‘What a Difference it was to be a Woman and not a Teenager’: Adolescent Girls’ Conceptions of Adulthood in 1960s and 1970s Britain

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ABSTRACT

British working-class adolescent girls wrote about their imagined futures in thousands of essays throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Producing narratives that were intended for the eyes of teachers and researchers, these writers’ attempts to reflect accepted narratives about growing up offer us a window into how wider societal ideas about adulthood were reinvented in post-war Britain. For these teenage girls, markers of adulthood remained traditional: marriage and motherhood were framed as the only route to becoming an adult woman. However, the category of adulthood itself was now conceptualised as the culmination of a series of discontinuous psychological stages of development, meaning that girls who did not achieve these goals could now be pathologised as psychologically and even biologically immature. This was especially problematic for young lesbians, who recognised that their sexual orientation both prevented them from straightforwardly conforming to heteronormative ideas of marriage and motherhood and was also identified as a ‘phase’ that was linked solely to adolescence. Nevertheless, these new ideas of adulthood shaped the choices of all adolescent girls, as they strove to prove that they were mature enough to no longer be defined as innately irresponsible teenagers.

In 1963, a fifteen-year-old girl from St Albans, who planned to leave school within the next year, imagined what she might be like at twenty years old:

It was my 20th birthday! What a difference it was to be a woman and not a teenager … a dignified young woman, thinking only of marriage and my position at work … When I was fifteen I used to drive Mum mad with all my boyfriends, the latest dances and my troublesome teenage spots. Dad used to get frantic with all the noise … But still they are happy now.¹

This teenager’s account emphasised that stable adulthood would be very different from the transitional experience of adolescence; in five years’ time, she would become both biologically and emotionally mature, no longer subject to the family tensions and ‘teenage spots’ that were characteristic of this developmental stage. Furthermore, the way that she phrased the significance of this future shift in her life was telling. While adolescent girls’ lives in post-war Britain were fundamentally gendered, becoming ‘a woman’ and not a ‘teenager’ suggested that achieving adult status was contingent on

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fully embracing a feminine identity in a way that was not quite the same when one was still growing up.

This narrative reflects hundreds of others written by British teenage girls in the 1960s and 1970s. Most, but not all, of these young women form part of what Lynn Abrams has termed the ‘transition’ or ‘breakthrough’ generation, who grew up in the ‘long sixties’ from 1957 to 1973, and, Abrams argues, moved from being ‘home-makers’ to ‘self-makers’ by embracing their individual self-worth. However, this shift was not evident in the way this generation imagined their futures while they were adolescents. Adulthood was characterised as a period of dutiful, self-sacrificial hard work, without any of the fun of the teenage years. Indeed, adolescence was often seen as a premature reward for shouldering the responsibilities of adulthood, with the implication that if you did not take on these responsibilities, you had somehow reneged on the deal. Marriage and parenthood formed two key markers of maturity for young women in particular, demonstrating that this status was fundamentally linked to the fulfilment of gendered expectations. While girls’ writings reflected the post-war shifts in socio-economic circumstances that Abrams highlights – almost all expected to continue to work after marriage and to return to work once their children were at school – these writers were often preoccupied with questions of how to balance work and childcare long before they actually had children of their own, demonstrating their recognition of the difficulty of this ‘double burden’.

Teenage girls’ narratives from the 1960s and 1970s therefore nuance the concept of a ‘breakthrough’ generation. These girls, of course, did not necessarily live out the lives they had imagined for themselves. Abrams points out that a number of her ‘breakthrough generation’ interviewees described what she termed a ‘transitional moment’ while narrating their life stories, when they parted from what they had perceived as convention when they were adolescents, ‘jettisoning’ their younger selves. Nevertheless, this article will contend that these girls’ self-narratives are significant regardless of what happened later. Even if some members of this generation discarded their teenage understandings of the way the world worked, this does not diminish the fact that these narratives governed their lives for a significant period of time, which was not less important in its own right because their younger selves temporally preceded their older selves. Teenagers’ ideas of what adulthood ought to be like established normative expectations for their presents and their futures, shaping the choices they made.

This article draws on three major source sets. First, the datasets produced by the Multiple Marking of English Compositions [MMEC] and Development of Writing Abilities [DWA] projects, which are held at the Institute of Education. The MMEC, which took place between 1962 to 1964, asked groups of fourteen- to sixteen-year-old English students from secondary modern, comprehensive, grammar and independent schools to write essays at six-month intervals over the course of two years, so the researchers could trace the development of writing ability between these ages, while the DWA collected adolescents’ writing from specific schools between 1966 and 1971. Second, the 1969 sweep of the 1958 National Child Development Study [NCDS], one of the first British longitudinal studies to follow the development of a cohort, asked its eleven-year-old participants to write a brief essay on ‘Myself at 25’. 13,669 essays resulted, originating from across England, Wales and Scotland. Finally the sociologist Ray Pahl collected essays from 142 school-leavers living on the Isle of Sheppey.
in 1978, asking these sixteen-year-olds to describe their future adult lives into old age, perhaps imagining they were looking back when they were older or telling their life story to their grandchildren. These three major source sets are supplemented by other contemporary sociological studies, such as the longitudinal study of 700 children born between 1957 and 1959 in Nottingham conducted by John and Elizabeth Newson, that grant us access to the narratives of adolescents under-represented elsewhere.

All these sources were mediated by adults. MMEC and DWA writers had no choice about participating; while the MMEC essay titles seem to have been selected on the basis of what the researchers thought would ‘interest’ teenagers, this was not necessarily a successful strategy. One respondent wrote, in frustration with the latest assignment, that it was ‘the worst, most uninspiring collection of titles I have ever seen’. Similarly, Pahl used teachers to collect his essays and they were written as a class assignment, possibly under test conditions. The NCDS, by sampling all children born in a single week in 1958, enjoined their cohort to write an essay that their peers would not be completing; this did not necessarily yield results, as a handful of NCDS responses to the survey question, ‘Imagine you are age 25’ indicated. One respondent wrote ‘I do not know what i want to be, do, or have when i am 25. I don’t care any way’ while another protested even more succinctly: ‘How the Hell Do I know’.

These essays and other writings, then, do not grant us access to what these writers ‘really’ believed about age; they were written mostly in classrooms, directed towards teachers, for distant research projects that their writers knew little about. However, these very limitations mean that they can tell us a great deal about how teenagers thought they ought to write and talk about adulthood, and how this age-category was understood by society. Aware that they were writing for an adult audience, these teenagers tried to demonstrate their own maturity by showcasing their awareness of the social and psychological tropes that distinguished adolescence and adulthood. While most of the writers deliberately presented ideas about age-categories that supported dominant societal beliefs, it is also evident that when they challenged these narratives about adulthood, they knew exactly what they were doing. Furthermore, as black feminist ‘standpoint’ theory informs us, a social group which is systematically disempowered can possess a particular kind of insight into the categories that inform its marginalisation.

Therefore, looking at how children and teenagers wrote about age when they were still under twenty, rather than solely focusing on adult memories of childhood and adolescence, is revealing. While all adults were once children, they are no longer children, and so can no longer speak from this subordinate social position; as Carolyn Steedman has written, ‘the child grows up and goes away’.

These essays were primarily written by white working-class adolescents, and so are undercut by the experiences of girls of colour, of immigrant girls, and of elite and middle-class girls. This article, however, will pay particular attention to one minority demographic that problematised accounts of becoming an adult woman in post-war Britain: young lesbians. Lesbian histories of post-war Britain, especially for the period before second-wave feminism and the founding of the Gay Liberation Front in 1970, are exceptionally scant when compared with the numerous histories of male homosexuality. Uncovering lesbian narratives in accounts written by adolescent girls in this period is especially difficult. The only examples I have been able to find before the 1980s were collected by the short-lived Joint Council for Gay Teenagers (JCGT) during 1978–9, some of which were published in Breaking the Silence in 1980.
The JCGT emerged in 1978 after concerns were expressed from existing organisations about how to deal with the increasing numbers of callers under twenty-one to gay and lesbian helplines. It became an umbrella group, with affiliated organisations including London Gay Switchboard, Lesbian Line, Grapevine, Parents Enquiry, Gay Activists Alliance, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and Icebreakers. In 1978–9, the JCGT sent out survey forms to all gay help organisations across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, asking them to use a loose series of questions to interview gay and lesbian teenagers about their experiences.\textsuperscript{16} Presumably operating with limited resources, the adult interviewers did not record the interviews but wrote down the teenagers’ responses in note form before typing them up into the kind of ‘case histories’ that JCGT wanted: no longer than a thousand words, in first person, and with all identifying details, including names and places, disguised.\textsuperscript{17}

Therefore, the JCGT responses are not ‘written by adolescents’ in the same way as the major source sets considered in this article. Nevertheless, the paucity of self-narratives produced by post-war lesbian teenagers makes them invaluable. Furthermore, unlike the written self-narratives in the other source sets, these interviews were voluntary and conducted outside the classroom; this put lesbian teenagers in a different position from the adolescent writers surveyed by the other research projects, more able to dissent from adult expectations. Their narratives challenged the normative ideas of maturity expressed by their heterosexual peers, emphasising that their sexual identities actively excluded them from achieving adulthood.

Post-war shifts in popular psychological understandings of age-stages inscribed adolescence as a liminal, transient and inadequate state.\textsuperscript{18} This reflected changing ideas about adulthood, which became more tightly associated with the achievement of rationality, empathy and abstract reasoning.\textsuperscript{19} Adulthood was not usually linked to a specific chronological age – although it was assumed that you could not become an adult until you had left school – but to a set of idealised goals and qualities. This meant that, if you failed to meet these expectations, you could be viewed as physically mature but not truly ‘grown-up’ – and, given the positive attributes ascribed to ‘adult citizens’ in this period, this could position you as pathological.

Adulthood, like other age-categories, has been constructed differently in different times and places, and should not simply be treated as a neutral state. However, there are no histories of healthy adulthood in post-war Britain, although there has been some work on the ‘midlife crisis’ or ‘middle age’, defined as an unstable or unsettled period explicitly distinguished from stable ‘maturity’.\textsuperscript{20} Childhood and adolescence are defined against adulthood, in the same way as femininity is defined against masculinity; to fully understand how understandings of age have shifted across time, we must examine adulthood in its own right. In this context, teenagers’ narratives provide an especially rich source base for exploring popular ideas of adulthood in this period because they were the group that was most often asked to explicitly reflect on what being an adult meant.

‘In everything I do I am told that it is just a stage I am going through’: conceptualising adulthood

Adolescent girls writing in the 1960s and 1970s positioned adults as responsible, hard-working – and often overwhelmed. As one fifteen-year-old girl from the MMEC
project wrote in 1963 in an essay on ‘Getting away from it all’, where she pictured herself as a mother: ‘Having spent a hard, long week of housework, shopping, cleaning and scolding children, I was determined that for just one weekend I would leave our house, children and neighbours and “get away from it all”’. Interestingly, her decision to write from an adult perspective was echoed by the majority of teenagers who chose this subject, indicating that the idea of ‘getting away from it all’ signalled an adult need to escape from the burdens of everyday life that felt less relevant to adolescents. NCDS respondents also drew on the discourses of stress and overwork that had started to emerge in the British popular press from the 1950s onwards. As one girl wrote, ‘I am a teacher and I am very busy … when school is over I go home and I have a pile of books to be marked and when I have to go to bed I put my head on my pillow and i go to sleep straight away’.

These relentlessly realistic depictions of future adult lives contrast sharply with the fantastical and aspirational stories sent to Mass-Observation by twelve- to sixteen-year-old boys in the 1930s. Both teenage girls and boys in the post-war period expected to take up jobs that were similar to those their parents had done, to live in modest housing, and to be careful with money. The divergence in these accounts seems out of step with the rise of affluence between the 1930s and the 1960s, and the contemporary and historiographical assumption that horizons were widening for this generation. However, when we remember that these writers were writing for a particular adult audience, this shift of emphasis makes more sense. Working-class teenagers in the 1960s and 1970s were acutely aware that their generation was criticised as irresponsible and delinquent, and were determined to prove that they did not share these failings – pressures that were not felt by their 1930s counterparts, in a period when ‘youth’ was viewed much more romantically and optimistically, despite the impact of economic depression. This also potentially motivated the writers’ impulse to emphasise that they recognised that their lives were much easier now than they would be later. In the Sheppey essays, this combined with the return of hardship to create even darker futures, as both male and female respondents frequently wrote that they would be on the dole or lose their jobs.

Black teenage girls were especially careful to emphasise their own responsibility and maturity even before economic crisis returned in the late 1970s, recognising early on that they would have to plan carefully if they did not want their futures to be derailed by the racist stereotyping they experienced in school. Nineteen-year-old Evelyn was still in school when she published ‘Lissen Sisters’ in the first issue of Ahfiwe, the journal of a supplementary school that served the black community in Lambeth, in 1974. Addressing young black women like herself, she wrote:

I have done what a lot of young black girls do today: Don’t go to school, swear a lot, run around, go home late and only believe in boys, fashion and blues … A black girl have to think about life not just having babies and boyfriends. I listened to my parents till I was 16, after that I didn’t and now I am sorry. I hear a lot of girls saying to hell with ‘A’ level, ‘O’ level, CSE and GCE but it will help get you somewhere in life … We should have ambition, education and a career in front of us.

Portraying one’s peers as selfish and irresponsible, as Evelyn does in this article, was a common tactic used by these writers to demonstrate their own maturity and utilise their psychological knowledge. Developmental psychological conceptions...
of childhood and adolescence exercised fundamental influence on teaching practice in post-war British state schools and on parenting advice manuals, as well as in other contexts such as child welfare services, as has been established by recent historiography.\(^{30}\) In short, as the work of researchers such as Jean Piaget became more widely diffused and established in Britain than it had been in the interwar period, both childhood and adolescence were re-envisaged as segmented into discontinuous maturational stages. While Piaget himself had stressed that these age-linked expectations were related to the child’s developmental rather than chronological age – so, in theory, a thirteen-year-old could operate with the intellectual capacity of an adult – in popular practice, these stages were taken as shorthand for how children and adolescents behaved, thought and understood. And as Piaget developed his work, in collaboration with Bärbel Inhelder, into the 1950s and 1960s, he increasingly promoted a more rigid conception of developmental stages, especially as he became interested in how early neuroscientific findings might link the structural development of the brain to the sequence he had identified.\(^{31}\)

Far from being abstract intellectual debates, these ideas were eagerly taken up in discussions about childhood and adolescence in British educational institutions – for example, in the influential and widely read Plowden Report on *Children and Their Primary Schools* (1967).\(^{32}\) They were also expressed in the practical provision of separate secondary schools for English and Welsh adolescents after the 1944 Education Act, and in the acceleration of provision of free separate secondary education in Scotland after 1936, before which about two-thirds of students remained in all-age elementaries.\(^{33}\) This reframing of the teenage years made post-war adolescence very different from interwar adolescence. Both interwar and post-war adolescents developed distinctive youth cultures, enjoyed individual spending power – especially if they were young men – and were envisaged as experiencing a period of ‘storm and stress’\(^{34}\). However, in the post-war period, adolescence was more sharply separated from adulthood in psychological terms, as it was repositioned as a distinct stage rather than as part of a smoother continuation of growth towards maturity, and moreover, as a stage that was characterised by its inadequacies rather than its strengths.

Teenagers were clearly aware of these new definitions of adolescence, which they encountered in films and magazines as well in the classroom.\(^{35}\) They often employed the language of developmental stages when they wrote about their own experiences and those of their peers, as well as positioning adolescence as a problematic period of transition. This was especially common in a set of MMEC essays from 1964 on ‘Myself at 16’. One respondent admitted that she bullied her sisters, did not do enough to help around the house, behaved childishly and had a violent temper, but presented these faults deterministically: ‘I am going through the adolescent stage and psychiatrists say that teenagers should not be punished but understood’.\(^{36}\) A sixteen-year-old girl who was part of John and Elizabeth Newson’s longitudinal study said similarly in 1974, ‘I think honestly you’re mixed up at the moment, “cause you’re neither one type of thing … You’re not a child any longer, yet there and again you’re not a grown up’.\(^{37}\) Some of the MMEC essays were more critical of this dominant mode of organisation: one sixteen-year-old thought that her moods were attributed by adults as ‘due to “a difficult” stage that I am going through. It seems to me that a girls life consists wholly of going through difficult stages’.\(^{38}\) Another wrote, ‘In everything I do I am told that
it is just a stage I am going through which I will grow out of it is “my age”. This is what I have been told since I was five years old it was always “my age” and it seems that it will continue to be “my age” forever.39

Other writers resisted the narrative that adulthood was the ideal state of being by emphasising that they wished they were young again – either from their present standpoint, or from the perspective of an imagined future adulthood. One NCDS respondent wrote, imagining herself as a twenty-five-year-old woman:

I wish I was yung again like when I was yung I wanted to be older … my sister loves school and she don’t want to leave. now when I have my birthdays I think about when I was young and I had birthday parties but when you get older you don’t have birthday parties … I think about school alot and how the teachers used to be. when you get older noone cares about you. when I was young I used to sing alot but now I hadly sing.40

Another respondent presented this feeling as part of a basic laundry list of adulthood:

GETTING MARRIED

HAVING CHILDREN…

GETTING older

WISHING I was young41

The sixteen-year-olds from Sheppey shared the concerns of the younger NCDS respondents. ‘As time went by I just seemed to get older and greyer everyday. I just wished I was young again, back at school having fun … if only I could start at the age of sixteen’, wrote one girl, imagining herself as an elderly woman, while another reflected – simultaneously evoking and challenging stereotypes of teenage self-absorption – ‘gazing out of the window, I wondered if those sixteen years olds ever wonder what its like to be sixty’.42 These writers played into adult discourses while also employing them for their own ends as they created mature personas, emphasising that, contrary to the assertions of developmental psychologists, they could think outside their own subjectivities and recognise the ‘privileges’ bestowed upon adolescents.

The older respondents from the MMEC, coming of age in a more affluent period than their Sheppey counterparts, were more likely to say that they were looking forward to adulthood, but some still admitted that they were apprehensive at the prospect: ‘like all children, I wanted to be an adult. Nowadays, the reverse is true for me … I certainly don’t like the thought of becoming an adult, then growing old. This too, I feel, is characteristic of how many teenagers feel’.43 Another respondent wrote that ‘When I was younger I used to long for the day when I would become sixteen … Now, at sixteen, I do not want to grow older’.44 The NCDS, MMEC and Sheppey essays, therefore, all deployed the dominant adult discourse, referenced by many writers, that ‘school days are the best days of your life’, but also implicitly critiqued the idea that adulthood was the ultimate goal of the maturational process, suggesting that childhood and adolescence had an inherent value of their own.45

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‘If you couldn’t have a child you wouldn’t feel like a woman’: imagining marriage and motherhood

In 1970, Jane, a student at a junior high school in Derbyshire, asked to ‘Write about yourself, about any part of your experience of life so far’ by her teacher for the DWA project, composed a script which she called ‘Monday Morning’ that depicted a typical conversation between her, her mother and her sister Susan:

Mum I don’t know kids you treat ‘em right and then you have to flog your self to death looking after them …

[Jane] Er Mum, you know, well this week and we had piles of homework and I didn’t have time to clean my shoes and they’re really filthy

Mum And what time do you think I have with all the washing and ironing to do. In fact all I ever do is to clean up after you two.

[Susan] Well don’t worry as soon as I leave school I’m leaving here and then I won’t be in your way, will I.

Mum very angry by now, You cheeky little hound … Kids why do I ever bother with them.46

This script is remarkably similar, both in style and in content, to the piece of writing produced by three eight-year-old girls at primary school in 1976 which Steedman discusses at length in her *The Tidy House* (1982). As Steedman argues, one of the houses that these girls invented is ‘tidy’ because it is childless: children are seen as a nuisance to their mothers.47 Jane was not only imagining her adult life as difficult; she was thinking about the future from a point in time where she and her sister were still positioned as the burden and the inconvenience.

Getting married and having children was seen as a mandatory rite of passage by the vast majority of white working-class female adolescents in this period. Few girls were able to write about their futures without mentioning these two events, although not all were as explicit about this as one NCDS essayist: ‘I think it’s good to have children or if you could’nt have a child you would’nt feel like a women, you would’nt be a women, your’ed just be one scrached and cracked orniment’.48 ‘Womanhood’ – and hence, ‘adulthood’ – for this writer was bound up with successfully finding a man and reproducing, and this was as true for teenage girls in the late 1970s as it was in the early 1960s. Most of the participants in the Newsons’ longitudinal study turned sixteen in 1974; the researchers commented that ‘the central preoccupation of female [adolescent] interviewees is to get married and have children’.49 To some extent, this continuity was unsurprising, as the images of adult womanhood that these girls were consuming remained the same across both decades. Angela McRobbie wrote in her study of the phenomenally popular *Jackie* magazine, conducted in 1977, that its contents had remained virtually identical since it had started publishing in 1964, with a focus on finding a boyfriend, getting married and having a baby.50

Nevertheless, white female adolescents did not idealise this inevitable future, but focused on the hard work of being a wife and mother. As one eleven-year-old NCDS respondent wrote, describing her daily routine:
1. Husband nags
2. It’s always me that has to do the washing up.
3. In my spare time I would sit and read the paper.
4. Husband never does the floor.
5. Baby’s always crying.
6. In my spare time I would knit myself a jumper
7. I have to do the beds.51

‘Working motherhood’ had already become more common for women from a range of class backgrounds after the Second World War, but continued to rise during this period: around 48 per cent of all British mothers were working by 1981 compared to around 28 per cent in 1961.52 Teenage girls writing in the 1960s and 1970s took this shift for granted. They were often explicit about how they planned to combine children and career, meticulously planning a range of childcare options that would allow them to work – sometimes part-time – while having young children.53 Girls were thinking about their responsibilities as both mothers and workers before they had even finished their own childhoods, already mentally running through the ‘organisational labour’ of being a working mother, to use Worth and Paterson’s term.54 As another NCDS respondent wrote: ‘I lead an ordinary kind of life. I am married and have a little girl of one year old. I do not go to work, but when my daughter is old enough to go to school I will go to college, and hope to become an infant teacher’.55 Similarly, a sixteen-year-old in Sheppey imagined: ‘I stayed at work until my first baby was born … We called her Hiedi. Three years later I had another baby a boy … We called him Danny … Hiedi started school when she was 5 and Danny started 2 years later. I went back to work.’56

In their writing, girls sometimes invoked their own mothers to deflect anticipated criticisms that suggested they would not really care about their children if they wanted to work, as in this NCDS essay:

I am 25 years of age and teach History at a local Grammer School … Although we have one girl of two, I still enjoy a social life. This does not mean that I ignore her, because I love her with all my heart and love playing with her. My Mother who does not live too far away comes and babysits for us.57

If girls did not expect their mother to help look after their children, they still framed these narratives in defensive ways. Another respondent wrote ‘I mit [might] have a job at a supmocit [supermarket] and my baby would be look after by someone that I new [knew] and that the baby new [knew] some [so] she would not be afried’.58 These essays reveal a complicated emotional landscape, indicating the significance of paid work to women regardless of whether or not it was a socially mobile or ‘prestigious’ career – writers were as likely to claim that they needed childcare so they could go to work at a supermarket or shop than so they could be a doctor or teacher – but also the maternal guilt that these girls already felt about their imaginary children.59

This recurring theme of wifely and maternal devotion in the NCDS, MMEC and Sheppey archives indicates that these writers, like Jane, were fully cognisant of adult narratives of the sacrifices they had made for this ‘selfish’ generation. However, employing these same themes, South Asian and African-Caribbean girls were often more critical of marriage and motherhood than their white counterparts. This might have been tied to the fact that, on average, girls of colour and immigrant girls were more
likely to declare themselves career orientated and ‘ambitious’ than British-born white working-class girls, as we saw in Evelyn’s *Ahfwe* article. Michelle, a sixteen-year-old West Indian participant in a study of black girls in a London comprehensive school, made similar assertions in 1976:

> I want a proper job first and some kind of skill so that if I do get married and have children I can go back to it; don’t want just relying on him for money, ‘cause I’ve got to look after myself … Maybe I’ll be a housewife or something like that, but I always picture myself working.\(^{50}\)

Amajit Kaur published ‘An Indian Girl Growing Up in England’ in *Multiracial School* in 1973, where she remembered that ‘[a]t fourteen I had decided that whatever happened I was not going to leave school and get a dead-end job’. In contrast, ‘the majority of my friends were rejecting school and they lived only for the weekends, while I lived for the school days’. She decided to stay on at school until she was sixteen and applied to the local technical college to do O Levels after completing her CSEs. At the time of writing, she was studying at a college of education.\(^{61}\)

South Asian girls also pushed back against both ethnic and romantic stereotypes, emphasising that ‘arranged marriage’ was not necessarily something that would happen to them or that they would resist, although some, like Kaur, stated they were worried about it. Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar wrote about a set of interviews they conducted with fifteen- to eighteen-year-old South Asian girls in the late 1970s, describing how these girls saw marriage as an issue that they could work out alongside their families, rather than an oppressive cultural practice they needed to be ‘saved’ from. Fifteen-year-old Kamaljit had:

> … known this boy for about two years now. We aren’t thinking of getting married yet but if I was to tell my parents about it they would agree because he is my religion. Besides, all my sisters have married who they wanted to… If he was English I think [my mum] would mind. I don’t know how she would react … she would tell me not to see him. Then it would be up to me to decide whether to see him or not. But I am the sort who can’t leave a family but can leave a boy.\(^{62}\)

Kamaljit’s narrative resisted the discourses of romantic love that developed after the Second World War and which were propagated by magazines like *Jackie* and by popular music, emphasising that she was not interested in finding ‘the one’ if that meant alienating her family.\(^{63}\)

Teenage African-Caribbean girls, however, were the most openly dismissive of the institution of marriage itself, similarly describing the self-sacrifice and devotion it required, but then using this as a reason to reject it. In Christine Griffin’s study of sixteen-year-old Birmingham school-leavers in 1979, she recorded this exchange between Carol and Sonia, who were African-Caribbean, and Clare and Jane, who were white. All four girls attended a mixed Roman Catholic comprehensive school, St Martin’s, in one of the city’s Social Priority Areas.

Carol: I don’t believe in marriage me. Waste of time.

Sonia: Nor me.

CG [Christine Griffin]: What about you? [To Clare and Jane]. Do you think you might?
Clare and Jane: Yeh.

Carol: I knew they would [laugh].

Another African-Caribbean girl, Marjory, who went to a different comprehensive in another Social Priority Area, expanded on this in a different conversation. When asked by Griffin ‘In the future do you think you’ll get married?’ she replied ‘No no no. Definitely not. Not marriage. You just suffer man. You’ve got to rush home from work and cook and tidy up and …’.64 By positioning themselves as ‘against’ marriage, black adolescent girls were resisting a strongly normative narrative.

‘People have been telling me for years that it was just a phase’: being a young lesbian

The achievement of adult status in post-war Britain was conditioned not only by gender, class and race, but by sexuality. Not all teenage writers either wanted to conform, or were able to conform, to the heteronormative expectations of which they were so acutely aware. Lesbians and gay men might not desire, or be able to attain, marriage and children; moreover, both male and female homosexuality was often seen as a marker of immature sexual development in both interwar and post-war Britain, and stigmatised using developmental psychological language such as the word ‘phase’.65 As Kate Fisher and Jana Funke have argued, the predominant early twentieth-century narrative that young men’s ‘undifferentiated’ or ‘undeveloped’ sexuality could be moulded by older male homosexuals highlighted the ‘corrupting’ influence of homosexual men; this narrative, although challenged, retained its power in post-war Britain.66 Female homosexuality might be understood in similar terms. Rebecca Jennings’s work on lesbianism in post-war Britain suggests that single female teachers were often portrayed as poor role models as they had no outlet for their ‘natural’ sexual and maternal instincts, and that student ‘crushes’ on older girls were reconfigured as a form of deviance that was common in adolescence.67

Constructions of homosexuality intersected with chronological age in interwar and post-war Britain not only because gay men and lesbians were positioned as potential threats to vulnerable adolescents, but because homosexual desire itself was seen as a sign of arrested sexual development, trapping one permanently as a teenager. Therefore, gay men and lesbians might be portrayed as both ‘dirty old men’ or ageing spinster seducers in the mould of ‘Sister George’ in The Killing of Sister George (1968), and as permanently confused adolescent adults, as Jennings notes.68 In the post-war period, this Freudian psychoanalytical language was bolstered further by the Piagetian developmental psychological language we have already encountered; it made sense to tag homosexual desire as something that belonged to one of these sequential developmental stages, but had no place once you had become an adult.69

In the mediated accounts recorded by JCGT, a dominant narrative trope is the encounter with an adult who tells the teenager that what they are experiencing is ‘just a passing phase’.70 This adult might be a parent or teacher, or a professional – an educational psychologist, a social worker, or a GP – whom they had been sent to talk to after coming out as homosexual. For example, eighteen-year-old Jane from Widnes told her interviewer:
People have been telling me for years that it was just a phase. It first came out at school when I was 14. I told a friend that I fancied her friend and she told everyone ... I had long talks to teachers and my mother found out and sent me to the doctor. All of them said that it would go away in the end and they were all wrong.\textsuperscript{71}

The idea of ‘going through a phase’ was fundamentally entwined with popular psychological and psychoanalytical knowledge, as eighteen-year-old Janet discovered when she told her mother than she was a lesbian: her mother told her that it was a ‘passing phase’ and that she was ‘insecure’ because of her father’s infidelities.\textsuperscript{72}

Other young women anticipated this challenge and combatted it. Middle-class Sarah, sixteen, living in the London suburbs, recalled that after her parents found out she had been to a lesbian club: ‘I told them that some of the women in the club had been about thirty and obviously were not in a passing phase’.\textsuperscript{73} The ubiquity of this encounter in the narratives of teenage lesbians indicates the power this trope had in the lives of adolescents; in short, these young women were being told that they could not know their own minds not only because they were adolescents, but because what they were experiencing was in itself a sign of their incomplete development. Some accounts even linked the psychological immaturity of lesbianism to physical immaturity. Nineteen-year-old Germaine from Alton, who had attended a secondary modern school, recalled: ‘I heard a rumour that if you didn’t start menstruating until late in your teens, this was a sign that you were “one of those”’.\textsuperscript{74}

Young lesbians might remain isolated in their peer groups even if they denied being ‘one of those’, because they were unable to genuinely invest in traditional rites of passage. Julie, sixteen, from Walthamstow, told the JCGT interviewer that ‘It really is horrible at school because everyone keeps on at you about whether or not you have a boyfriend and if not, why not’. She ‘invented a boy called Joey’ to convince her sister that she was seeing someone.\textsuperscript{75} Many other teenage lesbians struggled because they did not have boyfriends to talk about at school or work.\textsuperscript{76} As Hannah Charnock has argued, ‘[f]or girls of the post-war generation, discussing their heterosexuality was a crucial way in which they created and expressed intimacy with their closest friends’.\textsuperscript{77} Because young lesbians were either excluded from these conversations or had to pretend they were interested in boys to participate, their sexuality kept them at some distance from their peers.

Young people, therefore, might seek validation of their identities from homosexual adults who had made the difficult transition into maturity without having to deny their sexual orientation. As the age of consent for homosexual men was still twenty-one in England and Wales in the 1970s, and sex between men of any age was not legalised in Scotland until 1980, appeals from young homosexuals often put gay help organisations in a difficult legal position. The first meeting of the JCGT in 1978 emphasised this problem – which had been the main impetus behind the founding of the organisation – and emphasised that the concerns about ‘corruption’ affected young women as well as young men, despite the fact that sex between women had never been illegal: ‘Gay workers in befriending organisations are at serious risk when they help gay teenagers, both from the law (as regards males under 21) and from the common public stereotype which views adult gays as potential corrupters of the young’.\textsuperscript{78} This particularly affected teenagers living in more isolated areas; teenage callers to North Wales Friend, based in the predominantly rural county of Gwynedd, were advised to contact...
the Merseyside branch because they had a youth group. This was presumably not at all helpful to teenagers who could not afford the time or money to travel so far.

Even when gay organisations felt able to provide for the needs of teenage clients, young lesbians might not benefit from these services as much as gay men. A survey of gay and lesbian helplines conducted by the JCGT from 1978–9 revealed that while a majority of callers of all age groups were men, this was especially pronounced for callers under twenty-one, with some helplines receiving no calls from young women at all in the period under observation. This persistent problem was initially explained in deterministic terms that attributed the lack of visible young lesbians as something that was fundamental to the female experience. In an all-male meeting of organisers of under-21 gay groups in London in 1975, it was stated that ‘perhaps it was more difficult for young women to come to terms with their gayness’. However, at the beginning of the 1980s, JCGT started to explore more structural explanations for the absence of young women from its endeavours, noting in relation to the Gay Youth Movement conference held in Birmingham in 1980, where only nine of the eighty-four attendees were female, that ‘[i]t was agreed that a special effort for co-operation and anti-sexism was needed from the men’. This reflected the language used by male consciousness-raising groups that developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, inspired by the Women’s Liberation Movement; many men involved in these groups were gay.

The invisibility of younger adult lesbians meant that many teenagers found it difficult to combat the idea of a ‘passing phase’, believing that female homosexual desire was firmly linked to adolescence or to a ‘spinsterish’ old age. Some young women believed the language of psychological phases, and were surprised to find that adult lesbians existed. Sarah remembered that ‘When the Gay News trial [1977] came out I realised that there were a lot of homosexuals over the age of 14’. Elizabeth, fifteen, from Scotland, said that ‘It’s very hard to find other lesbians of my age & in my situation’; she found a women’s night at SHRG [Scottish Homosexual Reform Group] unwelcoming because ‘[m]ost of them were rather heavy stereotyped women’. Gerry, seventeen, when asked ‘What do you think are the worse [sic] problems for young lesbian women?’ said ‘When people talk about homosexuals they mean men – LESBIANS ARE INVISIBLE’. This had ramifications for the social lives of teenage lesbians who had embraced their sexual orientation. Nineteen-year-old Tim, who lived in Cardiff, felt ‘there’s not a lot for gays in Cardiff – two clubs, one basically for men, and only one really gay pub’.

If young white lesbians felt invisible, the situation was even worse for young lesbians of colour. Sakthi Suriyaparakasam has argued that the standard surveys of teenage homosexuals completed by organisations such as JCGT and the London Gay Teenage Group routinely under-represented black and ethnic minority young people; given that these surveys also interviewed more men than women, I have not been able to find contemporary testimonies from teenage lesbians from minority ethnic backgrounds before the 1980s. This also indicates a broader problem in considering how teenage girls interacted with heteronormative expectations in this period. The teenagers whose testimonies we have considered here were, by definition, confident in their sexuality, but it is likely that many young women who experienced homosexual desire were unable to break away from the prescribed path to maturity that had been laid out before
them, and therefore remain absent from the archives. While we cannot assume anything about the sexualities of young female writers who contributed to the MMEC, DWA, NCDS and Sheppey essay collections, we can mark where their accounts of their adult lives deviate from the expected life course.\(^8^9\) In the NCDS, a significant minority of eleven-year-old girls orientated their daily routines at the age of twenty-five around their female friends:

> I am Miss K … and I live in a flat in London with a friend of mine who is called Miss B … [Miss B.] works in a dress shop which is just across the road from our flat … I get up at about 7.30 to make our breakfast and when it is ready I wake [Miss B.] up. she usually grumbles and say’s that its too early for her to get up, but I don’t take any notice of her.\(^9^0\)

Around 3\(^{\text{per cent}}\) of the NCDS cohort explicitly said at the age of eleven that they did not want to ever get married.\(^9^1\) Furthermore, this figure remained the same when this cohort reached sixteen in 1974, suggesting that for these respondents, not marrying was not simply about being too young to have formed an interest in romance or sex, but said something else significant about how they saw their futures, reflecting the resistance to marriage expressed by adolescent black girls interviewed in other sociological studies.\(^9^2\) Girls were much less likely than boys to say that they did not want to get married, but there were counter-examples:

> My name is Miss. S … I have never thought of getting marryed it sound,s bouring the way my freinds discribe [describe] it … My life as a spinster is Realy exiting [exciting] … My love line says I will meet a tall dark and handsome man but it never happens. I like my Job and will never give my notice in. I think I am happier as a spinster than if I was married.\(^9^3\)

Some of these female writers decided that, rather than getting married or living life as a single working woman, they would become nuns. One writer imagined that, after joining a convent, ‘I felt happy, glad and satisfied never have I known myself so glad’.\(^9^4\) While, again, we can draw no conclusions about this writer’s sexuality, it is notable in the JCGT accounts and in retrospective testimonies that a number of young lesbians had originally planned to be nuns (and young gay men to become priests) as a way out of what seemed like an impossible future. As Megan, born in South Wales in 1955, who attended an all-girls secondary modern school and originally did not come from a Roman Catholic background, recalled as an adult: ‘Then I read about nuns, and nuns are women, and I felt very drawn to being a nun because I could be with other women. I wasn’t aware of any sexual feelings’. Megan joined a convent at the age of seventeen, though she left within a few years.\(^9^5\) Girls and young women who imagined adult futures that did not follow the traditional route of marriage and motherhood did not necessarily experience same-sex attraction; nevertheless, they were marking themselves out as deviant in ways they might not yet have fully appreciated.

**Conclusion**

By positioning marriage and motherhood as necessary conditions for the achievement of adulthood, and by suggesting that one could not be truly logical, emotionally mature and self-reliant before becoming an adult, developmental psychological discourse in post-war Britain set teenage girls on a predetermined track towards a familiar future. Those who resisted these edicts – single and/or childless women, young lesbians,
and girls of colour – could be stigmatised not solely because they were black or homosexual but because their life-cycle choices suggested that they were fundamentally immature. The kinds of self-narrative writing that adolescent girls were doing in these research projects may well have laid the foundations for new kinds of subjectivities in their later lives, reflecting Abrams’s argument about the way that the ‘breakthrough generation’ constructed their life stories. However, they were also forced to write for an audience where they knew they were not guaranteed a sympathetic hearing, who might easily assume that they were as selfish and irresponsible as the ‘typical’ teenager of the 1960s and 1970s.

For this reason, these writers had to choose between two different strategies: either they reiterated adult discourses to prove their own maturity, often deliberately criticising their peers as they did so, or they directly challenged these stereotypes, which meant undercutting received ideas about adolescence as a stage that was worthwhile only as part of a progression towards being ‘grown-up’. In the process, they reckoned with the inherent contradictions of post-war adulthood and womanhood, a state that was presented both as a desirable goal and as an age-stage when you had to put others first, even if this led to misery, stress and exhaustion. New societal ideas about adulthood therefore constrained their choices even while they still thought of themselves as adolescents, because they defined what they must do to escape the stigmatised identity of being a ‘teenager’ rather than a ‘woman’.

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Notes
1. Multiple Marking of English Compositions [MMEC], Institute of Education, WRI 1/1/1 (2 of 3), 611. Background details in WRI 1/1/7 (3 of 3), 611 and WRI 1/1/8 (3 of 3), 611.
2. Lynn Abrams, ‘Liberating the Female Self: Epiphanies, Conflict and Coherence in the Life Stories of Post-War British Women’, Social History 39 (2014), pp.14–35, pp. 15, 18, 21.
3. Laura Paterson, ‘I Didn’t Feel Like My Own Person’: Paid Work in Women’s Narratives of Self and Working Motherhood, 1950–1980’, Contemporary British History 33 (2019), p.407.
4. Abrams, ‘Liberating the Female Self’, pp. 15, 22.
5. The writers of these essays frequently make spelling and grammar errors. I have decided not to insert [sic] after each of these errors because the number of errors mean that it breaks the flow of the text and obscures what the writers are trying to say. I have inserted words in square brackets when the meaning might otherwise be unclear. All spelling and grammar errors in direct quotations from these essays can be assumed to be the writer’s errors.
6. In the post-war English and Welsh education system, these school types had strong class connotations. Elite or middle-class students tended to attend grammar or independent schools, while working-class students tended to attend secondary modern schools. Comprehensives were attended by students from all class backgrounds, but might still skew towards working-class students as elite or middle-class students had the means to access the fee-paying independent sector.
7. My consideration of the NCDS cohort is based on my reading of 6,500 essays, or approximately 50 per cent of the total, due to the large number of essays in this source set.

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8. Dawn Lyon, Bethany Morgan Brett and Graham Crow, ‘Working with Material from the Sheppey Archive’, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 15 (2012), pp. 301–09, p. 306.

9. MMEC, WRI 1/1/8 (2 of 3), 286.

10. Lyon et al., ‘Sheppey Archive’, p. 306.

11. NCDS, 1175. N112273; 5177. N18713X.

12. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 2000)

13. Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860–1931* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 79.

14. Another group that problematises ideas of growing up is trans boys, who also experienced female socialisation but whose experience of puberty, for example, would not necessarily have felt like progress towards maturity. Discussion of this group is beyond the scope of this article, and poses even more difficult (though not necessarily insurmountable) source issues than considering adolescent lesbians.

15. The exceptions for the 1950s and 1960s are Rebecca Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: a Lesbian History of Post-War Britain 1945–71* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Jill Gardiner, *From the Closet to the Screen: Women at the Gateways Club, 1945–85* (London: Pandora, 2003); Lesbian History Group, *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History, 1840–1985* (London: Women’s Press, 1993). Even work that focuses on the 1970s onwards tends to focus on separatist debates within the WLM rather than the ordinary lives of lesbians; for example, Jeska Rees, “‘Taking Your Politics Seriously’: Lesbian History and the Women’s Liberation Movement in England’, in Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (eds), *Sapphists and Sexologists* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 87–105.

16. Hall-Carpenter Archives [HCA], LSE Library, HCA/JCGT/1/1, 24/3/79.

17. HCA/JCGT/5/5.

18. Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?: How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 178–84.

19. For example: J. B. Edwards, ‘Some Studies of the Moral Development of Children’, *Educational Research* 7 (1965), pp. 200–11.

20. John Benson, *Prime Time: A History of the Middle Aged in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997); Mark Jackson, ‘Self-Help, Marriage Guidance and the Making of the Midlife Crisis’, in Mark Jackson and Martin D. Moore (eds), *Balancing The Self: Medicine, Politics and the Regulation of Health in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 250–85.

21. MMEC, WRI 1/1/1 (2 of 3), 387.

22. Mark Jackson, ‘Stress in Post-War Britain: An Introduction’, in Mark Jackson (ed.), *Stress in Post-War Britain 1945–85* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 6.

23. NCDS, 144. N14810F.

24. Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, ‘Children, Class, and the Search for Security: Writing the Future in 1930s Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History* 28, 3 (2017), pp. 367–89.

25. For example: MMEC, WRI 1/1/1 (3 of 3), 459; NCDS 216. N18107F; SLA 4867ess097.

26. Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London: Palgrave, 1983), p. 216.

27. For example: SLA, 4867ess092.

28. Grace Evans, ‘Those Loud Black Girls’, in Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah (eds), *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education* (London: The Women’s Press, 1980), pp. 183–90.

29. Evelyn G. Christie, ‘Lissen Sisters’, *Afiwe: Journal of the Afiwe School and Abeng*, Issue 1, undated, pp. 8–9, Black Cultural Archives, WONG/2/1-2.

30. Tisdall, *Progressive Education?: Angela Davis, Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Andrew Burchell, “The Adolescent School Pupil, Psycho-Social Theory and Practice, and the Construction of a Pedagogy of Discipline in Britain, 1911–1989’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2018); Jennifer Crane, *Child Protection in England, 1960–2000: Expertise, Experience and Emotion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

31. Tisdall, *Progressive Education?*, pp. 58, 66.

32. Department of Education and Science: *Children and Their Primary Schools: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)*, Volume I: The Report (London: HMSO, 1967), pp. 10–11, 18–25.

33. Tisdall, *Progressive Education?*, pp. 65–66, 187–88; Lindsay Paterson, Alison Pattie and Ian J. Deary, ‘Social Class, Gender and Secondary Education in Scotland in the 1950s’, *Oxford Review of Education* 37 (2011), pp. 383–401, p. 384.
34. David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Inter-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1995); Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918 to 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

35. Janet Fink and Penny Tinkler, 'Teetering on the Edge: Portraits of Innocence, Risk and Young Female Sexualities in 1950s’ and 1960s’ British Cinema', *Women’s History Review* 26 (2017), pp. 9–25; Barbara Hudson, ‘Femininity and Adolescence’, in Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava (eds), *Gender and Generation* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1984).

36. MMEC, WRI 1/1/8 (2 of 3), 374.

37. Elizabeth Newson, John Newson, Diane Richardson, and Joyce Scaife, ‘Perspectives in Sex-Role Stereotyping: Sex Roles in Adolescence and Pre-Adolescence’, in Jane Chetwynd and Oonagh Hartnett (eds), *The Sex Role System: Psychological and Sociological Perspectives* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 39.

38. MMEC, WRI 1/1/8 (3 of 3), 587.

39. MMEC, WRI 1/1/8 (3 of 3), 498.

40. NCDS, 127. N14255A. See also 296. N20968R; 298. N21041F.

41. NCDS, 5018. N18437W.

42. SLA, 4867ess111, 4867ess104.

43. MMEC, WRI 1/1/8 (1 of 3), 39.

44. MMEC, WRI 1/1/8 (1 of 3), 44.

45. For example: MMEC, WRI 1/1/1 (3 of 3), 408; NCDS, 5864, N19934N.

46. Development of Writing Abilities [DWA], WRI/2/1/65, Class Q75 scripts - Wilsthorpe Junior High - Junior High - Form 3, top stream 1 of 5. [Names have been changed].

47. Carolyn Steedman, *The Tidy House: Little Girls Writing* (London: Virago, 1981), pp. 34, 42.

48. NCDS, 6183. N20526F. While discussion of infertility is beyond the scope of this article, see Angela Davis, ‘Oral History and Women’s Accounts of Infertility in Postwar England’, in Tracey Loughran and Gayle Davis (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 123–40.

49. MMEC, WRI 1/1/1 (1 of 3), 44.

50. Angela McRobbie, ‘Just Like a Jackie Story’, in Angela McRobbie and Trisha McCabe (eds), *Feminism for Girls: An Adventure Story* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 113–28.

51. NCDS, 1969, 2911. N14516C. This use of ‘spare time’ rather than ‘leisure’ fits with Claire Langhamer’s findings in *Women’s Leisure in England 1920–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 22, even though Langhamer’s interviewees would have formed part of the previous generational cohort.

52. Stephen J. Hunt (ed.), *Family Trends: British Families Since the 1950s* (London: Family and Parenting Institute, 2009), p. 46.

53. For example: NCDS, 207. N17872H; 221. N18348W; 261. N19819L; 1009. N10926A; 1635. N12108G.

54. Eve Worth and Laura Paterson, “‘How is She Going to Manage with the Children?’” Organizational Labour, Working and Mothering in Britain, c.1960–1990’, *Past and Present* 246, Supplement 15 (2020), pp. 318–43.

55. NCDS, 6448. N21003Z.

56. SLA, 4867ess090.

57. NCDS, 519. N10041W.

58. NCDS, 611. N10225C.

59. On the emotional importance of paid manual labour to post-war women, see Margaret Williamson, “‘I’m Going to get a Job at the Factory’: Attitudes to Women’s Employment in a Mining Community, 1945–65,’ *Women’s History Review* 12 (2003), pp. 407–21.

60. Mary Fuller, ‘Black Girls in a London Comprehensive School,’ in Rosemary Deem (ed.), *Schooling for Women’s Work* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 52–65.

61. Amajit Kaur, ‘An Indian Girl Growing up in England’, *Multiracial School* 2 (1973), pp. 1–4.

62. Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, ‘Resistances and Responses: The Experiences of Black Girls in Britain’, in McRobbie et al., *Feminism for Girls*, p. 142.

63. Claire Langhamer, *The English In Love: The Intimate Story of An Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Rosalind Watkiss Singleton, “‘(Today I met) the Boy I’m Gonna Marry’”: Romantic Expectations of Teenage Girls in the 1960s West Midlands’, in Lucy Robinson, Keith Gildart, Anna Gough-Yates, Sian Lincoln, Bill Osgerby, John Street, Peter Webb and Matthew Worley (eds), *Youth Culture and Social Change: Making a Difference by Making a Noise* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 119–46.
64. Christine Griffin, Typical Girls? Young Women from School to the Job Market (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 54–5.

65. Although Rebecca Jennings’s work on lesbian mothers has shown how motherhood could be both desirable and possible for British lesbians, at least from the 1970s onwards; ‘Lesbian Motherhood and the Artificial Insemination by Donor Scandal of 1978’, Twentieth Century British History 28 (2017), pp. 570–94.

66. Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, ‘The Age of Attraction: Age, Gender and the History of Modern Male Homosexuality’, Gender and History 31 (2019), pp. 266–83.

67. Jennings, Tomboys and Bachelor Girls, pp. 23–4, 54. This builds on Alison Oram’s work on the inter-war period: ‘To Cook Dinners with Love in Them’?: Sexuality, Marital Status and Women Teachers in England and Wales, 1920–39’, in Kathleen Weiler and Sue Middleton (eds), Telling Women’s Lives: Narrative Inquiries in the History of Women’s Education (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), pp. 97, 104–5.

68. Jennings, Tomboys and Bachelor Girls, pp. 36–8, 76, 90. The ‘dirty old man’ stereotype is repeated by young gay men in HCA/JCGT/7/1 and HCA/JCGT/7/5.

69. Chris Waters, Sexology, in Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds), Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 41–63.

70. The significance of this phrase in the lives of lesbians up to the 1980s is indicated by the fact that the Lesbian History Group chose to call their 1993 text Not A Passing Phase.

71. JCGT, ‘Attitudes to Being Gay’ (1978–9), HCA/JCGT/1/1.

72. HCA/JCGT/7/5.

73. HCA/JCGT/7/5.

74. Michael Burbridge and Jonathan Walters (eds), Breaking the Silence: Gay Teenagers Speak for Themselves (London: Joint Council for Gay Teenagers, 1981), p. 54. This reflects Julie-Marie Strange’s argument that menstruation moved from being seen as debilitating in nineteenth-century England to a sign of healthy development interwar and post-war: ‘The Assault on Ignorance: Teaching Menstrual Etiquette in England, c.1920s to 1960s’, Social History of Medicine 14 (2001), pp. 247–66.

75. HCA/JCGT/7/1.

76. Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren, Something to Tell You … The Experiences and Needs of Young Lesbians and Gay Men in London (London: London Gay Teenage Group, 1984), pp. 59–60, 100, 108; Lorraine Trenchard, Talking About Young Lesbians (London Gay Teenage Group, 1984), p. 27.

77. Hannah Charnock, ‘Teenage Girls, Female Friendship and the Making of the Sexual Revolution in England, 1950–1980’, Historical Journal 63 (2020), pp. 1032–53.

78. ‘Conference on Young Gays – Final Details – Saturday 7th October 1978 – London’, HCA/JCGT/1/1.

79. Letter from North Wales Friend, Gwynedd, 23 Feb, 1979, HCA/JGCT/3/1.

80. HCA/JGCT/3/2.

81. ‘Meeting of Organisers of Under-21 Gay Groups in London’, 23/7/75, HCA/JGCT/1/4.

82. ‘GYM Conference 26th–27th July 1980’, HCA/JGCT/1/4.

83. Lucy Delap, Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth-Century Britain, Cultural and Social History 15 (2018), pp. 571–93.

84. JCGT, I Know What I Am; Gay Teenagers and the Law (London: Community Press, 1980).

85. HCA/JCGT/5/5.

86. LSE Library, HCA/JCGT/7/5.

87. HCA/JCGT/7/5.

88. Sakthi Suriyaprakasam, ‘Some of Us are Younger’, in Valerie Mason-John (ed.), Talking Black: Lesbians of African and Asian Descent Speak Out (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 94.

89. For NCDS, it may be possible to trace the sexualities of certain cohort members by looking at what they wrote in later life, but I have chosen not to do this here.

90. NCDS 2674. N14058X. See also: 5386. N19090T; 2046. N12858P; 2064. N12890P; 2352. N13474; 2436 N13618D; 2443. N13633C; 151. N15023Q.

91. The exact figure is 3.09 per cent, or 201 essays.

92. Cited in Diana Leonard, Sex and Generation: A Study of Courtship and Weddings (Tavistock: London, 1980), p. 43.

93. Abrams, ‘Liberating the Female Self’. See also: Carolyn Steedman, ‘State-Sponsored Autobiography’, in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds), Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945–1964 (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999).
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