

## **The 1960s: A Generation in Perspective**

### **ABSTRACT**

This article is a study of ten people who were radical or sympathetic to radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s. It has two related aims. The first is to relate the research participants' values, views and experiences in the 1960s to their subsequent life courses. The data for this is based on an interview with each participant and various supporting material. The second aim is to theorise the 1960s student movement in the light of the interview data and with reference to Mannheim's essay, 'The problem of generations' and other relevant sources. The article concludes that the radical 'generational unit' or student movement of the 1960s, despite weaknesses, is best interpreted as 'realistically utopian' rather than as irrational and immature as some contemporary liberals judged it.

### **KEY WORDS**

generation/generation unit/life course/Mannheim/radicalism/utopia

### **Introduction**

Some members of the post 1945 baby-boom generation will soon be 60. I am interviewing a sample of ten of them: five women and five men. They are Guy Denington, Frank Furedi, Janet Holland, Pam Lunn, David Milner, Caroline New, Sue Sharpe, Ceridwen Roberts, and Chris Rojek. Only one wanted to remain anonymous and I refer to him as Clive Jackson. I will give more information about participants as I refer to them individually.

The sample is selective, taken with the purpose of understanding a segment or 'unit' of a generation as well as particular individuals. All were students in the 1960s or early 1970s and were either involved in or sympathetic to the 'radical' activities of that period (the reason for putting the term 'radical' in quotation marks here is explained below). Most are now academics or researchers but, for comparison, I interviewed one whose career is in another part of the public sector. I have also used data from a number of secondary sources. To the extent that what follows is representative of any population, it is of student radicals of the 1960s. It is not intended to be representative of 1960s youth as a whole. Nor does the article attempt to establish in any quantitative or comparative way how radical the 1960s were.

The paper has two related aims. The first is to relate the participants' youthful radicalism to their subsequent life courses. The second is to theorise the 1960s student movement with reference to the interview data and to Mannheim's essay, 'The problem of generations'. The interviews cover participants' memories of the sixties, their careers and their thoughts on contemporary society including higher education and contemporary youth. My understanding of the life course is that it is a bio-social construct that to a variable extent allows scope for individual negotiation (see, Gaynor, 1993; Hunt, 2005). A main theme is the possible challenge to radical values presented by the pressures of careers and domestic demands.

This second aim of the article has a macro dimension and requires considerable theorisation. For this I draw on the work of Karl Mannheim qualified by perspectives from other sources, including contemporary sociologists of youth. The latter are especially useful in interpreting differences between generations. Mannheim's classic

but, as Pilcher (1994) says, neglected essay on generations – *The problem of generations* (1952a) – grounds theory in empirical data and that is the intention here.

As a distinctive period, ‘the 1960s’ did not, of course, begin neatly in 1960 or end in 1969. Its roots lie in the 1950s as manifested politically by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and culturally by ‘the beatniks’. Radical student activity continued well into the 1970s with the economic downturn following the 1973 oil crisis a key turning point.

### **Mannheim’s Theoretical framing of the Concept of Generation**

Mannheim’s approach encompasses social context and collective experience, meaning and action (1952a). He distinguishes between a generation as *location* and a generation as *actuality*. The former refers to those born at approximately the same time and is synonymous with the term cohort. A generation as actuality is one that shares major formative experience albeit that response varies (307). Arguably, the depression of the 1930s and the accompanying pressures on education and employment provided such a common experience for much of youth in Western Europe and North America. It may be that 9/11 and the associated events will shape contemporary youth into an actual generation. If so it is likely to be very different than the 1960s generation. The concept of an actual generation provides a macro framework that avoids reducing youth to an undifferentiated collective mass and which can be interpreted to incorporate the structure/action duality.

Mannheim also provides a concept appropriate to micro-level analysis: ‘the generational unit’:

*The generational unit represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such. Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problem may be said to be part of the same actual generation, while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experience in different specific ways, constitute separate generational units* (1952a: 304).

The key phrase defining generational units is ‘those groups ... which work up the material of their common experience in different specific ways’. Although he regarded class as ‘the most significant’ social influence, he argued that ‘generation’ as well as other factors might also have substantial independent influence (1952b: 248). A particular generational unit is defined by the similarity of the sentiments, ideas and potentially actions of people of people of similar age who may not be individually known to each other. He used the term ‘gestalt’ to indicate this complex ‘bond’ (1952a: 305). He observed that particular units share given symbols and slogans (1952a: 305). On this basis there were doubtless numerous generational units in the 1960s. Mannheim emphasised that a generation as actuality and associated units only emerge if ‘triggered’ by social circumstances, and particularly ‘as a result of an acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation’ (1952a: 309-10). A generation as actuality is then a realised potential (an ‘intelechy’ (311).

The appropriateness of Mannheim’s model to the 1960s student movement, the generational unit analysed here, is illustrated below. The Participants in the research were selected on evidence (confirmed in interviews) that they shared the outlook and

concerns of the 1960s student movement. I use the more familiar term 'student movement' inter-changeably with that of generational unit.

The term 'unit' is used to include identification with either or both political and cultural student radicalism. Quite possibly, many young 1960s radicals did not consciously differentiate between the two. Further, the notion that personal integrity required consistency between cultural life-style and political orientation was widely held. For many, the slogan 'the personal is the political' meant that cultural values should be inseparable from political ones.

Two further concepts of Mannheim's are also used here: utopia and disinterested intellectuals (as distinct from those with a sectional interest, 1952b: 232). He argued that various 'utopias' reflect given political ideologies but that a utopia that benefits all and not merely sectional interests might be attainable (1952b: 173-236, especially pp.234-6). He considered that the role of such intellectuals is crucial in 'clarifying' what might be termed a societal rather than a sectional utopia. They are able 'transcend' predominant perceptions of 'reality' and Mannheim leaves no-doubt that he supports such efforts (Chapter V). An issue discussed in this paper is the extent to which the student movement merely reflected or rather 'transcended' the sectional interests of students.

In positing a close relationship between factors such as class, generation and ethnicity and consciousness, Mannheim's approach is broadly modernist. As such, it differs from poststructuralist informed sociology of youth. The latter tends to use less structurally delimited concepts, such as 'discourse' or 'discursive formation'. Similarly, rather than refer to 'triggering' 'formative factors' (1952a: 312), a variety of concepts are employed to indicate 'identification' with particular 'streams' or 'channels' of activity, particularly cultural (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003: 6).

However, the theoretical model mainly targeted for criticism by poststructural approaches is not Mannheim's but the subcultural theory of the more recent Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall et al., 1975; Hebdige, 1979). Redhead, Bennett, Muggleton and others agree that ,although its use persists, the term 'subculture' implies too specific and fixed a relationship between underlying factors such as class or ethnicity to youth cultural identity (Redhead, 1997; Bennet, 2000; Muggleton, 2000). As Muggleton and Weinzierl remark in their lucid introduction to *The Post-Subcultures Reader*: 'the terms subculture, club-culture and tribe or neo-tribe are sometimes used interchangeably, to refer to the variety of youth cultural formations' (6). Given this, Mannheim's concept of 'unit' might seem too delineated and 'solid' for most contemporary theorists of youth.

As their terminology suggests, contemporary sociology of youth has been as much marked by 'the cultural turn' as other areas of sociology. I do not intend to read back these terms as descriptors of the cultural radicalism of the 1960s although what follows is informed by a poststucturalist awareness that generational identities may be less clear-cut than Mannheim's model sometimes suggests. Bennett's term 'neo-tribe' certainly has some purchase in relation to the cultural expressions of 1960s radicalism, particularly to the hippies. However, the term counterculture, better indicates the prominent oppositional aspects of the lifestyles of 1960s radicals and I prefer to use it to supplement Mannheim's terminology.

Mannheim's concept 'generational unit' remains a powerful analytical tool, especially in relation to political orientation. His work on youth was partly inspired by the youth movements of the 1930s. In this context, he focused more on political and ideological than cultural identification. In contrast, current terminology of youth is saturated with cultural terminology. While Redhead and others rightly stress the preoccupation of much of 1980s and 1990s youth with pleasure and personal identity (1997), the 1960s radicals were more political. Indeed, even the hedonism of the 1960s was widely theorised as political (see Marcuse, 1969; Roszac, 1969). Muggleton and Weinzierl observe a relative lack of a political focus among youth at the turn of the millennium but see potential in the anti-globalisation movement (2003: 16-19).

### **A Radical Generational Unit: 'Something is happening...'**

Everyone I interviewed felt at the time that 'something special happened' in 'the sixties' and that this was significantly the product of their own generation. These were typical comments:

*you got a sense of things changing ... you know ...in terms of clothes and personal mores, the way things were being questioned*

*I was a child of the sixties...I thought sociology could help me explain the world as it was and help me change it*

*In 1968 we absolutely thought we were going to change the world ... we thought we could do anything*

This confident, almost euphoric feeling of impending change led some of my sample towards Marxism and others towards a loose and exploratory radicalism. Identification with particular causes or strands of the movement tended to come later. Several participants in the research were not sure what descriptive label they might have been willing to accept in the 1960s, some now preferring 'left' or 'left of centre' or none at all to 'radical'. In general, the New Left did not take for granted the 'doctrines' of the 'old left'. This reflected an ideological openness and pragmatism. Although some influential New Left intellectuals worked within the Marxist tradition, notably the *New Left Review* group, many students were radicalised by a specific issue or series of issues and/or the mood of dissent about the present and optimism about the future. While a reviving Marxism attracted a number of the more doctrinaire, others took a fresh, less rigid approach to the tradition. So both in terms of specific issues and of a shared developing political mood, the new radicals worked up 'the material of their common experience' in a collective way.

The following are the issues and factors most frequently mentioned in the interviews:

- Nuclear Disarmament
- University bureaucracy
- Participatory democracy
- Corporate capitalism
- The Vietnam War

The counterculture/alternative consciousness

Towards the end of the 1960s other issues, more or less already part of the radical agenda, were seen as increasingly important. These included:

Racism/Ethnic minority rights  
Women's rights/Patriarchy/Sexism  
Gay/Lesbian rights  
The Environment  
Global Inequality

In Mannheim's terms, then, to what extent, was the student movement ideological in the sense of self-interested or 'transcendentally utopian'? The answer is complex and, of course, reflects differences among participants. A fuller response to this question will emerge in the course of this paper. However, as indicated above, initially the student movement was chary of ideological rigidity. For some, this included a cautious attitude towards Marxism if not outright rejection. Nor do most causes espoused by student radicals appear ideological in the sense of expressions of their own collective interests. On the contrary, particularly in the 1960s, they mainly concerned the interests of others. Only their opposition to the perceived paternalism and authoritarianism of university authorities pertained directly to their self interest but this was a relatively minor aspect of the activism of the period. Later, the various 'rights groups' that in part emerged from 1960s radicalism did develop distinctive group rights ideologies generally pursued within pluralist politics.

### **Social Context and Social Origins**

The sixties were both an end and a beginning. The lasting rupture was with the cultural conservatism of the immediate post-war period. Youth hastened this change but it was already occurring widely, driven by developments in leisure and consumption. Richard Hoggart has chronicled the myriad of social distinctions and differences in taste between the working and middle classes and, indeed, within each in the post-war period (1957). Whatever their immediate social background, the research participants agreed that they wanted to distance themselves from it – most of them substantially. They could barely wait to throw off what were in effect the constraints of class.

Several participants commented on conflicts at home and school. Early and mid-teen disagreements with parents were about matters of personal autonomy rather than politics. Length of hair and skirts were mentioned. A burgeoning youth culture fed these conflicts and provided a sympathetic backdrop to what might otherwise have been routine domestic generational struggle. Several used the word 'respectability' to describe the ethos they were beginning to reject – and this feeling crossed class lines. Two participants commented that they saw going to university as 'an escape'. The generational rebellion on campus enabled them to relate personal experience to a wider frame of reference and meaning. Despite some quite intense conflicts, none in middle age gives a sense of serious lingering resentment against their parents. Indeed, they seemed very caring in this respect.

The majority of participants in the survey came from middle class backgrounds. Their radicalisation was fuelled less by experience of disadvantage than by a questioning of conventions that they variously saw as restrictive, conservative or ridiculous. David Milner, now a professor of psychology at Westminster University, describes 'an impeccably middle-class' childhood and youth in Mill Hill and Southgate, London. Born in 1946, he claims to have been part of the first wave of grammar school boys to reject post-war convention. As a fourth former and aware of a colourful youth culture emerging nation-wide, he was unimpressed by the way sixth-formers expressed their 'privilege' of not having to wear school uniform: 'To a man, they wore harris-tweed jackets and cavalry twill trousers – they looked exactly like their fathers, even aspiring to this state'. Later, on holiday from university, he clashed with his own father about hair length ('just over my ears') and clothes. His father aggressively accused Milner of looking 'effeminate' who enquired, in turn, whether his father's behaviour was supposed to be 'masculine'. After the row they didn't talk to each other for several weeks. They never seriously rowed again but went their mainly separate ways.

Although he joined CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) as early as 1962, Milner states: 'I was aware of the cultural changes before anything else' (i.e. before the new political radicalism). Like a number of other participants in this research, including, Janet Holland, Clive Jackson, Caroline New, and Pam Lunn, his father was politically broadly left of centre (mothers tended to be described as 'non' or 'apolitical'). It is quite possible that they absorbed left of centre tendencies more or less unconsciously but, if so, they reworked them in the context of the 1960s.

Caroline New and Pam Lunn both showed an early interest in radical politics, influenced in the former case by the views of both her parents and in the latter by her father's. New's parents were pacifists and she joined CND at the age of 14. Her father was a 'white-collar engineer' and her mother a housewife. While at school she founded a group called 'The World Citizens Society'. As an undergraduate at Cambridge from 1964 to 1967 she was relatively uninvolved in politics but 'had political boy friends', indicating the still largely patriarchal complexion of radical politics. As a postgraduate at Oxford in 1968 she was 'peripheral' to the New Left Review group of intellectuals. She 'sort of became a Marxist through studying sociology' and has remained one ever since albeit of changing hue. She took part in protests against university regulations controlling student life and also in anti-racist demonstrations. She now describes herself as 'an old Marxist' but this self-deprecation hides a life-long involvement in radical causes, notably feminist ones. She now recommends co-counselling as a powerful emancipatory project.

Pam Lunn was born in 1950. Her father was a Chartered Accountant and her mother a housewife. She describes her father as 'a Guardian reading liberal'. He encouraged her to interrogate her reactions to current issues including the last execution in Britain and the Cold War. She 'articulated a previously intuitive pacifism' after participating in a sit-in against the military junta in Greece which became violent. She felt contradicted the purpose and message of the sit-in. Hers was and remains a strongly anti-hierarchical, morally based radicalism that is nevertheless well informed about organisation theory and practice. When asked in interview what motivated her radical activity, she stressed the values of 'justice and equality'. In the longer term, she has preferred to pursue these values through pressure group rather than mainstream party

political activity. The latter included CND, Amnesty International and Third World First. Later she joined the Green Party. She mentioned her support for the women's encampment at Greenham Common several times. She states rather deliberately: 'I was not a Marxist'. Her moral motivation, wariness of hierarchy and support for diverse radical issues typifies a strong if diffuse strand in 1960s radicalism.

Janet Holland and Clive Jackson, two respondents from working class backgrounds, succeeded in entering higher education. Both had felt constricted by their home environment. Nevertheless, their early socialist sympathies may have owed something to their fathers' socialism as well as the inequalities they witnessed around them. Both took time to come to terms with higher education. Clive Jackson was 'thrown out' for taking part in a sit-in (nearly all other supposed participants pulled out at the last minute!) but re-entered later. Janet Holland worked as a secretary at the London School of Economics and registered as a mature student only when it was pointed out that she was 'as bright as the students'. One of the 'hidden injuries of class', to use Richard Sennett's phrase, experienced by working class people can be lack of familiarity and confidence in dealing with institutional hierarchies (1972: 96-98). Despite early academic success both took time to find their way and, eventually, senior academic positions in higher education. One even felt a sense of not quite knowing how 'to operate' the system, of not quite belonging to it, well into mid-career. The culture of class origin can continue to impinge on the life-course despite social mobility.

Guy Denington, now 56 years old and working in public health, is the only person in the survey to go to public school. He developed a strong psychological and intellectual independence partly to compensate for the constant competitive participation demanded by the school. Later these characteristics were more overtly expressed in a relatively autonomous and open style of management. He developed an increasing interest in environmental issues that he still sustains.

I have not included here an account of the early social background and influences on some of my sample, viz. Frank Furedi, Sue Sharpe, Ceridwen Roberts, and Chris Rojek. These are no less interesting but, given the limitations of space, I have chosen to draw on their interview responses covering later aspects of their lives and for their current opinion.

Charles Hampden-Turner's book 'Radical Man' (sic) cites data to suggest that many American student radicals of the 1960s were influenced by the radical and liberal values of their parents (1971). Arguably, what differentiated the two generations is that the younger one was more insistent that these values should be put into public practice. My research is not extensive enough to support the same thesis about British student radicals but it may be relevant in several cases discussed above.

As Mannheim's model indicates, the individual lives of my respondents, unique as they are, could not have taken the course they did without the confluence of wider social developments. These included post-war economic expansion, a wider youth cultural 'revolt into style', and a series of political developments, including the Vietnam War. Specifically, the rapid expansion of higher education gave students a collective strength and presence never previously experienced. This is comparable in

kind if not scale, to the way the factory system contributed to the collectivisation of the proletariat.

In part, the strength was an illusion. Pam Lunn and Caroline New recognise as much. The former refers to the ‘mass self-righteousness’ and ‘hubris’ of this generation of student radicals – the less attractive side, perhaps, of their idealism. Caroline New guffawed in retrospective disbelief at ‘the arrogance’ and ‘naivety’ of the young activists imagining as some did that they might imminently overturn ‘the system’ without a clear understanding of the power of contrary forces.

### **Higher Education and a Collective Experience**

This section more fully explores the collective quality of 1960s student radicalism. It illustrates how personal agendas of freedom interacted with a wider movement.

The shift from post-war austerity to growing affluence was the ‘master-trend’ that established the base on which political and cultural change and experimentation flourished. ‘The meaning of style’, to use Hebdige’s term and, for that matter, the meaning of affluence was different for different generational ‘subcultures’ (1979) or units. The consumer boom and related lifestyle changes had begun among working class youth in the early to mid 1950s. At an obvious level of interpretation, ‘subcultures’ such as the ‘Teds’ and the ‘Mods’ revelled in conspicuous consumption though some have read deeper meanings into their activities (see Hall and Jefferson ed., 1976).

It was some years before students caught up in stylistic expression with those in paid work (Abrams: 1979). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, other than the beatnik influence, student style had been typically down-beat and informal. It became more expressive, naturalistic and sensual as the counterculture took hold. The expansion of higher education in the 1960s attracted media and public attention to students and the more colourful and radical among them used this for their own publicity.

If the desire for change was partly personal, the experience was collective. One participant expressed the sense of community in these terms:

*In the sixties and seventies there was a collective sense of a whole generation being bound together*

More precisely in Mannheim’s terms, for some, the generational unit of radical students became the focus of identity often at the expense of the family of origin. This did not involve any formal joining: the long hair, the hippie clothes, the music, the drugs – the counterculture – were pervasive. Nevertheless, there were informal pressures to conform to nonconformity: not to be ‘turned on’ was to be ‘square’ or ‘straight’ (a piece of argot that now, of course has a different meaning). One interviewee who had not dabbled in psychedelic drugs even now seems mildly defensive about it, insisting, controversially, that alcohol probably had a similar illuminating effect.

Memories of what came to be called the counterculture caused the eyes of several interviewees to light up. Clearly they ‘had turned on’. However, as one of them put it,

‘all this was part of a bigger, radical statement, we weren’t just being alternative, we thought we were the way the future was going to be’. As all the interviewees acknowledge, it has not quite turned out that way.

The intellectual ferment of the time is illustrated by the fact that whereas all could name an intellectual or book that influenced them in the 1960s, few could easily do so for the present period. Several participants mentioned the same books. Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* and Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful* were referred to several times. The influence of Marcuse is not surprising because he directly addressed the relationship between affluence and socio-cultural liberation that exercised the minds of many on the left. As Guy Dedington put it:

*Yes ... technology was going to free up everything ... people would work less, there would be less poverty... Nobody ever talks about that now ...*

Marcuse gave theoretical expression to such sentiments. He wrote in the liberationist tradition of the Frankfurt School (1964; 1969) that also considerably influenced Mannheim. Integrating Marxist and Freudian theory, he argued that the material surplus generated by modern technology rendered the ‘repressive’ capitalist work ethic redundant. He maintained that for the first time a liberated or ‘utopian’ society based on the values of the pleasure principle was ‘realistically’ possible. By this he meant something perhaps more easily comprehensible in terms of Maslow’s concept of self-actualisation, not simply sexual liberation. What prevented this happening was the capitalist demand for ‘surplus profit’ which in turn required ‘surplus repression’ of a cultural and psychological kind. Marcuse acknowledged that work requires some restraint in the form of self and social control but that capitalism exacts far more than necessary i.e. surplus repression.

Several participants acknowledged the influence of Bob Dylan (sometimes now referred to in mock reverence as ‘His Bobness’). These days Dylan sometimes adopts puzzlement when it is suggested that his earlier work had a political dimension (Dylan, 2005). One participant commented on Dylan’s evasiveness about his early influence: ‘well... he always wanted to be a rock singer’ (rather than a protest singer) and added, ‘I couldn’t follow him into his Christianity...’. However, the many sides of Dylan cannot obscure the political content and influence of his early work. Some of his political comment was overt as in *The Lonesome death of Hattie Carroll* (a black woman killed by white landowner, William Zanzinger) or symbolic as in *Blowin’ in the Wind* – a song that became the civil rights anthem. David Boucher comments that Dylan’s early work ‘is not offering a structural analysis of society in which the forces at work are impersonal’ but rather attacks specific injustices and their perpetrators (2004: 166). However, I would in addition argue that songs such as *Blowin’ in the Wind* and *The Times they are a Changin’* evoke generalised sentiments critical of society – of the kind that Mannheim argues can contribute to the gelling of a (radical) generational unit

When, in his post-protest period, Dylan, deeply influenced by drugs, began to paint a picture of society as a surreal nightmare (as in *Desolation Row*), he again expressed the sentiments of a generational movement. By the mid 1960s, the influence of psychedelic drugs contributed to notions of ‘alternative reality’ and ‘cultural revolution’. These developments further eroded some young radicals perception of

clear distinction between political and cultural radicalism and a strategy for change reflecting such a distinction. Many other singers and groups evolved in a comparable way to Dylan. Among those referred to were the Beatles and the Stones. Simply to mention these groups is a reminder that the 1960s were as much about straightforward pleasure as radical theorising. As often as not, they were referred to in the former respect by the participants in this research.

Although most of my sample joined one or more radical organisation, the sense being part of a dynamic movement did not seem to require this. Marches, protests, sit-ins, teach-ins, ad hoc steering groups and coalitions happened on such a regular basis that they seemed a normal part of life – at least, of student life and students activists felt they were about to change the world. The timescale demanded or assumed for change was often immediate: ‘freedom now’. As is discussed later, several participants in this research associate this sense of imminent change to a lack of interest in long-term strategic thinking. Further, most regarded those campus Marxist groups which did offer revolutionary scenarios as too doctrinaire and anti-libertarian.

Three, however, referred to specific Marxist commitments. Clive Jackson was for a period a member of the Trotskyist organisation, International Socialists. Frank Furedi, now Professor of sociology at Kent University, was also drawn to Trotskyism although this was in the mid to late 1970s after the height of 1960s radicalism. A factor in both their thinking was a rejection of Soviet style communism and a desire for a more democratic socialism: opinions also widely held in one form or another by non-Marxist radicals. As students, both Jackson and Furedi were banned for a period by their institutions following radical activities. Certainly there was a relatively confrontational though not necessarily a more committed edge to their activism. As previously mentioned, Caroline New has consistently been a Marxist but of various kinds.

The participants in this research shared a sense that they were part of a movement for change that had a serious chance of success. Mannheim argues that such challenges to the status quo of radical generational units carry a powerful emotional charge and this was true of the student movement (1952a: 309). Wordsworth’s reference to the revolutionary youth at the turn of the eighteenth century comes to mind: ‘bliss was it then to be alive, but to be young was very heaven’. Of course, there is a difference between what is felt to be possible and what realistically might be.

### **Careers and Values**

In the absence of revolution during or since the 1960s, the issue of how to relate to the existing system - liberal capitalism - became unavoidable for radicals. Far from, in Marcuse’s terms, a new reality principle being established, reality got tougher in the form of Thatcherism. Careers had to be established, relationships made and, in some cases, children reared in conditions not of the respondents own choosing. How far has middle class life claimed the former student radicals? If they have not changed the system, has the system changed them?

All the participants sought careers compatible with their principles, several simply acting on the basis of unconscious assumption. However, not all had the same priorities of were equally ambitious for conventional career progress. To work, let

alone progress in a system of which one is critical is likely to present moral and practical problems. Calculations may have to be made about whether personal promotion will make it easier to help others or the reverse. Such choices have been made more testing in higher education because of changes in management structure accentuating both bureaucratic hierarchy and market competition (discussed below). None of the nine involved in education welcomed these changes and several stated that they went against the grain of their educational values. Most have avoided the managerial route in preference for teaching and/or research.

The feminist movement provided something close to a combination of a career and a way of life for Sue Sharpe, a free-lance researcher, and Janet Holland, a professor at South Bank University. In opposing patriarchy and supporting women's rights, both of them distanced themselves from the chauvinism of 1960s radicalism. They stress that their feminist networks have been a source of support both personally and in their research work. They acknowledge that this has only been possible because of the mainly public funding they have been able to win for their work. In turn this reflects that feminism has achieved a substantial degree of legitimacy and success and that feminist inspired projects have been able to command a share of public resources. Holland mentions that she has found it easier to make progress with her feminism than her socialism. It is perhaps simply a difference of temperament and taste that Holland has tended to establish tighter institutional connections than Sharpe who has always preferred research and writing to teaching and administration. In both cases, feminism has been central to self-motivation, organisation and productivity.

Pam Lunn has also shaped her life-course within feminism although she relates feminism to a wider framework of principle. She trained as a teacher at Bristol University and anticipated that she might eventually become a Head Teacher. After some experience of school teaching, she changed the direction of her career because she 'did not like what schools were doing to children ... inducting them into their place'. She went into adult education because she felt that interaction with adults would be more meaningful and productive. Experience confirmed this for her and she now works at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre where she describes her position as 'privileged'. I return to her comments on feminism, patriarchy and organisational structures later.

Whereas Pam Lunn adjusted her ambitions to her emerging principles, Caroline New states that she 'was never very ambitious in career terms'. Her consistent and time-consuming involvement in radical causes seems to bear out that she had other priorities. She also committed substantial time to bringing up her three daughters. She questions whether playing the role of a middle class housewife with a higher earning husband is consistent with her feminist principles but it is just as plausible to see her life-course decisions as motivated by concern for others as by convention. Quite late in her career she gave up a full-time teaching post in higher education to pursue writing and family commitments.

Ceridwen Roberts' career progressed along predictable lines but feminism played a significant role within it. After studying as a postgraduate in the early 1970s, she lectured in Industrial Sociology at Trent Polytechnic. She describes the pattern of work there as very individualised 'for obvious structural reasons'. She contrasts this with the 'collaborative' pattern of work in her next post as a researcher at the

Department of Employment where she worked mainly with women on ‘aspects of women in the labour market’. Like the other feminists in this survey, she prefers to work in a team and refers critically to ‘managerial technicians’. Thirty years later she still works with some of these colleagues. Her working relationships at the Department of Employment have been a defining feature of her working life.

The men in the survey lacked the base of solidarity offered by feminism to the women. It seems that they did not easily find it elsewhere. Although perhaps marginally more conventionally ‘successful’ than the women, they also seem to have experienced more professional conflict. Both Frank Furedi and Clive Jackson say that their radical principles affected their career progress although in different ways. Furedi emphatically states that he was denied promotion several times because of his radical views and activities. Clive Jackson’s early academic progress was slowed because he prioritised his political and trade union work ahead of opportunities he had for postgraduate studies. In turn, this has a detrimental affect on his early and mid-career. Although Furedi and Jackson paid a price for their principles, both are now senior academics in leading universities. The careers of David Milner and Chris Rojek, a professor and senior publisher, seem not to have been adversely affected by their political views.

Several participants regarded teaching and/or research as a better medium for self-expression and retaining their integrity whilst making a living than careers in management. Some have probably paid a marginal price in status and income as a result. On the whole, they seem less concerned to justify themselves than a number of 1960s ex-radicals interviewed for the *Times Higher Education Supplement* who took the career route to senior management (North *et al.*: 2004). On the other hand, they may have had less power and opportunity to help or protect people. It would be invidious to be judgemental on such a complex matter of individual choice.

Guy Dedington, the only non-academic interviewee, gave a considered account of his approach to applying for promotion to senior management level in the public health service. At first it was with some hesitation. He proceeded to competitive interview on the basis that he would manage consistently with his principles. Reflecting his long-standing environmentalist convictions, he would focus on the prevention of pollution and the protection of people rather than simply inspection and the enforcement of regulation. With damage limitation in mind, he also considered who might get the job if he didn’t. His principles were part of the messy process of decision-making: not ‘selling out’ completely continued to matter. Like other participants, he wanted to make some sort of difference – albeit short of changing the world.

### **Where did it go Wrong? The Longer Term Legacy**

By the time Margaret Thatcher came to power, all interviewees realised that the ‘sixties dream’ had gone. The socialists among the respondents accept that the goal of significantly greater equality is now further away than ever. One is now more sceptical about people and sees self-interest as an impediment to collective action - but says ‘if you pushed me I’d still say I’m a socialist’. None of the ten is optimistic about the present state of either global or British society and most are pessimistic

about the state of higher education. There is a sense that the twentieth century did not go their way – that ‘the big picture’ was painted by someone else.

Responses to the question ‘where did it go wrong’, varied. Most recognised that the naivety and inexperience of the radicals themselves had played a part. However, Frank Furedi and David Milner do not quite agree with this interpretation. Furedi believes that the movement could have achieved more if there had communicated better with a wider constituency, including the genuinely disadvantaged. He sees an opportunity missed. Milner argues that the young radicals tried to change too much too quickly and criticises a lack of strategic awareness. As a result, much of the general public was ripe for the backlash that duly came. These views suggest that the decline of 1960s radicalism was not inevitable, that history might have been different.

A number of factors were mentioned external to the movement. Several participants referred to the self-interested sectional behaviour of the unions as contributing to the rise of Thatcherism. Such a perception of the unions was common even in the early 1960s and made a strong student-worker coalition unlikely. Yet, the student movement badly needed a wider base of support. With one exception, none of the participants in the research showed strong allegiance to the trade union movement in their university years. In this sense they were typically student ‘New Left’. Similarly, only a minority supported the Labour Party as students.

Regardless of whether they felt the Thatcherite counter-offensive could have been anticipated, participants agreed about its effectiveness. Thatcherite measures to control and discipline youth were as comprehensive as those directed at the trade unions. What participants could not have foreseen was, as they now perceive it, the continuation of Thatcherite policies under New Labour. By 1997, most were prepared to support the return of a Labour government and some shared the renewed hope of that time. By 2005 disillusionment runs deep.

None directly involved in higher education supports the managerial changes introduced in the last decade or so. One simply commented: ‘I hate them’. Pam Lunn suggests that to the extent that participatory democracy survives in higher education, it does so in the informal networking practices of feminist-influenced women and like-minded men. The diffusion of these practices means they do not depend on feminism per se. She argues that the critique of patriarchy can be understood as referring to the structures of domination that characterise all hierarchy, including educational ones. In this respect, she argues that the management of higher education has become more patriarchal since the 1960s.

Those teaching sociology expressed concern about the state of the subject in higher education. Frank Furedi was the most scathing. He finds much current sociological research trivial and irrelevant to larger social issues. He attributes what he sees as a lack of imagination and critical structural perspective partly to an over-prescriptive regulatory regime. Furedi remains radical, even talking of establishing a ‘free university’ focusing on critical understanding rather than employment-related skills and qualifications.

Somewhat relatedly, the biochemist, Stephen Rose argues that a conservative natural science has super-ceded the radical social science of the nineteen sixties and seventies

as the template of popular explanation (2005). In an interview with Lorrie Moggach, he argues that a conservative turn in biology reflects and feeds into a wider reactionary cultural climate. He states that deterministic theory predominates in evolutionary biology, explaining inequality, including racial inequality, as biologically programmed. As a result belief in human agency is undermined and some take refuge in religion:

*In a sense, science was justifying the status quo. We can't live in a better world, we live in the best world we can possibly have. And now I think that trust in science has begun to diminish. If social science can't change the world and science can't either – and actually seems to be producing problems rather than solutions – maybe (people) look to religion instead (Financial Times: W3)( My brackets).*

The most positive legacy of 1960s radicalism was perceived to be its contribution to putting minority rights firmly on the national agenda. The scale of this contribution is difficult to establish given that the various rights movements had origins and support distinct from those within 1960s radicalism. However, these movements have helped to shape the politics of the later part of the twentieth century and any substantial contribution to them is a considerable achievement. Several spoke positively of the extension of the rights movements to the global level.

Opinions about the current younger generation were mixed but not unsympathetic. Students are perceived as more conformist now but as having limited alternatives given their positioning by government policy. They are typically in debt, frequently have to do paid-work as well as study and often live with their parents. Paradoxically, although most families are by most measures far richer than in the 1960s, students appear to feel less secure and less confident. greater awareness of global risks. The fact that the teaching academics in the survey typically have large and anonymous classes does not help relations but no one blamed the students for this. The involvement of some young people in the anti-globalisation movement drew some positive comparisons with the 1960s movement.

The extent to which consumer and commercial values are thought to form the lives and minds of the young was a source of concern. Chris Rojek, offered an interpretation which posits some continuity between 1960s and contemporary youth. The conspicuous consumption of the 1960s *youth as a whole* can be seen as the early stages in a long-term trend to individualisation and informalisation based on affluence and greater leisure. Arguably, only a minority adopted radical lifestyles. Even so, their impact was immense. Today, despite the efforts of Naomi Klein (2000) and others, branding has become a pervasive symbolic system that some young people buy into with gusto and others, paradoxically, perhaps because they see little choice.

The reaction against the 1960s was not led by the young generation of the 1980s which was not especially conservative but by conservative adults among whom Margaret Thatcher and Mary Whitehouse were prominent. In so far as generational analysis is applicable, it is in the reassertion of adult authority and the assertion of control over the young.

### **Conclusion: the 1960s and Social Theory**

Unsurprisingly, assessments of the 1960s student movement have tended to focus on the generational dimension.

The classic Marxist critique of political idealism argues the futility of ideals that do not reflect material realities or address power relations. Tom Bottomore maintained that the student movement lacked both a developed alternative ideology and a coherent strategy for change (1967). However, this criticism is less damning if 1960s radicalism is assessed as a social movement having a generalised influence rather than in terms of party or pressure group politics – an interpretation compatible with Mannheim’s analysis of generational units.

Many prominent liberals, including some considered left of centre, saw the New Left as irrational, self-indulgent and as a threat to social order (see, for instance, Lipset (ed.), 1967; Feuer, 1969 ) A favoured way of conceptualising this was through Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex: the indulged youthful elite being seen as failing to make the transition to adulthood in rejecting necessary authority and limits on emotions and fantasy. In effect, the radicals rejected the reality principle.

Marcuse uses Freud to offer a more favourable interpretation of the student movement. It is also possible to extrapolate a positive perspective from Mannheim (who died well before the movement’s emergence). Both raise the possibility of attainable utopia. By this they mean the best society achievable given material conditions. *On this basis*, the 1960s radicals were not so unrealistic: broadly, they were right about racism; about gender (though understanding took time to develop); about the environment; about global inequality; and, arguably about organisational democracy. Their ideas and those of their intellectual mentors are those of the disinterested intellectuals that Mannheim referred to. Environmental issues and global inequality are now even more urgent issues. Further, there is an increasing realisation that this is so. It may be that the time is riper for a radical revival than superficially appears to be the case. Murmurings of dissent may turn again into arguments for radical change.

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