexual partner was not her fiancé. Yet, she critiqued the idea of the sexually permissive 1960s because she felt that prevailing moral attitudes were neither permissive nor liberal. This mismatch between behaviour and moral attitudes could result in feeling as though some aspects of the 'swinging sixties' were experienced in reality and some were not. Moreover, some young women, such as Susanne, did not have pre-marital sex, which suggests behaviours were not changing for everyone. Ultimately, the imagined sexual freedom of the 1960s was, on an attitudinal if not behavioural basis, unsupported by the realities of young women. Moreover, the simple 'sexual revolution' implied by the popular memory masks what was in reality a complex overlapping of conservative and liberal values and behaviours.

In addition to critiques of 1960s sexual liberation, other female Mass Observers criticised the idea of the 'swinging sixties' because they were unable to access other aspects of this imagined lifestyle due to parental control and authority. For example, Linda, born in 1950, understood the popular memory of 1960s youth culture to be about music, dancing and fashion rather than sex. She commented that, aged roughly 13–16 in the mid-1960s, 'By then the Beatles had arrived & so had the Swinging Sixties. I wanted to go out & have fun, go to dances with my friends and wear make-up. My parents didn't approve.'<sup>45</sup> Susanne's reflection on her 'conventional family' noted above similarly implied that the conservatism preventing a 'swinging sixties' lifestyle was communicated in and enforced by the family.<sup>46</sup> Linda put on make-up in secret and washed it off before her father collected her from dances, something he insisted upon and that Linda found very embarrassing. Linda felt that the 'swinging sixties' was a reality centred on music, make-up and boyfriends, but she could not freely access it because her parents still wielded significant authority over her. Her flouting of parental rules, however, gave her limited access to what she saw as a more 'swinging' lifestyle. This implies that for Linda, her youth meant a time of tension and negotiation between authority and freedom, not dissimilar to Alice's.

Linda's account also shows how age and gender shaped how parental authority affected the experiences of young women in the 1960s. For Linda, her relatively young age (13–16) perhaps elicited tighter parental control, as did the fact that she was female. Young men were often given greater latitude by parents compared to sisters, and as both young men and young women reached the later stages of youth, parental control often began to relax at least a little—though for young women, this was usually premised on having a boyfriend who assumed the father's supervisory role. Young men and older young women might, therefore, have more access to lifestyles similar to the popular memory based on fashion, music, socialising and sex, meaning that the gap between popular and personal memories of 1960s youth is sized according to age and gender as well as parental authority.

Some women also critiqued the 'swinging sixties' by suggesting that it happened only in certain localities. For example, Angela, born in 1950, felt that the 'swinging sixties' did not happen in her small northern industrial town.<sup>47</sup> Jane, born in 1952, took the opposite view: 'I grew up in the swinging sixties in Liverpool. The atmosphere was pretty free and easy then. When I speak to contemporaries who have grown up in this area [Yorkshire, where she lived

at the time of writing] they seem to have led a far more sheltered existence.<sup>48</sup> Of course, other factors such as class and family may have contributed to Jane's more 'swinging' experience, while being even slightly younger than Angela perhaps also meant that Jane reached her youth later in the 1960s when progressive ideas had gained a stronger hold. Unfortunately, Jane's single MO response limits how far this can be explored. These accounts do suggest, however, that the lifestyles of young women varied across the country, with perhaps more urban and metropolitan areas such as Liverpool offering opportunities closer to the popular images of the 1960s, in comparison to quieter and more conservative lifestyles lived in smaller towns or rural areas. It also suggests that some women were aware of this geographical discrepancy and used it to evaluate popular narratives.

Women's critiques of the 'swinging sixties' in MO responses often contain a common narrative: there was an external reason why they did not participate in that lifestyle. Linda blamed her parents, Angela pointed to location and Susanne and Alice cited conservative attitudes. This suggests that the popular memory of 1960s youth has two pervasive strengths. First, it makes women assume that it does have some basis in reality or the possibility to have been their reality, even when their own experiences suggest otherwise. Second, having an excuse for not having participated in the 'swinging sixties' makes women's experiences both narratively and psychologically composed, either because they wish their experiences had been more like the popular memory or because they wish to distance themselves from 'immoral' images of 1960s youth. Linda, Angela, Susanne and Alice, however, did not see the 1960s as a period of moral decline—Linda actively wanted to pursue fashion and music more, while Alice did not feel guilty about pre-marital sex, for instance—so their motive for explaining why their lives were not 'swinging' is likely because they felt that they 'missed out' and wanted to justify this to themselves and their audience. Therefore, while women can critique the popular memory where it does not fit lived experience, their relationship with it is complicated by the strength and popularity of that memory.

A few women also critiqued the popular memory by acknowledging its artificiality and its *post hoc* construction by the media. As noted above, Alice thought the idea of the 'swinging sixties' was constructed and communicated through documentaries.<sup>49</sup> She also advanced this idea in the earlier Spring 1993 directive where she suggested that the 'free love and drugs' concept of the 1960s was created by 'today's media [which] distort reality by concentrating on a few wayward folk rather than on the boring majority'.<sup>50</sup> Alice, therefore, thought that popular images of 1960s youth accorded with the lived experience of some, but not of the majority, but was also aware of the retrospective, hyperbolised cultural construction and communication by the mass media of those images.

Indeed, Alice's identification of the *post hoc* and artificial nature of the popular memory of 1960s youth is not simply a rejection of it. In her response to a 2001 directive, she not only suggested that the image of the 'swinging sixties' was created by documentaries, but also mentioned numerous times that more conservative moral attitudes, usually communicated in the family and particularly surrounding pre-marital sex for young women, limited how far the popular memory reflected reality and initially discouraged her from having sex for fear of parental opprobrium. When Alice did have sex with her boyfriend, however, she noted that 'we both felt it was right and good and not shameful or sinful in any way', suggesting that she was able to challenge more conservative attitudes and lifestyles, and that pre-marital sex was not always considered taboo by young women who had been brought up to see it as such.<sup>51</sup> Alice's multiple directive responses, therefore, show that women's relationship to

the popular memory of 1960s youth is not straightforward. Like Alice, at times, they suggest that it is false and was created *post hoc*. At others, they claim that it was reality for a minority, but that factors such as older moral attitudes prevented it from being the experience of the majority. At other points still, they imply, perhaps unconsciously, that some aspects of their lives did accord with popular images of 1960s youth—for Alice, this is evident in the fact that she had pre-marital sex and did not feel guilty about it.

In MO responses, women who were young adults during the 1960s, therefore, critique the popular memory of 1960s youth culture where it does not fit their own lived experiences and understandings of 1960s moral codes and lifestyles—often due to gender, age, parental control and the continuation of older, more conservative values. Yet, even while critiquing them, popular images still influence how women conceive of 1960s youth more generally. Moreover, as Alice's case demonstrates, a woman's relationship to and understanding of public discourses is not always straightforward.

### Oral history interviews: critique, composure and subsequent experience

Like MO respondents, female oral history interviewees often actively critiqued the popular memory of 1960s youth culture where it did not match lived experience, though it still structured how they understood the concept and experiences of 1960s youth generally. More so than with MO, analysing how women negotiate between popular and personal memories of 1960s youth in oral history interviews also reveals how this is part of each woman's attempt to achieve composure. This is because oral history interviews offer a narrative life history in which experiences and understandings of youth are contextualised, whereas MO responses are, necessarily, more fragmentary. The interviews also reveal how subsequent life experiences affect women's negotiation between popular and personal memories of youth. This is explored here in the oral history interviews of three women who were young adults in the 1960s: Marilyn, Jacqueline and Diana.

Marilyn rejected popular images of 1960s youth, but how she described her lifestyle as a young woman in the 1960s also implied that these images did match some aspects of her experiences.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that while the popular memory does not accurately describe *all* lived experience for *all* women, it is based on *some* of the reality of *some* women, even where any one woman does not consciously recognise this. Marilyn, a retired administrative worker, was born into a working-class family in 1946 and grew up in Hockley, Birmingham, before moving to a council maisonette in Edgbaston in her late teens. I asked Marilyn if she thought her youth had been like the popular images of 1960s youth. She suggested it was not, based on her understanding of the 'swinging sixties' as being centred on drug culture in particular metropolitan locations.

I couldn't say I was in the swingin' sixties because I never did drugs, I never smoked, I never did anythin' like that ... I suppose it was the swingin' sixties to some, 'praps more in London or 'praps certain parts of Birmingham. 'Praps if there was more money about to the swingin' sixties and you were in the scene ... I didn't know that scene ... Y'know, I was like in a little house with me mum and dad and we kept away from it.<sup>53</sup>

Marilyn's critique is similar to those above. She suggested that the popular memory does describe the experiences of some, but this was determined by a locality and affluence inaccessible to her and by partaking in certain activities that she did not do. In particular, Marilyn associated the popular memory of 1960s youth with drugs, so since she did not take drugs,

she cannot see herself as having partaken in the 'swinging sixties'. Moreover, Marilyn married aged 20 as she had become pregnant and, while her parents were sensitive and pragmatic, she noted that this was generally considered taboo, suggesting that Marilyn thought older, more conservative values rather than sexual liberalisation characterised the mid-1960s—indeed, her boyfriend's parents reacted very negatively. Consequently, she did not think the popular narrative described her own youth. Instead, Marilyn saw her youth as centred on home and family, a theme that permeated her interview as part of her desire to compose a narrative and self centred on home and family.

Indeed, when I asked Marilyn to sum up the 1960s and her teenage years, she quickly asserted that they were characterised by 'a lovely family life'.<sup>54</sup> This impulsive response reinforces the fact that Marilyn associated her youth with family rather than the popular idea of the 'swinging sixties'. She later added that, compared to her present-day experiences with her grandson, as young adults, she and her peers had more discipline and fewer material goods.<sup>55</sup> This again reveals how Marilyn rejected popular images of 1960s youth because money, discipline and parental authority conditioned her behaviour and attitudes more than her grandson's. It also shows that subsequent experiences encourage a re-evaluation of past experiences: Marilyn's experience in the 2010s with her teenage grandson made her reflect back on the discipline and affluence of her own youth, potentially making her see them as, respectively, heightened and dampened in comparison. This comparison and hindsight undoubtedly influenced Marilyn's critique but do not render it inaccurate or false. First, given the experiences Marilyn related in her interview, such as having strict curfews and relatively little spending money, she likely did experience less affluence and more discipline in the 1960s, which limited her access to a 'swinging sixties' lifestyle.<sup>56</sup> Second, understanding what motivated Marilyn to reject the popular memory, even if that is a present concern, is crucial to untangling the relationship between discourse and experience. It shows that evaluations of popular and public discourse depend on both past and present experience.

However, despite her overall rejection of it, the experiences Marilyn related in her interview did align with some popular images of 1960s youth—albeit ones not centred on the drug culture Marilyn assumed characterised the 'swinging sixties'. In particular, Marilyn associated herself with sub-culture by actively labelling herself 'A Mod', though she later asserted this was based on the fashions and music she liked, not because she engaged in altercations with Rockers, even though she had been at Margate during the 1964 bank holiday Mods and Rockers clashes.<sup>57</sup> Sociologists and cultural theorists have argued that post-war sub-cultures were a manifestation of class and generational struggle.<sup>58</sup> Christian Bugge has, conversely, argued that commercialisation stripped sub-cultures of their radical potential.<sup>59</sup> Bill Osgerby has taken more of a middle ground, arguing that while the market shaped and popularised post-war sub-cultural styles, young adults were not passive consumers and could attach their own meanings to objects.<sup>60</sup> It is outside of the scope of this article to settle the debate over the 'authenticity' and politics of sub-culture. However, Marilyn's identification with sub-culture on a sartorial rather than political level suggests that experience did not match some elements of the popular memory (ie in terms of class and generational struggle), but that young women could positively identify with other elements of that popular memory (in this case, Mod sub-culture) because they attributed their own sub-cultural meaning to their clothes.

Marilyn's leisure was also typical of most young adults in the 1960s and incorporated many activities that featured within popular images of 1960s youth culture. For example,

she regularly went dancing, kept up with the latest fashions and hairstyles, was an avid fan of pop music and programmes like *Ready, Steady, Go!*, and also had pre-marital sex without feeling guilty about this (though Marilyn did note she was apprehensive about telling her parents of her pre-marital pregnancy, showing that older taboos were not completely eradicated).<sup>61</sup> This again shows that the popular memory does describe some elements of ordinary young women's experiences in the 1960s, particularly in terms of their leisure activities and the fact that some women were engaging in pre-marital sex. However, despite this, Marilyn considered these activities normal and ordinary and so does not associate herself and her activities with the popular memory. Instead, Marilyn rejected the popular memory because she understood it as based on things she did not do (drugs), in places she did not live (London) and because popular notions of the rebelliousness, deviancy and hedonism of 1960s youth do not fit with her narrative of home and family or, indeed, with her actual experiences. As such, though her experiences have some correlation with popular images of 1960s youth, she sees her life as too ordinary to have really been part of the glamorous 'swinging sixties'.

Additionally, at several points, Marilyn described her youth and the 1960s as a time of freedom and independence in which she had little responsibility and relative latitude to please herself as long as she was home by her curfew. Her account of her youth gives a strong impression of having fun and being on the sartorial fringe of Mod sub-culture. This language of sub-culture, enjoyment, freedom and a lack of responsibility is central to popular images of 1960s youth culture and it frames Marilyn's recollection of her youth, even though she also talked about restriction to these because of limited spending money, parental authority and curfews. Therefore, despite claiming that her youth was unlike the popular memory of 1960s youth, Marilyn's understanding of both youth and the 1960s was framed by the language and images of that popular memory. Ultimately, Marilyn rejected the idea of the 'swinging sixties' as it did not accurately describe *everything* about her lifestyle and did not fit easily with her broader narrative of family life. Yet, she still employed the language and concepts of this discourse as aspects of it did reflect some of her lived experiences and consequently shaped how she conceived of her youth and the zeitgeist of the years she lived it in.

For Jacqueline, the popular memory of 1960s youth offered a way for her to understand her youth in the context of her later separation and divorce from her husband.<sup>62</sup> Like Marilyn, Jacqueline suggested that her experiences of youth were not like popular images of 1960s youth, but still drew upon those images as a way to understand youth as a stage in the life cycle and to present a composed life narrative that accounted for her divorce. Jacqueline was born in 1946 and lived near Blackpool in a lower middle-class family. She went to a secondary modern school and then technical college before doing secretarial work at several different companies.<sup>63</sup>

Jacqueline married her first serious boyfriend aged 19 in 1965. At several points, Jacqueline implied that she married too young, though 19 was not an uncommonly young age for young women to marry in the mid-1960s. For example, when asked if she married the sort of person she expected, Jacqueline replied, 'That's difficult to say really, I don't know what I expected. It was too young.'<sup>64</sup> She frequently also referred to her divorce, the process of which began nine years before the interview, in 1977, and was still a raw issue for Jacqueline, demonstrating that current events and emotions strongly colour recollections in oral history

interviews. Indeed, the narrative of Jacqueline's interview was centred on justifying and explaining her divorce.

Jacqueline's recollection of her youth was fitted into this narrative justifying her divorce. She depicted herself as having 'Not a very interesting teenage life really', since she and her future husband were saving money to get married so could not afford to go out much.<sup>65</sup> However, Jacqueline's leisure activities as a young adult were very similar to those enjoyed by the majority of young people at the time and, indeed, a large proportion of young women in the 1960s had their leisure curtailed while saving for weddings and mortgage deposits. Jacqueline was a member of the local Church youth club, went to the cinema, met friends in coffee bars and occasionally went dancing with her boyfriend. Unlike the majority of women whose leisure and spending were curtailed by saving for marriage, however, Jacqueline expressed regret at her past lifestyle. When asked what a good night out was as a young woman, she replied, 'I don't know, I think probably because we got married so young, we were conscious of saving up, which with hindsight now, is the wrong thing, I think, but, so we didn't really go out a lot.'<sup>66</sup>

This regret and feeling of missing out as a young woman suggest that Jacqueline's concept of 1960s youth did not match how she perceived her experience of it. She implied that a more interesting teenage life could and should have been had. In other words, she measured, and found wanting, her own experiences against the popular memory of affluent, leisure-oriented youth. Interestingly, Jacqueline seemed to wish that her youth had been more 'normal' in how far it matched popular images of 1960s youth, rather than seeing those images as describing the lifestyles of a 'swinging' minority in the way that Marilyn did. She assumed that 1960s youth should have been about fun and freedom for everyone, not responsibility and asceticism, and in this way, popular discourse shaped her understanding and articulation of what youth more generally should entail and mean. This shows, however, that individual women do not necessarily interpret and understand the popular memory of 1960s youth in the same way, often due to the individualised ways in which they feel their own experiences do or do not match it. Marilyn, for example, saw the 'swinging sixties' as about drugs and therefore as unreflective of her own experiences. Linda understood the 'swinging sixties' as based on music and fashion, while Susanne and Alice conceived of it in terms of sexual permissiveness. For Jacqueline, the popular memory of 1960s youth meant simply a generalised freedom and fun, which she retrospectively felt isolated from, given how her divorce shaped her recollections of youth.

Indeed, her perceived boring and wasted youth was used by Jacqueline to present a composed life story that enabled the audience to understand why her marriage failed and allowed Jacqueline to feel comfortable with these events. By framing her youth as preparation for marriage, she justified why her experiences were not like the popular memory but also, given her divorce, justified her disappointment at having had such a supposedly unexciting youth since the marriage ultimately failed. This exacerbated how far Jacqueline assumed her experiences deviated from popular images of 1960s youth, demonstrating the effect subsequent life experiences have on how women understand and negotiate between both popular and personal memories. However, the popular memory of 1960s youth still underpinned Jacqueline's concepts of youth. By describing her youth as boring, she implicitly drew on an alternative concept of youth based on fun, affluence and freedom and implied that she could have had this lifestyle had she had more money since she assumed all other young adults had this lifestyle. Ultimately, as Jacqueline's interview shows, women's



memories of youth are coloured both by public discourse and also by their subsequent lives. Exploring the meaning of youth on both a collective and personal level therefore requires close examination of the life story and its construction.

Jacqueline was interviewed in the late 1980s, at a time when anti-permissive Thatcherite rhetoric painted the 1960s as causing moral decline.<sup>67</sup> Marilyn, Diana and many Mass Observers saw the 1960s and its youth culture as positive, even progressive, reflecting the widespread positive popular images of the 1960s during the later 1990s and twenty-first century when most of their responses were collected. Jacqueline's 1980s negotiation between popular and personal memories of 1960s youth might, however, be expected to take an anti-permissive tone. Indeed, Jacqueline considered herself a Conservative.<sup>68</sup> However, Jacqueline's narrative was not obviously neoliberal or anti-permissive. Instead, she imagined 1960s youth culture as something positive, exciting and available to seemingly everyone but her as a way to account for her failed marriage, which overrode the conservative 1980s political narrative that portrayed the 1960s more negatively.

In her 1993 MO response, Alice also rejected recent anti-permissive attacks on the 1960s that had begun in the 1980s. She wrote that, 'Recently there's been much criticism of the Sixties' [*sic*] and I'm heartily sick of politicians, the press and the older generation blaming the so-called 'moral decline' on my generation. 'Moral decline' my foot!<sup>69</sup> Alice therefore also rejected anti-permissive rhetoric about the 1960s and its youth culture, instead seeing the period and its assumed sociocultural changes as positive because this allowed her to feel comfortable with having had pre-marital sex and to position herself as part of the generation that questioned older generations, as noted above. This again suggests that women actively negotiate between popular discourses and personal memories to best serve their agenda for composure. It also shows how both contemporary and subsequent personal experiences determine which popular discourses (and indeed which elements of those discourses) women accept or reject, and how this also affects which discourses shape their understandings of 1960s youth in general. Just as women do not necessarily accept popular memories of a 'swinging sixties', they equally do not passively accept Thatcherite anti-permissive views of the decade.

Diana was born to a working-class family in 1949 and lived on the border between Aston and Witton in Birmingham.<sup>70</sup> She left grammar school at 16 and worked in a factory office for six months before working at a bank. Like Jacqueline, during her later youth, Diana did not go out much because she and her fiancé were saving money for marriage and a mortgage. Unlike, Jacqueline, Diana expressed none of the same regret about this. Indeed, Diana's discussion of what she did in her free time as a young woman implied that her lifestyle and leisure were, in fact, quite typical and not as restricted as she suggested due to saving. She went to the cinema weekly, often went to the pub or a jazz club with her boyfriend on Friday nights and saw pop bands in various concerts as well as watching TV or listening to records at home.

Like Marilyn and Jacqueline, Diana denied that the 'swinging sixties' had happened for her. When asked if she thought her experiences in the 1960s were typical, she responded, 'Well I think among my friends they were typical. But ... going back to reports you get these days about the 60s you wonder where it was ... You might read about them but they didn't come anywhere near me ... But it didn't come into my world.'<sup>71</sup> She implied that the popular memory of 1960s youth applied to the reality of only a minority. Diana also suggested that,



like Alice, she was aware that, at least to a certain extent, the ideas of the 'swinging sixties' were artificially created and disseminated, likely by the media.

At times in her interview, however, Diana's recollections of her 1960s youth were both more in line with and structured by the popular memory. For example, when asked what she thought the best thing about being a teenager in the 1960s was, Diana said, 'I suppose it's gotta be the clothes and the music.'<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Diana avidly followed fashion and the latest music in the 1960s meaning that, like Marilyn, some of her experiences matched popular images of 1960s youth in terms of fashion and music. Moreover, when then asked what the most difficult thing was about being a teenager in the 1960s, Diana laughed and said, 'Mmm, the clothes and the music! I 'spose it happens with every generation doesn't it? The disapproval of the generation before I suppose.'<sup>73</sup> Diana's parents often disliked the clothes she wore as a young woman and she thought them quite strict compared to her friends' parents, but still got on well with both her mother and father. However, she conflated their relatively minor disagreements over clothes with the popular image of widespread generational conflict in the 1960s. As such, Diana fitted her experiences of minor disagreement over clothes (a common tension between young women and their parents, but hardly symbolic of unbridgeable generational conflict) into a broader narrative of generational conflict because the popular memory of 1960s youth shaped how she understood youth and the relationship between young adults and their parents.

Nevertheless, in general, Diana did not consider her youth to have been in line with popular ideas about 1960s youth. Like many of the MO respondents, she felt the need to give an explanation for this. At multiple points in her interview, Diana commented that she had led a sheltered life when growing up.<sup>74</sup> In particular, she felt that her parents 'were a lot stricter than other people's parents'. Diana was only allowed out at certain times and her curfew was strictly 10 pm, which limited the activities she could pursue. Indeed, when asked if there were any defining characteristics about her generation in the 1960s, Diana responded that for the people she knew, 'we all seemed to want the same thing. We all got engaged, got married, saved for a house ... and that's what everybody seemed to be aiming for.'<sup>75</sup> Diana therefore rejected the popular memory of 1960s youth because, for her and her peers, life as a young adult instead followed a much more traditional pattern of aspiration and achievement and was constrained by parental authority.

Diana attempted to compose both her life story and self as simply 'normal' throughout her interview, and this shaped how she negotiated between popular and personal memories of youth in the 1960s. As she told me, the 1960s 'was me growing up. It wasn't anything special'.<sup>76</sup> By presenting herself as 'normal' and following a 'normal' life trajectory, Diana could explain why the 'swinging sixties' passed her by because, as noted above, she implied that this lifestyle applied only to a 'non-normal' minority. Moreover, Diana told me that shortly before her interview, she had spoken to a friend about my project looking at the lives of ordinary 1960s young adults. They had discussed their youths and Diana told me that her friend 'remembers much more of hers in much more detail than I do'.<sup>77</sup> This likely shaped Diana's narrative about her youth in the interview. By comparing her recollections to her friend's more detailed memories, she perhaps assumed her youth had been less noteworthy, less exciting and, therefore, less like the popular memory. This shows that subsequent life experience—in this case, talking with a friend—and the attempt to produce composure both affect how women negotiate between popular and personal memory when recalling their youth in oral history interviews.

Marilyn, Jacqueline and Diana's oral history interviews all show that women do not passively accept popular images of 1960s youth. Instead, they can critique and reject them where they do not match their lived experiences. They also understand the popular memory of 1960s youth in subtly different ways that suit their own purposes. Marilyn, for example, saw her youth—which did accord with some popular images in terms of fashion, music and leisure activities—as 'normal' and therefore unlike the popular memory, which she understood to be based on drug culture, to compose her life and self as being centred around family and home. Indeed, despite their critique, the popular memory structures how these women understand the concept of 1960s youth more generally; they assume it was a reality for some people and that their own lives could have been more like it if it were not for parental authority and a lack of money. The oral history interview, by providing a life history, also reveals how each woman's negotiation between popular and personal memories of 1960s youth is part of a wider project to achieve a composed narrative and self, and is affected by subsequent life experiences.

It is also interesting that while all three women suggested that their lives were not like the popular idea of 1960s youth, they acknowledged this with varying degrees of regret. Marilyn and Diana expressed no obvious sense of regret that their youth had not been like the popular memory, though Diana's conversation with her friend possibly sowed a small seed of doubt in this respect. Jacqueline, however, clearly felt disappointed that she missed out on the opportunity to experience the more exciting 1960s youth she assumed everyone else had experienced however untrue her assumption was. The distinguishing point here is the overall narrative each woman constructed about herself and the role her youth played in this. Both Marilyn and Diana presented themselves as relatively ordinary and content with following a 'traditional' life trajectory that centred on home and family. For them, therefore, not having participated fully in the 'swinging sixties' was unproblematic. At the time of her interview, however, Jacqueline's divorce was still a raw issue for her, so she attempted to compose a narrative justifying it. Since she saw her youth as a preparation for her failed marriage, she logically regretted how she spent her time as a young woman and assumed that she could have had more fun had her experiences been more like the popular memory. Even though Marilyn also spent much of her youth with the boyfriend she later married and divorced, the break-up happened sufficiently far in advance of her interview, she had a much better relationship with her ex-husband and could link her 'family' narrative to her parents, daughter and grandson rather than her ex-husband, so the divorce was not central to her narrative in the way it was for Jacqueline. Overall, therefore, how each woman felt about their lived experiences having deviated from the popular memory of 1960s youth was contingent on their subsequent life experiences and how they fitted their youth into a wider composure of narrative and selfhood.

## Conclusion

Young adults and youth culture in the 1960s are popularly depicted as free, permissive, hedonistic, fashionable, pop music obsessed, delinquent, rebellious, sub-or counter-cultural and in constant generational conflict with their parents. However, this characterisation does not reflect the lived experiences of the majority of young women—indeed of young adults of both sexes—in 1960s Britain. Consequently, when recalling their 1960s youths, women actively critique this popular memory. They attribute the gap between representation and

experience to a variety of reasons including a lack of money, location, parental control, the persistence of more conservative values and practices and to the fact that these popular images of 1960s youth were at least partially constructed *post hoc*.

The popular memory of 1960s youth is powerful, however. Having been widely circulated throughout society in both political discussion and the media from the 1960s to the present day, it has become the dominant, if misleading, set of assumptions and 'knowledge' about 1960s youth. Therefore, it still shapes how women understand the concept of 1960s youth more generally. Jacqueline and Linda, for example, both thought that a more exciting youth was out there to be had. Women's understanding of and relationship to the popular memory are also complex even for an individual. As Alice's MO responses show, at points, it can be rejected, at others seen to apply only to a minority and at others still more reflective of lived experience. Different women also understand the popular memory in different ways: Marilyn thought it centred on drug culture while Susanne thought it centred on sexual liberalisation, for example. Moreover, when recalling their 1960s youths, women negotiate between popular and personal memories in order to create both a composed narrative and self. Subsequent life experiences, such as divorce, having grandchildren and even simply speaking to a friend, also affect how women understand both their youth and public discourses. Ultimately, how women interpret and negotiate the popular memory of 1960s youth is highly individualised. Most importantly, however, women do not passively accept popular memories.

Overall, these findings offer insight into how women interact with popular discourses that rarely accurately describe their lived experiences. It also offers insight into how and why discourses are selectively used in the creation of life narratives, reinforcing that personal experience and attempts to produce composure are central to this. Moreover, this article shows that examining the gaps between personal and popular memory can reveal where, for individual women, the popular discourses do and do not reflect lived experience and why—in this case, usually due to gender, age, location, money, parental authority and the persistence of older moral codes. This refines our understandings of Britain in the 1960s beyond a simple polarised view of the decade as either progressive or conservative.

Analysing the relationship between personal and popular memory, therefore, allows historians to access and interpret experience as well as the process of memory, though a more in-depth study of the lived experiences of 1960s youth is still needed. It reveals that the experience of youth in 1960s Britain was characterised by an uneasy and uneven mix of both new, more liberal and older, more conservative values and behaviours, and that women were often acutely aware of this both at the time and retrospectively.

## Notes

1. Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 92; Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain*, 194.
2. Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain*, 194; Addison, *No Turning Back*, 215; and Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 95.
3. Addison, *No Turning Back*, 215; Collins, 'The Permissive Society', 10.
4. See the following for discussion of popular images of 1960s youth: Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*; Osgerby, 'Postwar Media Representations of Youth'; Bartie, 'Moral Panics and Glasgow Gangs'; Church Gibson, 'The Deification of the Dolly Bird'; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*; Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain*; and Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals*.
5. Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 196–197.
6. Marwick, *The Sixties*.

7. Collins, 'The Permissive Society'; Fisher, 'Permissiveness and the Politics of Morality'; Mort, *Capital Affairs*; Mort, 'The Permissive Society Revisited'; Thomas, 'Student Protest in Britain'; For further works reappraising the 'progressive' 1960s see: Davis, 'The London Drug Scene'; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*; Donnelly, 'The Cultural Politics of Historiography'; Thomas, 'Will the Real 1950s Please Stand Up?'; and Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*.
8. Sandbrook, *White Heat*.
9. Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, xiii; Harris and O'Brien Castro, 'Introduction', 2.
10. Though the lived experiences of 1960s youth is an underdeveloped field, see the following for some discussion of how their lives were unlike popular stereotypes of 1960s youth culture: Clarke et al., 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class'; Gorer, *Sex and Marriage*; Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change*; McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*; Mitchell, 'Reassessing "the Generation Gap"'; Schofield, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*; Todd and Young, 'Baby-Boomers to "Beanstalkers"'; and Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*.
11. Harris and O'Brien Castro, 'Introduction', 2.
12. Ibid.
13. Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', 74.
14. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 11–18.
15. Maslen, 'Autobiographies of a Generation', 25.
16. McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, ch. 1; Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945*, ch. 5.
17. Jackson and Bartie, *Policing Youth*, 153; McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 52–53; and Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 137–140.
18. Tinkler, 'The Teenage Self and Lifestyle'; Abrams, 'Mothers and Daughters'; and Smith Wilson, 'The Good Working Mother'.
19. Tinkler, 'The Teenage Self and Lifestyle'; Abrams, 'Mothers and Daughters'; and Smith Wilson, 'The Good Working Mother'.
20. Thomas, 'Student Protest in Britain'.
21. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*; Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure'.
22. Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, 51.
23. Ibid., 31–33.
24. Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain*, 1–2; Osgerby, 'Postwar Media Representations of Youth'.
25. Davis, *Youth and the Condition of Britain*, 1–11; Bartie, 'Moral Panics and Glasgow Gangs'; and Church Gibson, 'The Deification of the Dolly Bird'.
26. Osgerby, 'Postwar Media Representations of Youth', 326.
27. Ibid., 323.
28. Grimley, 'Thatcherism, Morality and Religion'.
29. Donnelly, 'The Cultural Politics of Historiography'.
30. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, ix.
31. Green, 'Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory"', 38–40.
32. Ibid., 42–43 emphasis in original.
33. Roper, 'Re-Remembering the Soldier Hero', 184.
34. Ibid., 183–184.
35. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 22–23.
36. Abrams, 'Liberating the Female Self', 14–35.
37. Kramer, 'The Observers and the Observed', 1–11.
38. Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, (MOA), Spring 2003 Directive.
39. MOA, Summer 2001 Directive; MOA, Autumn 2005 Directive.
40. MOA, Autumn 2005 Directive, F3409.
41. MOA, Summer 2001 Directive, W1813.
42. Ibid., W1813.
43. Thane, 'Unmarried Motherhood', 12–14; Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 49–51, 198–199.
44. Langhamer, *The English in Love*, 159; Schofield, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*, 164.
45. MOA, Spring 1993 Directive, C1768.
46. MOA, Autumn 2005 Directive, F3409.
47. MOA, Summer 2001 Directive, G2883.

48. Ibid., N1552.
49. Ibid., W1813.
50. MOA, Spring 1993 Directive, W1813.
51. MOA, Summer 2001 Directive, W1813.
52. Interview with Marilyn Shaw.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture*, 7–8; Clarke et al., 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class', 42–48.
59. Bugge, 'Marketing to Youth in Britain'.
60. Osgerby, 'Youth, Consumerism and Hegemony', 301–303.
61. Interview with Marilyn Shaw.
62. Paul Thompson and Harold Newby, *Families, Social Mobility and Ageing: An Intergenerational Approach 1900–1988 (FSMA)* [computer file], Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], July 2005, SN4938, Interview 066.
63. Ibid., Interview 066.
64. Ibid., Interview 066.
65. Ibid., Interview 066.
66. Ibid., Interview 066.
67. Grimley, 'Thatcherism, Morality and Religion'.
68. FSMA, Interview 066.
69. MOA, Spring 1993 Directive, W1813.
70. Interview with Diana Allen.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Selina Todd, Eve Worth, Sam Brewitt-Taylor, David Blagden and the University of Exeter Ex Historia seminar for comments on earlier and various versions of this piece, and the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex for permission to use their material. I would also like to thank my two anonymous reviewers for their very generous and helpful comments.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/K503198/1].

## Notes on contributor

**Helena Mills** is a D Phil candidate in History at the University of Oxford, researching the experience and memory of youth in 1960s England.

## References

- Abrams, Lynn. "Liberating the Female Self: Epiphanies, Conflict and Coherence in the Life Stories of Post-war British Women." *Social History* 39, no. 1 (2014): 14–35.
- Abrams, Lynn. "Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the 'Good Woman' in 1950s and 1960s Britain." In *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe 1945–2000*, edited by Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, 60–83. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.
- Addison, Paul. *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-war Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Bartie, Angela. "Moral Panics and Glasgow Gangs: Exploring 'the New Wave of Glasgow Hooliganism,' 1965–1970." *Contemporary British History* 24, no. 3 (2010): 385–408.
- Brake, Michael. *Comparative Youth Culture*. London: Britain and Canada, 1985.
- Bugge, Christian. "'Selling Youth in the Age of Affluence': Marketing to Youth in Britain since 1959." In *An Affluent Society? Britain's Post-war Golden Age Revisited*, edited by Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, 185–202. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.
- Church Gibson, Pamela. "The Deification of the Dolly Bird: Selling Swinging London, Fuelling Feminism." *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 14, no. 2 (2007): 99–113.
- Clarke, John, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts. "Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview." In *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, 9–74. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Collins, Marcus. "Introduction: The Permissive Society and Its Enemies." In *The Permissive Society and its Enemies*, edited by Marcus Collins, 1–40. London: Rivers Oram, 2007.
- Davis, John. *Youth and the Condition of Britain: Images of Adolescent Conflict*. London: Athlone Press, 1990.
- Davis, John. "The London Drug Scene and the Making of Drug Policy 1965–73." *Twentieth Century British History* 17, no. 1 (2006): 26–49.
- Dawson, Graham. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Donnelly, Mark. *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics*. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005.
- Donnelly, Mark. "Sixties Britain: The Cultural Politics of Historiography." In *Preserving the Sixties*, edited by Trevor Harris and Monia O'Brien Castro, 10–30. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Fentress, James, and Chris Wickham. *Social Memory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- Fisher, Trevor. "Permissiveness and the Politics of Morality." *Contemporary Record* 7, no. 1 (1993): 149–165.
- Gorer, Geoffrey. *Sex and Marriage in England Today: A Study of the Views and Experiences of the under-45s*. London: Nelson, 1971.
- Green, Anna. "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates." *Oral History* 32, no. 2 (2004): 35–44.
- Grimley, Matthew. "Thatcherism, Morality and Religion." In *Making Thatcher's Britain*, edited by Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders, 78–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Hall, Lesley. *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- Hall, Stuart, and Tony Jefferson, eds. *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Harris, Trevor, and Monia O'Brien Castro. "Introduction." In *Preserving the Sixties*, edited by Trevor Harris and Monia O'Brien Castro, 1–9. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Jackson, Louise, and Angela Bartie. *Policing Youth*. Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 2014.
- Kramer, Anne-Marie. "The Observers and the Observed: The 'Dual Vision' of the Mass Observation Project." *Sociological Research Online* 19, no. 4 (2014): 1–11.
- Langhamer, Claire. *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of Emotional Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Marwick, Arthur. *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, C.1958–C.1974*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.



- Maslen, Joseph. "Autobiographies of a Generation? Carolyn Steedman, Luisa Passerini and the Memory of 1968." *Memory Studies* 6, no. 1 (2013): 23–36.
- McRobbie, Angela. *Feminism and Youth Culture*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- Mitchell, Gillian. "Reassessing 'the Generation Gap': Bill Haley's 1957 Tour of Britain, Inter-Generational Relations and Attitudes to Rock 'N' Roll in the Late 1950s." *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 4 (2013): 573–605.
- Mort, Frank. *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Mort, Frank. "The Permissive Society Revisited." *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 2 (2011): 269–298.
- Osgerby, Bill. "'Well It's Saturday Night an' I Just Got Paid': Youth, Consumerism and Hegemony in Post-war Britain." *Contemporary Record* 6, no. 2 (1992): 287–305.
- Osgerby, Bill. *Youth in Britain since 1945*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Osgerby, Bill. "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Postwar Media Representations of Youth." In *The Media: An Introduction*, edited by Adam Briggs and Paul Copley, 322–334. Harlow: Longman, 1997.
- Roper, Michael. "Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 50 (2000): 181–204.
- Sandbrook, Dominic. *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties*. London: Abacus, 2007.
- Schofield, Michael. *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*. London: Longmans, 1965.
- Smith Wilson, Dolly. "A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-war Britain." *Twentieth Century British History* 17, no. 2 (2006): 206–229.
- Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War*. Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 1998.
- Summerfield, Penny. "Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews." *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 65–93.
- Thane, Pat. "Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England." *Women's History Review* 20, no. 1 (2011): 11–29.
- Thomas, Nick. "Challenging Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain." *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 3 (2002): 277–297.
- Thomas, Nick. "Will the Real 1950s Please Stand up?." *Cultural and Social History* 5, no. 2 (2008): 227–235.
- Tinkler, Penny. "'Are You Really Living?' If Not 'Get with It!' the Teenage Self and Lifestyle in Young Women's Magazines, Britain 1957–1970." *Cultural and Social History* 11, no. 4 (2014): 587–619.
- Todd, Selina, and Hilary Young. "Baby-Boomers to 'Beanstalkers'." *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 3 (2012): 451–467.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*. Harlow: Longman, 1985.