

Citació per a la versió publicada

Torkelson, J. [Jason] & Martínez Sanmartí, R. [Roger]. (2022). An older age colored by youth: the continuing significance of youth-generated cultural boundaries for Sixties affiliates. *Journal of Youth Studies*. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2022.2065911

DOI

<http://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2065911>

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10609/147035>

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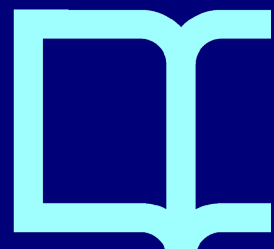
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An older age colored by youth: the continuing significance of youth-generated cultural boundaries for Sixties affiliates

Recto running head : JOURNAL OF YOUTH STUDIES

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History : received : 2021-7-22 accepted : 2022-4-8

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ABSTRACT

This article uses 14 in-depth interviews with individuals who felt involved with and were young during what is commonly known as ‘the Sixties’ in America to explore the potential relevance of youth-generated boundaries for now even older age. Analyzed data are focused upon informants’ subjective identifications and life course understandings as among a specific, though highly relevant section of the first generation to have now lived more complete lives inside Western post-World War 2 cultural transformations, in which the experience of youth and passage to adulthood became reshaped for many. Interviews show a continued significance of youth-generated boundaries around aging, parent culture, and conventional adulthood informants attribute to the Sixties that influence how they conceptualize their current self, peers, and understand social generations generally. We argue our data extend recent research from youth (sub)cultural studies on how subjective youth cultural connections can configure eventual adulthoods to the latter phases of life. Generally, where we do detect youth-generated boundaries as shaping aspects of how sampled Sixties affiliates profess to be looking ahead to later life, findings suggest a complexified corresponding older age containing newer types of markings and subjective experiences might be emerging that merit empirical consideration beginning with this generation.

KEYWORDS

- Sixties
- older age
- generation
- life course
- lifestyles

I think our collective sense of power that we could change the world has made a difference in my life ... The people that I’m closest to [now] are likeminded ... I think that having this positive sense of myself and what we as the 60s generation ... could do, and the changes that we made gives us the confidence to continue to try to make changes now

--Joan, 72, Social Worker, Retired

Introduction

Frequently taken as a point of fundamental change in Western culture, the 1960’s—or, the ‘long Sixties’¹ of 1954 – 1974 (Varon, Foley, and McMillian 2008)—have held enduring space in the public imagination and academy. Scholars have extensively historicized this period (Jamison and Eyerman 1994; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Jameson 1984; Farber 1994; Gitlin 1987; Heale 2005) as well as regularly charted possible political aftereffects for 1960’s contemporaries at various points (Aron 1974; Marwell, Aiken, and Demerath 1987; McAdam 1989; Whalen and Flacks 1989; Braungart and Richard 1991; Davis 2004; Kisseloff 2007; Jones and O’Donnell 2012). Revived popular attention to the 60’s has arisen of late too where the 50-year anniversary of associated happenings recently passed.

In this article we 'check in' on a different potential imprint of Sixties culture at roughly this half-Century milestone from its commonly considered apex: 1968. Specifically, we consider narratives of 14 individuals who professed to have 'felt involved' with the Sixties and who were young during the 1960's in America with a focus on how they subjectively perceive aging, (their) adulthood, generational identity, and look ahead to navigating older age. Sixties affiliates are significant where 1) certain contours of adult transition and adulthood first encountered by the baby boomers generally have since served as the benchmark for understanding subsequent cohorts, and 2) they likewise rank as among the first to have come of age through—and affiliated with—a developed youth culture containing strong possible cultural distinction from adults, peers, and perceived 'us' versus 'them' boundaries connected with music, styles, and related dispositions. Our analysis here connects with recent developments from youth (sub)cultural studies examining the potential lasting influence of association with what had traditionally been thought-to-be strictly 'youth' cultures and artifacts for individuals who now are aging out of, within, or alongside these with respect to their identities, friendship circles, schemas, and ultimate adulthoods they elaborate into their 30's, 40's, and 50's (Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Bennett 2013; Hodkinson 2011; 2013a, 2013b; Torkelson 2015; Haenfler 2014, 2018). Broadly, the extension of this track of inquiry to Sixties affiliates at this juncture significantly marks our first opportunity to explore the potential applicability of youth-generated cultural boundaries for individuals who have now lived more complete lives within the post-World War 2 West where the 'consumer culture' first emerged (Featherstone 1991; Eyerman and Turner 1998; see generally Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Bauman 1992).

Our intensive interviews with the portion of this generation that affiliated with the Sixties demonstrate an ongoing significance of youth-developed cultural traits and boundary forms, even where these may not currently be spectacularly held in style or overt self-presentation. Data show Sixties affiliates continuing to react against perceived conventionality in culture, notions of adulthood, and other—generally older—generations in ways that influence how they profess to see their current selves, peers, conceptualize community, aging, and now look ahead to later life. Insofar as we detect distinctive youth-generated boundaries carrying into older age, and insofar as the post-War cultural transformations informants encountered as youths indeed solidified new social geometries of identity, belonging, encounter-with-the-world, and transition for subsequent young persons (cf. Roberts 2007), our data potentially indicate a complexified corresponding older age containing newer markings and experiences may be emerging for some in the West.

As Joan's reflections above underscore, the content of much Sixties identification resided in the generation itself, promise of generational change, and intra/inter-generational boundaries. We therefore first review foundations of generational theory (Mannheim 1952) with an emphasis on where it connects with epochal shifts relevant to contextualizing 1960's youth encounter-with-the-world, and this data collected roughly a half Century later. Next, we detail newer, relevant scholarship on contemporary younger generations, the subjective life course, and studies focused upon how certain youth (sub)cultural affiliations of more recent times collide with later life adulthoods. We then overview sampling, frame, and data collection. In presenting data, we first investigate informants' understandings of conventionalism and adulthood as youths, specifically as these apply to current intragenerational conceptions of self, age peers, and attendant life trajectories. We then detail subjective intergenerational boundaries, and any continuities or breaks over time. Finally, we explore potential influence of youth-generated boundaries in how informants profess to now move toward older age. Potential implications for understandings of generations, contemporary youth (sub)cultures, older age, (subjective) adulthood and the life course come via discussion.

Review of relevant literature

Qualities of social generations

A notion of 'generation' has long been central to macro-sociological conceptualizations of cultural change, even formative to the discipline—e.g. from Comte's liberal progressive development requiring generational supplantation to a prominent mid-Century American tradition (Parsons 1962; Ryder 1965) conceptualizing negotiated cultural succession through structures youth cohorts inherit. Such models of cohort contemporaneity and turnover, however, while potentially applicable to series' of lives contained within larger epochs, assume inevitability, linearity, even passivity.

Mannheim's (1952) articulations of generation and generational change, still the most influential and bedrock theory of these today, sees generations less as givens or necessary qualities of life cycles. Social generations are rather a possibility, one comprised of distinctive consciousness forged within the dynamism of young persons encountering major historical events they actively respond to, and shape in return (Mannheim 1952; see also Pilcher 1994). Crucial for 'social generations' specifically coming together then, or departing from being a mere 'age cohort', is the presence of 'entelechy'—a generation's own inner aim, or way of expressing and representing life and the world. Entelechy is most likely to develop in periods of rapid shift or tumult where young persons encounter traditions and social scripts ill-fitting their age and the concrete problems of their situated historicity. A critical consciousness unique to youth entrance into society can result and

inform youth envelopment in social and intellectual movements that depart from prior generations while sowing bases for reconfigured futures. Although the consciousness of a generation contains shared representations, it is notably prone toward fostering different—even antagonistic—intragenerational 'units', or dissimilar reactions to them (Mannheim 1952).

Sixties youth encounters: intergenerational distinctions and intragenerational units

Certain Sixties youth have since comprised among the more voluminously analyzed such 'units' by virtue of the great transformations they came of age within, and reacted against (Edmunds and Turner 2002, 2005; Whalen and Flacks 1989; Lambert 1973; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Jamison and Eyerman 1994; see also Bristow 2016; Burnett 2010). The 1960's indeed comprised points of pivot or solidification regarding key trends in post-World War 2 sociality, ones that have even defined much prominent Western social theory. With new media, cultural exchange and alliance could be forged across borders (McLuhan 1964), compressing time and space (Giddens 1981; Harvey 1990), and ushering in the first "global generation" (Edmunds and Turner 2005). Nuclear threat and newfound understandings of environmentalism established modern 'risk society' (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). The shapes of identification, consumption, economy, taste, and belonging likewise became more flexible, elective, individualized, commodified (Bauman 1992; Giddens 1991; Jameson 1991; Harvey 1990). In addition, deep political and cultural changes were forged that have footed enduring tensions in the public consciousness—consumerism, feminism, sexuality, global thinking, activism, technocracy, music, meanings of social success, civil rights, technologies of convenience, intellectualism, expression, among others. With increased life expectancies, extended education, and the development of the 'teenage' market (Griffin 1993; Hine 1999), the life course—though perhaps especially the transition to adulthood—became reshaped.

Most significant for this analysis, it was in these post-War times the contemporary image of adulthood and its association with stable finality became cemented in full in common culture (cf. Blatterer 2007), and that certain young persons in turn cast such ostensibly conventional lifestyles and corresponding adult social roles toward unprecedented question (Jamison and Eyerman 1994; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Whalen and Flacks 1989). Divides between parent and youth cultural patterns during the preceding more standardized industrial expansion leading into the 1950's—high school rebellion, an emphasis on youthful fun, and later, rock n roll—differed here where they generally only assumed a more temporary eschewing of settled adulthood. This emergent 'structured irresponsibility' was frequently outright 'romanticized' by adults who did not experience similar space at corresponding chronological ages; even observers like Talcott Parsons (1942, 607) characterized this 'recalcitrance to the pressure of adult expectations and discipline' as temporary and ultimately functional for interwar youth transitions.

The 1960's, by contrast, crucially brought overarching beliefs in fundamental change and an availability of a newer-found more explicit anti-conventionalism (Jamison and Eyerman 1994; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Whalen and Flacks 1989) that stood to fracture such romanticization or segmented transition for some. Starkly contrasting interwar times, there was a clear perception of an emerging intergenerational clash, from which a 'politics of age' has since notably held place in both popular culture and strands of scholarly analysis (cf. Bristow 2016). These formative moments are captured by frames situating certain Sixties youth within 'generational conflict' (Mead 1970), 'generational war' (Bristow 2016), or even a prizing of 'perpetual youthfulness' (Eyerman and Turner 1998). Perhaps little, however, so simply encapsulates the fervor of the times quite like the speed with which the phrase 'don't trust anyone over 30" uttered by New Left activist Jack Weinberg during a 1964 interview with the San Francisco Chronicle proliferated and became enshrined into a mantra.

To be sure, this anti-conventionalism was by all indicators minoritarian and connected with class and racial distinctions (e.g. roughly 1 of every 33 non-college affiliated young persons and 1 of 8 college students identified with the 'New Left' in 1969 [Heale 2005]), though it undoubtedly comprised a significant schematizing flank for organizing identity and disposition where many youth more generally were impelled to assume positions in relation to it. Indeed, the extent to which these changes represented substantive contestation or merely a new youth-fueled *coolness* or *hipness* impersonating the 'fun', 'novelty', or 'freedom' of consumer fulfillment within nascent post-Fordism (Frank 1998; Osgerby 2004) is of course anything but definitive. The point is that not only explicit or identifying counter-cultural movements were necessarily implicated, but also to some degree larger sections of young people and other spaces like advertising, film, music, politics. Beginning with these times, even much pop and rock music held potential to become experienced, however mild or circumscribed to a moment of leisure, as a break from conventionality and associated lifestyles (see also Bennett 2013).

Further here, it was not just against their parents above them where new types of youth boundaries applied, but young persons come the 1960's also became expected to fashion distinction from their peers around them. Baseline dispositions toward (anti)conventionality were undoubtedly further complexified as the very notion of the 'teenager' itself was concomitantly solidified to its fullest as a marketing niche, and constructed as a social problem in new ways (Griffin 1993; Hine 1999). One's pre-adult years became a colorful domain where young people normatively explored identity and

navigated subjective differentiations across an increasingly vast ocean of age-related politics, dispositions, styles, music and other commodities. It is no coincidence it was in this moment the developmental psychologist Erik Erickson (1968) came to characterize youth as a time of 'crisis'.

Regardless of how sizable or substantive divides among generational units in this fold, young persons' encounter with and navigation of newly variegated expectations, consumption forms, fractures in broader culture, youth culture, and life course convention all stood to inflect their 'natural attitudes' in ways that rendered them lastingly distinct from 'generations' before them. As Lambert (1973, 38) described this entelechy turning into the 70's: 'Youth, whose consciousness was just emerging, differed ... radically from the experience of their parents and the establishment generation whose orientations to life developed in the 1930s'.

Post 70s cohorts, 'subjective' adulthoods, life courses, and 'subcultures'

In all then, by the time the curtain fell on the 1960's, transition into adult social roles was no longer necessarily idealized or just taken-to-be as inevitable, youth-generated dispositions potentially possessed durability beyond one's immediate younger years, and negotiating the expressions—and counter-expressions—of the new youth culture firmly became part of growing up for many. Especially for those who possessed affinity for the generation's cultural changes, this produced new experiences of youth and possible corresponding transitions to and modalities of adulthood. These imprints have persisted, if not deepened or multiplied for subsequent cohorts.

Regarding (transition into) adult social roles, recent interpretive work on 'subjective adulthood' focused upon documenting splintering meanings of adulthood held by contemporary young persons finds increasing numbers fashioning what they perceive as unique adulthoods outside traditional and age-determinist interwar/mid-Century forms. This is evident in modern populations who possessed explicit anti-conventional boundaries as youths like Torkelson (2015) documents with ex-straightedgers as well as across common demographic distinctions (Hartmann and Swartz 2007; Carr and Kefalas 2009; Waters et al. 2011). The 'box check' template of adulthood established in post-War times continues to possess immense resonance in the public imagination broadly (Blatterer 2007, 2010). However, markers like leaving home and especially marriage and having children are declining in salience in terms of how increasing numbers of young persons now envision adulthood (Furstenberg et al. 2004; see also Carr and Kefalas 2009; Hartmann and Swartz 2007; Waters et al. 2011).

With respect to the possible endurance of dispositions generated during youths' encounter-with-the-world, youthfulness and the liminality of youth itself has been increasingly valued, celebrated, marketed to all, and subjective age liberated to degrees from biological chronology. As Blatterer (2010, 74) describes the situation: 'while the teenage market of the post-war era helped differentiate teenagers from the parent generation ... [today] the differences between the marketable demographics childhood, youth and adulthood are smoothed over and the young/old binary is challenged.' Within this climate, some scholars like Wyn and Woodman (2006) have even been prompted to consider whether a 'post 1970s' generation has come together—encompassing common monikers like Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z—in which each cohort now roughly carries (or idealizes carrying) forward cultural sensibilities formative to their youth rather than conjoining into an encompassing, homogenous, inert, or traditional 'adult' culture.

There have been different approaches to capturing the shapes of—and experiences contained within—such possible transformations. Some have considered the extent to which an altogether 'new adulthood' prizing continued openness and non-settlement outside traditional connotations of stoicism and finality may be materializing (Hartmann and Swartz 2007; Wyn and Woodman 2006; Blatterer 2007, 2010). Others have focused upon young persons as occupying a more elongated, complex, and unique, though ultimately temporary, transitional space (Arnett 2004; Roberts 2007; see just generally Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005).

Most all such works nonetheless tend toward conceptualizing affected individuals roughly akin to Arnett's (2004) five-point framework of pronounced self-focus, identity exploration, perceiving open-ended futures, negotiating feelings of instability, and in-betweenness. Recently, Arnett and Mitra (2020) clarifyingly assessed the extent to which these qualities might apply to individuals as old as 60 via survey methods. Unsurprisingly, a negative association with age is evident; however, the majority of 18–60 year-olds appear to now embody these five hallmarks, with the notable eventual exception of continuing to feel 'in between' (Arnett and Mitra 2020).

Deeper here, the new possible ways of being young or engaging ostensibly anti-conventional expressions forged in the Sixties—e.g. potential unique youth identity, space, political foci, societal reaction, style, nonmainstream disposition—have far from gone away. Where certain Sixties youth may have connected these with their generation itself and ideals of grand change (Edmunds and Turner 2005; Berman 1996), more fervent homologous boundaries that might now be drawn between contemporary youth and their parents, peers, and/or what is taken as conventionalism frequently find place in

now-multiplying arrays of youth-based styles, aesthetics, distinctions, music and/or referent cultures.

The content of these post 1970's boundary forms has chiefly been the province of subcultural studies (cf. Haenfler 2014; Gelder 2005). It is only in the past decade or so that scholars have begun to lend significant empirical attention to the consequences of these types of formations or scenes for individuals who are only now inevitably transitioning into their middle and late adult years. Noteworthy findings gleaned from aging or former Goths, punks, straightedgers, EDM (electronic dance music) enthusiasts, among others, are indicating youth-generated distinctions can continue to be subjectively significant, provide bases for resisting socially constructed aging, and substantially configure things like identity, adulthood, schema, disposition, friendships, career, parenting and style later in life (cf. Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Bennett 2013; Hodkinson 2011; 2013a, 2013b; Torkelson 2015; Haenfler 2014, 2018).

Given that youth-generated boundary forms demonstrably shape the ultimate adulthoods or middle age lives elaborated by individuals passing through or aging within the differentiated—or referent—cultures of post 70s times, where Sixties affiliates now on the precipice of older age might find themselves on these same metrics begs attention. This is particularly where they rank as among the first to have encountered a youth culture normatively containing such strong possible youth/adult distinctions, identifications, or potential perceived anti-conventionalist (dis)positions, and who, perhaps most crucially, subjectively took these on to degrees in their formative years.

Further conceptual considerations and questions for investigation

Our review connecting elements from subcultural studies, generational theory, post-War (youth) culture, and subjective adulthood points toward further considerations and several domains for empirical development regarding where Sixties affiliates now stand.

1- In existing Sixties literature, where the individual comprises the unit of analysis, the emphasis falls heavily upon overt political affiliation, activism, and possible changes in these from the 1970's to present day over questions of youth-generated cultural boundaries. In accord with the principle that political disposition is typically sedimented in youth (Schumann and Scott 1989), these works generally find later-life continuities among activists and sympathizers in the face of disillusionments and a tempering of more extreme political positions (Aron 1974; Marwell, Aiken, and Demerath 1987; McAdam 1989; Whalen and Flacks 1989; Braungart and Richard 1991; Davis 2004; Kisseloff 2007; Jones and O'Donnell 2012). We know affiliates of post-70s (sub)cultures can hold onto subjective adulthoods and boundary forms they take to be non-conventional and distinctive from age cohort peers well into middle age. Extending this track of inquiry back upon Sixties youth approaching older age, we ask: how do Sixties affiliates now subjectively perceive aging, the life course, (their) adulthood, and any intragenerational distinctions or identifications from their younger years?

2- The 1960's have likewise been extensively analyzed in historical terms (e.g. Jamison and Eyerman 1994; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Jameson 1984; Farber 1994; Gitlin 1987; Heale 2005) and received consideration as a lastingly impactful generation in accord with Mannheim's theorizations (Edmunds and Turner 2002, 2005; Bristow 2016; Burnett 2010; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Roberts 2007). Notable emendations to Mannheim have generally drawn upon Bourdieu to better articulate ways generations may actively engage in classificatory struggles to define the fields of how social aging and change are enacted (Eyerman and Turner 1998; Edmunds and Turner 2005; see also Purhonen 2016). Especially given that the content of Sixties cultural boundaries are more 'generational', we ask: do subjective intergenerational boundaries remain significant for the Sixties generation even as they approach older age? Such inquiry speaks to demands in generational theory noted by Eyerman and Turner (1998) regarding the potential lasting consequences of generational identities and their maintenance through post-War technologies and consumption forms. Are there specific ways informants conceptualize themselves as distinct relative to their parent generation? How are chronologically younger cohorts understood differently, if at all?

3- How are Sixties affiliates conceptualizing, elaborating, or experiencing (their move into) older age? Our informants are broadly significant here where they rank among the first to be on the precipice of older age having lived near entire life courses within Western post-War culture. As a concentrated subsection, 'unit', or minority generational faction among those for whom this first encounter applies, Sixties identifiers may embody certain extremities of cultural change that can be outwardly clarifying—as Berger and Luckmann (1966) note, attention to extreme cases can usefully aid in understanding aspects of those less extreme in certain instances. Ultimately then, what, if anything, might our collected accounts be able to hint toward with respect to shapes of identity, subjective life course understandings, and forms of older age that might now be available to others and subsequent cohorts ahead?

Sampling and methodological procedures

Interviews were semi-structured and emphasized meanings informants attached to the Sixties from their younger standpoint alongside current outlooks. Data were primarily derived from a battery of questions in a larger instrument aimed at subjective understandings of adulthood, aging, the life course, identity and generational boundaries. Informants were selected based upon their professing to have once ‘felt involved’ with the Sixties while contemporaneously experiencing it in America. Respondents born between 1940 and 1955 were targeted in the interest of ensuring conscious ‘encounter-with-the world’ followed the Second World War but that all would be aged a minimum 18 years old before the end of ‘Long Sixties’ (Varon, Foley, and McMillian 2008). Birth years in the final sample ranged from 1943 – 1954 (with all but 2 coming between 1943–1950). Ages at the time of interview ranged from 62 – 75 with an average of 69.5. Thirteen respondents were interviewed face-to-face in one sitting in America by the first author. One who grew up in America was interviewed face-to-face in Spain by the second author, with a virtual follow-up by the first author. Finally, interviews were conducted between 2016 – 2020 to roughly coincide with the 50-year mark of 1968, widely considered the apex of the 1960’s cultural movements (Berman 1996). Interviews lasted from as little as one hour to as much as 2 and a half hours, with an average length of 1 h and 50 min. All were transcribed and coded for common themes.

Word-of-mouth and snowball techniques were utilized. Snowball sampling can potentially yield a biased picture by being confined within a particular network of people not representative of a larger target population (Biernacki and Wladorf 1981). These shortcomings were somewhat offset by the fact three distinct chains of successful referrals within Minnesota, Indiana, and the New York City/Upstate region were garnered. Present residence aside, localities in which individuals experienced the 1960’s, crucially, were diverse.²

We took heed to Purhonen’s (2016) criticism to emphasize accounts of masses over elites, leaders, or intellectual institutions in sampling, which contrasts the bulk of scholarship on generations and work on the Sixties. Word-of-mouth sampling aided in locating informants who saw themselves as more common within Sixties transformations. Professed identity, involvement with activism, and anticonventional lifestyles therefore ranged from roughly moderate to strong to very strong, which well-aligned with intercoder appraisals of informant narratives. Crucially, these distinctions did not appear to influence how respondents reflected upon the Sixties, generational boundaries, (adult) conventionality, or describe their current outlooks. In all, the final sample yielded a healthy mix of perspectives from a range of localities, experiences, life histories, and degrees of involvement from the ground. Table 1 contains sample information.

Table 1. Informant Characteristics.

	Int.	Gend.	Highest	Marital		Involvement/	
Name	Age	ID	Educ. Level	Status	Children	Identity	Main Nominated Occupation(s)
Jimbo	66	M	B.A.	Married	Yes	Strong	Stock Broker
Dylan	66	M	H.S.	Married	Yes	Moderate	Retired, Flight Attendant
Carrie	69	F	Ph.D.	Divorced	Yes	Moderate	Retired, Professor
Jacques	65	M	B.A.	Married	No	Very Strong	Musician, School Bus Driver, Activist
Carney	75	M	Ph.D.	Married	Yes	Strong	Community Organizer
Lana	70	F	B.A.	Divorced	Yes	Moderate	Nursing
Laura	62	F	H.S.	Married	Yes	Strong	Flight Attendant
Lorna	72	F	M.A.	Married	No	Strong	Nursing
Ravindra	72	M	B.A.	Married	Yes	Very Strong	Uber Driver
Tony	68	M	Ph.D.	Married	Yes	Moderate	Professor
Tunie	73	F	B.A.	Divorced	Yes	Strong	Retired, ESL Teacher
Joan	70	F	M.A.	Divorced	No	Very Strong	Retired, Social Worker

Betty	72	F	B.A.	Married	Yes	Very Strong	Gardner
Selena	73	F	B.A.	Married	Yes	Strong	Retired, Medicine

Findings

Intragegeneration: anti-Adult trajectories & continued peer distinction

Sampled Sixties affiliates ably accounted for what they understood as their youthful outlooks, and almost unanimously recounted pronounced boundaries around what they conceptualized as conventional lifestyles and adulthoods. On such trajectories, 73-year-old retired teacher Tunie proclaimed 'I totally rejected that'. Complementarily, 68-year-old university professor Tony retrospectively reflected 'I never pictured myself as an adult'. Going further regarding what adulthood looked like from the standpoint of youth, 75-year-old community organizer Carney described it as 'a minefield that I had to negotiate'. Likewise, Jimbo, a 66-year-old stockbroker, quipped with some irony considering his ultimate career that 'it looked like the establishment ... more or less mundane and dry'. The 72-year-old nurse Lorna, however, perhaps more fully articulated these collective sentiments when recollecting

Adulthood looked like responsibility and following a traditional path/ ... /They used to say don't trust anyone over 30. That was ... old/ ... /At 18 I couldn't think of a valuable life at 40. They were just people moving around. It had no meaning to me. I didn't imagine their lives to be important ... I didn't imagine them having a personal life ... I didn't think of them as having any vitality/ ... / It's ok for them, but not necessarily for me/ ... /I started to emerge to aspire to different things

In line with Lorna's final comment, youthful questioning of or potential antipathy toward conventional adult life provided frameworks Sixties affiliates frequently described as influencing their own trajectories. Crucially, informants were equipped to subjectively reflect upon possible durability versus change to anti-conventionalist sentiment across now closer to full life courses. Strong continuities characterized most narratives. Seventy-three-year-old retiree Selena, for instance, said in looking back 'I just knew ... I wanted to be a different way/ ... /I didn't want ... a giant house and five cars and all that ... I have succeeded in not being that, even now with my 73 years (laughs)'. The 73-year-old Betty left what she conceptualized as conventional structures due to the Sixties. In discussing her current identification as a gardener alongside a life history that involved living on communes and in yoga communities with her husband, Betty asserted

I can say that it impacted us so greatly, what happened to us in the 60s, that we were unwilling to ... go back into conventional society ... Every turn, every time there was a branch in the road and we could have gone back into conventional society or not, we always went the other way ... We never did real jobs (laughs)

To be sure, all respondents, Betty included, nominally described some inevitable alignment with a form of adulthood where conventional spheres like marriage, child rearing, work, educational attainment, or feelings of responsibility applied (see Table 1). Beyond how engagement with such objective or "box check" traditional adult markers prompt ed these baseline linkages (cf. Shanahan et al. 2005; see also Raelin 1987), however, eventual adulthoods were nonetheless frequently subjectively characterized as alternative to a perceived inertness, fixity, or stoicism still ascribed to a conventional 'other'. Here, it is noteworthy a sizable number of respondents otherwise voiced continued disidentification with 'adulthood' itself as a larger construct into their 60s and 70s. For example, 69-year-old retired college professor Carrie said 'I'll tell you when I reach it [adulthood]; I'm sorry (laughs)'; 73-year-old Tunie declared 'I don't think I've ever really felt as adult as I'm supposed to be'. For his part, Jacques, a 65-year-old musician, activist and school bus driver, not just attributed his life's leisure and vocational pursuits to a youthful perception that adulthood was 'scary and boring'; Jacques also declared that currently adulthood 'just looks like a big camouflage', and that 'definitely ... I'm holding onto some of my youthful feelings'. These boundaries were often detectable in how age cohort peers were characterized. Consider this from Jimbo, who himself responded 'nah, not really' when asked if he currently felt 'adulthood' suited him. Jimbo weighs his life trajectory reacting against aspects of adult conventionalism versus an age peer he conceptualizes as having embodied it

I was more the wild child, outta line, ya know, I went in a different direction. I had motorcycles; I lived in the woods; I built myself a cabin ... I'm not definitely your normal kind of adult where they grow up and they go to school and they get a job and that's it. I definitely veered off that path ... I'm glad I did ... If you don't have those [experiences] ... you'd probably have more of a bland life/ ... /Like this one guy [I know] ... he went to work at Sears and

I was kinda like a hippy, and then he worked for the post office, and then he just retired and that's all he's done his entire life.

Informants indeed generally significantly believed their encounter and identification with Sixties culture opened opportunities, life paths, or dispositions that continue to distinguish them as they now transition toward even older age. Whereas Jimbo more discussed this in terms of his intervening life trajectory between the 1960's and now, others explicitly described it as an ongoing facet of current life or identity. On one front, this simply manifested on cultural grounds, or continued perceived distinction from peers. For example, Tunie described feeling different in a local women's exercise group she recently joined, and attributed this to the conventional life paths she viewed 'other' women possessing when saying

The women I exercise with, they don't try new things. I'm willing to venture out and they're not. They're kinda stuck in a rut, and I don't wanna be stuck in a rut/ .../Maybe they ended up in some sort of menial job working in a factory and then they had kids, and great grandchildren ...Yeah, I just feel I had more opportunities than they did

On another front, perceptual differences in 'biological' age from 'chronological' age peers emerged in addition to those of a more youthful subjective 'social' age (cf. Schwall 2012). Interview transcripts showed a noteworthy number of respondents perceiving themselves as less biologically 'old' than chronological peers. For instance, Lorna said of how she sees certain persons her own age she encounters 'I might talk to someone and they'll say 'oh you know I'm getting old, I'm 70' and I'm thinking 'I'm 70 too', [but] I'm not gonna tell that [my age] because they're tottering around'. Joan echoes these sentiments but drew a larger boundary around her closer circle of friends she professes to share similar formative countercultural bases with versus others. When prompted to clarify who such 'others' were, she asserted 'I wouldn't say that they're really friends; they're peripheral kinda people ... They just seem to be old'. Finally, 66-year old retiree Dylan embodied both such inward appraisals of a subjectively more youthful social self and outward attributions of intensified biological aging when saying

A lot of the people around my age seem so much older than me. I've asked guys that I've run into different places-ok so when do you stop saying 'hey look, see that old guy, that old geezer over there?' and it turns out they're younger than you. When does that happen? I dunno ... I feel like I'm in my 40s

Intergenerational boundaries: continued parent generational distinction

These findings whereby Sixties affiliates subjectively understand themselves to be biologically and socially aging differently relative to perceived conventional age peers lead to our second set of questions, which explore the potential application of such boundaries upon younger and older generations. With only small exceptions or qualifiers, identification with and belief in coming from a unique generation significantly remained strong (see Eyerman and Turner 1998). Noted Jimbo plainly, 'definitely, that was a very distinct generation'; said Lorna similarly 'This was a distinctive time ... It was good ... It was a distinctive time in history.' Jacques even demonstrated sensitivity to intragenerational units (Mannheim 1952) when discussing whether he was part of a generation by saying: 'Yes. However, I meet people who are my age who grew up in the rural area and I haven't asked them, 'were you ... in the Sixties?''

The pervasiveness of these conceptions provided conversational benchmarks from which intergenerational meanings, where applicable, could be actively calibrated in process of interviews (Holdstein and Gubrium 1995). Both younger and older generations were generally well conceptualized. However, Sixties affiliates notably had more difficulty attaching specific or consistent attributes to younger generations. Carrie nicely summed up these baseline differences in coherency when saying 'it's harder for me to define the generation below me/ ... /I don't have a clear picture of what that generation is like whereas I do have a clear picture of the two before mine'. Joan similarly stated 'I don't know when they're talking about, Gen X and Gen Y. I couldn't quite conceptualize what that was'.

Ken Roberts (2007, 268) recently argued the 'youth of today are different from the baby boomers, many of whom did not accept the way things were for themThe post-1970-s cohorts are making lives for themselves in the world as they find it.' Perhaps simply sharing Roberts' view, the only domain where significant overlap in accounts of younger generations emerged came where some respondents perceived generations after them to be merely occupying changes carved by Sixties transformations. For instance, from Selena's view, the difference between hers and subsequent generations was 'there was no ... 'movement' after that [us] really, there was nothing'. The 62-year-old flight attendant Laura even went so far as to deny generational status to younger age cohorts on these grounds. When prompted to reflect on whether there came a time she thought a new generation might be emerging, she said

You know actually, I didn't. You're talking about someone in the [19]70s or 80s, and what's going in with them? I look at them as almost a way of being; I kinda felt sorry for them in some ways because they didn't have to fight for what was theirs ... [They] fit into a little mold and do the proper thing, because that makes it so much easier if you have a script you can follow ... I think my generation just wanted to put a stamp on things

Accounts of parent or older generations, by contrast, were generally consistent and coherent in content. On a basic level, informants—perhaps unsurprisingly—frequently referenced political and cultural shifts commonly associated with the Sixties and 'generational gaps' foundational to their youth (Whalen and Flacks 1989; Lambert 1973; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Bristow 2016; Mead 1970; Braungart and Richard 1991). Said Carrie, 'We were more open to protest and to demand, and we had rock and roll (laughs). We had the pill ... It was like that magical time.' Additionally, Tony noted

We were aware that, unlike previous generations, there was a lot of dissent ... We were aware that [Vietnam] was different from the previous couple wars that our parents had been involved with. Culturally, the music was changing. My generation had its own music that was very different ... And we loved it

Most significantly, interviewees were now positioned to account for essentially complete life courses in their parent generation. Distinction with and boundary-work around parent generational conventionality remained strong.

Many indeed saw their parent generation as generally having remained disengaged from the 'question everything' ethos (Varon, Foley, and McMillian 2008; Berman 1996) they otherwise saw as central to their own generation and experiences. For instance, Betty noted of her impression of older generations at this juncture 'I don't think they [our parent generation] had the opportunities to break free like we did.' Laura relatedly asserted 'I don't think their generation ever questioned anything ... They were told how they were going to grow up and become adults.' In perhaps more roundly articulating how the larger life courses of older generations were frequently conceived, Joan said 'I think that they accepted the world as it was. I think we asked the questions and we wanted to find answers. I don't think that they did. I think that they just went along and did whatever one did ... They just had a life; it was very different.'

This continued perceived passivity, resignation, or inertness significantly also applied to how many of our informants understood their parent generation to have been aging out. Here, 72-year-old Uber driver Ravindra bluntly stated 'I don't give up' when describing how he believes his final years will contrast those witnessed in older generations. Distinction regarding engaging the death process itself was also drawn. As Dylan reflected 'I get the impression that the generation before me didn't think about getting older, and that ... when they got into their 70s and 80s they just wanted to die.' Selena, for another example, also discussed differences in how she believed her own generation might approach older age and death when saying

It's hard ... to speak to how another generation is looking at old age and death ... but I know ... older people here that [were] ... really was afraid of it, and didn't want to talk about it ... I would certainly be more open to talking about it. I think other people in my generation would be ... not just running away from it, and not wanting to think about it

Aging colorfully, and continued community

Continued boundary-work with parent generation leads into our third set of research questions on how Sixties affiliates are looking ahead to and beginning the elaboration of older age themselves. Interviewees resoundingly idealized an older age that would be marked by continued growth, activity, a more colorful experience than their parent generation generally, and, for some, even a phase of life that remained decidedly unsettled to degrees. In this latter vein, 70-year-old nurse Lana noted of her future 'it's very much like when I was 20. I never had a long-range plan, and I still don't.' Like many others, for Jimbo, continuous creative engagement is how he is planning his remaining years. Among other things, he discussed a new music project he had been focused on in recent months

I have to do something so I kinda started a project, I've written about 15 songs so far, maybe 20 ... and I have a little recording studio in the back room in the house ... Those things keep me rolling, I go out and play a couple times a year still ... I do other stuff, but both me and my wife, we try to keep busy

These basic dispositions in part map onto established 'activity' theories of older age in which some older adults maintain happiness via active social interactions (e.g. Atchley 1989). Collected data, however, extend the underlying impetus for 'activity' to generational boundary-work and—youth-generated—cultural identification.

In this vein, drawing upon Bourdieu, Eyerman and Turner(1998) have characterized elements of the Sixties generation to be in longstanding symbolic struggle over the social field of aging. Our data indicate these processes apply to even older age where Sixties affiliates continue reacting to and contrasting their own plans with their parent generation's aging patterns. For a basic example, regarding what will hallmark his (transition to) older age Tony asserted 'I'm gonna spend my retirement much more involved in reading and studying, ya know, continuing education, things like that. Opportunities that my parents ... weren't interested in pursuing.' For her part, Laura also starkly reflected definitional divisions over social aging when she said of older generations

I think they had more of a plan that was written in stone for them. You got to a point where you were retired you had a retirement payment check come in. I think it was more established / ... /I don't know if my generation is going to put up with being invisible ... Am I gonna become one of these invisible people that has nothing to offer? Or do I wanna ... find some way to offer something?

Finally, beliefs in aging differently than older generations were frequently described in collective terms, specifically regarding others perceived to be connected to the Sixties. Here, many conceived of a larger 'formative collective' (see also Torkelson 2015) of others they understood to be like them due to autobiographical and experiential commonalities rooted in the Sixties. For Lorna, this manifested within her immediate friendship circle. She said, 'I think that the people that I'm closest to probably went through very similar kinds of transformations that I did ... Our path has been very similar/ ... /I think collectively ... our experiences ha[ve] brought us to a place that's freer, more open, more in control.' For her part, Joan echoed these sentiments, but in course notably intersected them with a contrast regarding how she sees her friends versus parents in terms of social aging

My parents were old by the time they were 70 ... This is something that comes up a lot with my friends ... We're 70 or thereabouts chronologically, but we certainly don't have that attitude or anything—I mean we're very different than our parents' generation. There's still hopefulness, there's strength and resilience / ... /We are gonna go out kicking and screaming. It's like 70 is a number and it doesn't define us in terms of our thinking, in terms of our actions, in terms of how we dress ... We're active and a different kind of 70 than our parents

For some, conceptualizations of a broader formative Sixties collectivity containing individuals they did not necessarily know notably influenced how community was explicitly negotiated and area of residence selected for older age years. In this vein, Jacques reflected on the composition of his current city of residence that the presence of other Sixties persons 'is probably why I still live here'. For others like Tunie,, such perceptions marked desired older age transitions. Tunie's move to a small liberal college town was chiefly driven by her visualizing peers there she did not before know personally, but perceived to possess experiential bases similar to hers. She said

I came here ... because there's so many people who are open minded and doing good things just in every area of life. For me this is like an oasis/ ... /That's why I chose this area/ ... /I joined a group here [where] I would say ... people probably share similar experiences to me ... We are a small group ... There are ... connections.

The gardener Betty herself had recently moved to an area where she believed she had again found other Sixties persons from diverse localities, or as she put it 'the same people' she had always gravitated towards. In course of discussing current community, Betty also well encapsulated many of the attitudes toward 'aging colorfully' when she said

We definitely found community again/ ... /We're still living those same ideals. Here. Now/ ... /There's art. There's music. All the time. We volunteer in the theater. We get to go to concerts and plays/ ... /Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. There's too many books that I want to read. There's too many documentary films that I want to watch. There's too many cultural events of music and plays that I want to go to. There's too many friends that I want to hang out with. I don't know how to fit it into my life ... There's ... constant reminders to be ... awake in my life.

Discussion

Our interviews with the subsection of the Sixties generation who identified with commonly associated cultural transformations in their younger years found respondents highly reflective regarding conceptualizations of generation, identity, conventionality, and adulthood across their fuller life courses. Youth-generated boundaries—versus the conventional 'other'—still informed their professed understandings of self, even as they stand on the precipice of older age a half Century past the crescendo of the 1960's. Many notably continued to react against an inertness they began to perceive

in conventional adult life trajectories and their parent generation during their coming of age. Where such boundaries are retained, they significantly appear to influence what were described as mindful movements toward a more active and youthful older age indeed colored against the perceived social and biological aging patterns of both their parent generation and ostensibly conventional peers. Additionally, a broader 'formative collectivity' containing other likeminded persons with similar past autobiographical encounter with the Sixties can be envisioned to degrees, and may play a role in shaping later life friendships, social aging, and community. There are numerous possible implications and points for further empirical development.

Most broadly, American Sixties affiliates rank as among the first to have lived near complete life courses—and have their encounter-with-the-world constituted—more fully within post-World War 2 cultural transformations where new anti-conventional boundaries, possible experiences of being young, and transitions to and possible modalities of subjective adulthood became available. As the segment of this generation who arguably most sharply embodied or identified with these shifts, gathered data indicate a complexified corresponding older age containing new possible experiences and markings may be emerging for some that merits consideration. Here, all informants saw youth-rooted dispositions or identities holding place in their engagement with what was idealized as a more open-ended older age featuring continued personal growth to some degree or another. (Re)connection with others believed to share similar formative bases likewise potentially marked a valued facet of—or transition to—a desired older age. Generally, sampled Sixties affiliates believed their formative encounter and identification with Sixties culture opened the way to opportunities, life paths, and dispositions that distinguish them into their 60's and 70's.

Our gathered data may shed qualitative light onto the question posed by Arnett and Mitra (2020, 418) regarding their finding that majorities of middle-aged Americans now embody dispositions that have otherwise frequently been attributed to (transitioning) young persons of: '[i]n what sense are a majority of Americans in their 30's, 40's, and 50's 'finding out who I really am,' focusing on myself,' and feeling that 'anything is possible' given that most of them have stable lives and commitments to family and work that are unlikely to change substantially?' Regarding such 'box check' markers, all sampled Sixties affiliates got married at one point, forged independence, finished education, and the majority engaged conventional employment and had children (see again Table 1); these ostensibly objective markers were unsurprisingly frequently nominally connected to 'adulthood' (cf. Shanahan et al 2005 [Q3]). Collected narratives, however, crucially bent much more substantially toward a continued reaction against the image of adult settlement itself that operates apart from—or beneath—such attainment metrics, and in ways undoubtedly consequential for even older age dispositions and lives. For certain individuals or populations then, perhaps rather than a phase that 'ends', subjective reactions to conventionality or fixed adulthood may comprise a continued negotiation hallmarking entire lives, and the deepening fractures regarding adulthood's position within the Western life course may hold some roots in a potentially lasting cultural pushback to its connotations of finality in ways that depart from the purview of transitional 'help versus hindrance' and shifting 'box check' understandings.

Further in this vein, if degrees of anti-conventional/anti-adult sentiment that were newly available come the 1960's have carried through entire life courses for some, our findings may indicate the foci of what has traditionally been 'youth' (sub)cultural studies may not necessarily be limited to any specific life course segment(s). Our findings here arguably extend recent research on various post-70s youth (sub)cultures demonstrating ways certain referent affiliations—frequently containing anti-conventional/anti-adult boundaries—can provide individuals lasting subjective distinction with respect to identity, schema, disposition, or socially constructed aging well into middle and even late adult years (cf. Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Bennett 2006, 2013; Hodkinson 2011, 2013 a, 2013b; Torkelson 2015). Where Sixties affiliates continue to conceptualize themselves as distinct and, in cases, even actively seek out community with other perceived Sixties persons, there may be further implications for later life cultural identity and community. On one front, increased lifespans may find 'older age' a multigenerational and competing space ordered by the sort of intergenerational boundary-work documented in this article (Burnett 2010; Wyn and Woodman 2006; see also Eyerman and Turner 1998). On another, is the question of whether elective cultural identities may apply to the construction of later life community for post 70s cohorts. Will affiliates of post 70s youth (sub)cultures who have retained identity while inevitably transitioning into degrees of mid-life engagement with traditional family and work life (Hodkinson 2011, 2013b; Bennett and Hodkinson 2012) in turn elaborate older ages characterized by (re)connection with formative youth scenes or cultural sensibilities (e.g. Goth or punk rock retirement communities)? Where indicators from the literature show Goth community becoming substantially revised to accommodate aging participants (Hodkinson 2011, 2013a), former straightedgers viewing themselves to be 'wolves in sheepskin' concealed beneath adulthood's conventional markers of attainment and imperatives of facework (Torkelson 2015), and just a general continuing significance of youth cultural connects into middle age for affiliates of various scenes (Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; see also Bennett 2006), it would seem likely that such boundaries

await in older age for many from these populations when held in conjunction with this study's data. Beyond the purview of more pronounced or ostensibly spectacular sensibilities, identities, or communities, though, how might potentially milder or less marked patterns of break from conventionality factor into older age within broader consumer culture—e.g. in shifts toward the marketization of youth to persons of all ages (Blatterer 2010), or even just in the sense commentators like Frank (1998) or McGuigan(2009) understand 'coolness' as fueling contemporary consumption and keeping capitalism in motion?

Many further questions indeed arise, and considerably more research is needed to complicate, qualify, or lend firmer foundations to these inferences gleaned from this specific sample and sampling criterion, especially with respect to scope. The main question certainly is whether Sixties affiliates unique. To what extent should other baby boomers with less affinity for Sixties movements—particularly those from class and racial locations less commonly associated with Sixties affiliation—or various social locations within post 70's cohorts (Gens X-Z) ahead broadly be considered to reflect these patterns? Insofar as this is the case, a larger question looms of whether scholars should be prompted to consider new cultural markings or archetypes of older age to be developing—those documented here as well as others potentially residing beyond this analysis of this section of this generation—that influence how this phase of life can come to be engaged, conceptualized, and experienced with respect to cultural identity and subjective social age. Taken even a step further, what might any of these processes look like into the future across the life courses of contemporary youth now parented—or grand-parented—by individuals who may possess more lifelong relationships with various anti-conventional or youth-generated boundaries?

More generally, to any degree reluctance to embrace adult finality is becoming normative into the twenty-first Century (cf. Arnett and Mitra 2020 see also Wyn and Woodman 2006; Hartmann and Swartz 2007), the questions of whether the sorts of boundaries documented in this article persist or recede with respect to their place within contestations over defining the fields of social aging and the life course (Eyerman and Turner 1998) as well as the perdurance of intragenerational boundaries will undoubtedly require significant attention. Across all such questions, what does appear clear to us is due attention to the potential for youth-generated boundary forms to color aspects of whole life courses will valuably contribute to multitudes of research agendas.

Notes

- 1 Though frequently highly overlapping, we typically use 'Sixties' when denoting cultural association and '1960's' for issues of temporality✗
- 2 Among others, areas in which informants experienced the Sixties are Florida, Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Kansas, Quebec, Vermont, Minnesota, Wisconsin, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Connecticut, Spain, Missouri, numerous localities in California—e.g. San Francisco, Oakland, LA, Daly City ✗

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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