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Peace and Love? Brilliant!

Capturing the British Essence of the 1960s Counterculture Movement

ABSTRACT: *This article analyzes the actions of British citizens during the 1960s transnational counterculture movement. Booming with creativity, young people across the Western world started to venture outside the traditional mindset established by their elders and created new norms for themselves. This article shows the elements that made the 1960s British counterculture movement unique by examining what types of people were involved and their actions, illuminating their complex motives for challenging traditional values. The 1960s British counterculture questioned the status quo, introduced new customs, and featured images that came to be associated with Britishness.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; Britain; counterculture movement; youth culture; sexuality; drug culture; Vietnam War; nuclear disarmament; university students; British Pathé*

Introduction

“But among the things that defined the new Left, as against a traditional, rather stuffy old Left, was that one was not upset by and even saw the role for hash or LSD. One would say that it assisted a little bit in knowing oneself, but really it was just having fun. It was an element of hedonism.”¹ Reflecting on his years as editor of the *New Left Review* during the 1960s, British historian Robin Blackburn (b. 1940) insisted that the counterculture movement centered on the idea of self-indulgence and activism. Seen as a tumultuous decade in the history of the Western world, the 1960s were marked by the rise of various social movements that voiced their dissent against hegemonic power. These campaigns included the student movement, free speech movement, anti-Vietnam War movement, anti-nuclear arms movement, and the women’s liberation movement. The 1960s also witnessed a change in fashion, individual expression of sexuality, the growth of drug culture, and the rise in folk and Rock ‘n’ Roll music. Those who participated in these new social groups were collectively given the title of the new counterculture movement. In this article, “counterculture” is defined as a way of life and set of ideas that are opposed to those accepted by most of society. Led mostly by the youths who held ideals and opinions that differed from those of post-war era adults, these movements sought to challenge and change society into one that would allow them to live more freely.² Although predominantly studied in its American context, the 1960s counterculture movement was observed on a global scale where new ideals became transnational. However, the counterculture

¹ Jonathon Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground, 1961-1971* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 12.

² For a discussion of youth as the center for rebellion against the status quo over the years, see Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *European Cities: Youth and the Public Sphere in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005). For a comprehensive sociological approach to youth behavior, see Jeremy Roche, Stanley Tucker, Rachel Thomson, and Ronny Flynn, eds., *Youth in Society: Contemporary Theory, Policy, and Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

movement in Britain was unique in its formation and forms of expression and therefore deserves further analysis. This article concerns itself with the essence of the British 1960s counterculture movement and investigates what types of people were involved, as well as their actions which in turn illuminate their complex motives for participating in challenging the status quo.

An array of primary sources produced between the late 1950s and early 1970s are utilized for this article's attempt to create a comprehensive impression of British counterculture's unique features. Editorials from *The Beaver*, the weekly newspaper of the LSE Students' Union at the London School of Economics, offers great insight into this particular student movement, as well as student perspectives toward protest.³ *Oz 28: School Kids Issue* of *Oz* magazine also provides an awareness to the 1960s drug and sex culture of British youth.⁴ In addition to these examples of print media, official documents from various counterculture organizations provide context for their motives behind mobilization.⁵ Testimonies of counterculture participants conducted by historian Jonathon Green and the autobiographies written by prominent anarchist Christie Stuart and political activist Tariq Ali also offer insight into the rationalization of radical political ideology during the 1960s.⁶ With such an abundance of primary sources at its disposal, this article discusses the images and voices that differentiated British counterculture from the movement as experienced in other countries.

Since the 1980s, historians have commented on the transnational aspect of the global counterculture movement and how Britain has been contextualized within this worldwide phenomenon.⁷ Historian Anthony Messina notes that the protest movement in Britain was the result of the failure of political parties to articulate

³ "Come Demonstrate for Vietnamese Freedom!" *The Beaver*, February 29, 1968, Students' Union Print Collection, *The Beaver*, London, London School of Economics (LSE) Archives and Special Collections; and "Deadly Pot," *The Beaver*, January 16, 1969, Students' Union Print Collection, *The Beaver*, London, LSE Archives and Special Collections.

⁴ Jim Anderson, ed., *Oz 28: School Kids Issue*, *Oz* magazine, May 1970.

⁵ Excerpts from official documents produced by counterculture organizations are found in "Britain," Chapter 9, in *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*, ed. Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skærlund Risager, and Laurence Cox (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 227-247.

⁶ Green, *Days in the Life*. For his work, Green interviewed just over one hundred former "60s people" and transcribed and condensed their responses, and those interviewed were characterized as illogical, intellectual, religious, and creative figures of the counterculture movement. Christie Stuart, *Granny Made Me an Anarchist: General Franco, the Angry Brigade, and Me* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004); Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (1987; London: William Collins Sons & Co., 2005).

⁷ For the transnationalism of the counterculture movement, see Russell Duncan, "The Summer of Love and Protest: Transatlantic Counterculture in the 1960s," in *The Transatlantic Sixties: Europe and the United States in the Counterculture Decade*, eds. Grzegorz Kosci, Clara Juncker, Sharon Monteith, and Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 144-173; and Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States* (1998; London: Bloomsbury Reader, 2012).

citizens' concerns on a variety of issues.⁸ Along the same lines, political scientist Nirmala Rao asserts that many felt such disdain for government authority that they saw the need to protest a variety of issues,⁹ while historian Holger Nehring points out that the pacifist perspective against British imperialism in India advocated by Gandhi in fact influenced many protestors.¹⁰ Scholarship pertaining to the distinctiveness of the British counterculture within urban spaces includes works by Elizabeth Nelson, who provides a chronology of events,¹¹ and Simon Rycroft, who focuses on the culture of London during the 1960s and its designation as the "Swinging City."¹² However, more precise scholarship is needed to capture the essence of the 1960s counterculture movement specific to Britain.

Through the use of primary testimonies and media texts that focus on participants, this article seeks to portray the British counterculture movement of the 1960s as distinct from other countries' counterculture movements in both its action and perception. It argues that the British counterculture movement of the 1960s questioned the status quo, introduced new customs, and featured images that came to be associated with Britishness. By examining the motives and actions of participants and their forms of expression, this article adds to the social and cultural history of twentieth-century Britain. Its first part focuses on the activist role of counterculture participants working on key international and domestic issues; its second part discusses new customs practiced by a more self-indulgent youth culture; and its final part examines the physical attributes associated with the Britishness images of counterculture participants. These issues on which youth participants were able to express their dissent and opinion sheds light on the complexities of the various social movements that have had a lasting effect on British citizens and how they conceptualize the world around them.

I. Participants

The counterculture of 1960s Britain was exceptional in that it called for new roles for activists that young people individually and collectively could fulfill by voicing concern about key issues that plagued society. One such issue that called for mass attention and new activists in Britain was the government's stockpile of nuclear warheads. As allies of the United States during the Cold War, British officials felt

⁸ Anthony M. Messina, "Postwar Protest Movements in Britain: A Challenge to Parties," *The Review of the Politics* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 410-428, here 410.

⁹ Nirmala Rao, *Reviving Local Democracy: New Labour, New Politics?* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2000), 67.

¹⁰ Holger Nehring, *Politics of Security: British and West German Protests and the Early Cold War, 1945-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 63-86 (Chapter 2, "Identifying the Protests and the Protest-Makers").

¹¹ Elizabeth Nelson, *The British Counter-Culture, 1966-73: A Study of the Underground Press* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

¹² Simon Rycroft, *Swinging City: A Cultural Geography of London, 1950-1974* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011).

the need to arm the country with nuclear warheads in the event that the war would turn “hot.” Having knowledge of the devastating effects of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II through the global media, British young adults felt the need to oppose nuclear armament on moral grounds. Thus, in 1958, British citizens formed the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). According to his 2004 autobiography, prominent British anarchist Christie Stuart became very active in the CND movement. According to his experience, the CND was a “mass movement of popular protest embracing a broad form of progressive individuals, old pacifists, new anti-militarists, conscientious religious sorts, trade unions, and [other] groups” who were convinced that “if enough pressure could be applied to the government [they] would give way and ban the bomb.”¹³ Although initially oriented toward conventional politics, the CND had to embrace the means of mass movements, such as rallies, demonstrations, and marches, because Labour Defense Minister Aneurin Bevan had retreated from the anti-nuclear clause and blocked traditional channels of influence. Mass demonstrations promised to be an effective vehicle of expression in a political system that was apparently somewhat sensitive to mass “voice.”¹⁴ During an era when Britain was losing its foreign colonies one by one, citizens became concerned with the idea that the government held such destructive weaponry. They now felt they had a duty to press for governmental policy change, change which could only be successful if the government witnessed mass opposition from its citizenry. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Britain observed a surge in anti-nuclear weapons protests. From 1960 to 1970, the University of Manchester alone witnessed ten anti-nuclear weapons protests that each gathered several hundred participants.¹⁵ By demonstrating their frustration at the hegemonic power of the British state, citizens took the energetic role of activists and pushed for changes to policies instituted by an older generation that had been ravaged by war.

British citizens during the 1960s also turned their attention to the issue of the Vietnam War, with organizations such as the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign calling for the war’s immediate end. In his 1987 autobiography, British activist Tariq Ali describes his desire to push for the demilitarization of Vietnam. Based on his attendance at the 1965 Helsinki Peace Conference and speaking with Vietnamese individuals affected by the war, Ali comments: “We had to do everything in our power – if necessary turn the world upside down – to help the Vietnamese drive

¹³ Stuart, *Granny Made Me an Anarchist*, 102.

¹⁴ Messina, “Postwar Protest Movements in Britain,” 422.

¹⁵ Sarah Louise Webster, “Protest Activity in the British Student Movement, 1945-2011” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 2015), 148.

the Americans out of their country.”¹⁶ Tariq Ali had also visited the war-torn areas of Vietnam in 1967, noting in a journal entry on January 29, 1967:

There are mangled dead bodies. There is a hospital with Red Cross markings, which has been singled out and destroyed. If the shelters had not been evacuated, the casualties would have been very high. I look for military targets. There are none. Sadness mingles with anger and rage. Would the Americans ever bomb a European city in this fashion today? The Vietnamese are clearly not human beings as far as Washington is concerned.¹⁷

Counterculture historian Holger Nehring notes that the British had “rejected American consumerism as potentially totalitarian and regarded the American intervention in Vietnam as a novel form of colonialism that would pacify powerful capitalist interests in the United States,” with some British protesters even expressing their anger at U.S. policies by burning American flags.¹⁸ British citizens were not necessarily anti-American, but they were strongly against American foreign policy and expressed this concern through large-scale demonstrations and marches filled with anti-Vietnam War rhetoric. One demonstration held in Trafalgar Square in London on March 17, 1968, rallied nearly 10,000 protesters, many of whom had heard of the march via university student newspapers.¹⁹ As they marched to the American embassy, tensions with police grew, resulting in the arrest of nearly 200 protesters and some sustaining minor injuries. These types of protests show that British citizens of the counterculture actively used their voices and bodies to try to produce change in a world that was still struggling with imperialist powers. As citizens of arguably the largest imperialist power, these individuals had seen the devastating effects of their government’s actions and wanted to effect drastic changes.

At the center of counterculture demonstrations was the large British student population who felt the need to fulfill their role as leaders of change. Reports in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign’s weekly bulletin after the October 1968 occupation of the London School of Economics provide insight into the motives behind the movement and the march’s result. Bulletin writer Dave Slaney notes that “the occupation of LSE still stands as a model for political action” where, by taking control of their own institution on a revolutionary basis, the LSE students

¹⁶ Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 61. Ali also mentions that he traveled to the United States and debated Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in a televised event regarding American involvement in the Vietnam War. Ali would comment that he believed he had won the debate.

¹⁷ Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 101.

¹⁸ Holger Nehring, “Great Britain,” in *1968 Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*, ed. Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 125-136, here 129-130.

¹⁹ “Come Demonstrate for Vietnamese Freedom!” *The Beaver*, February 29, 1968. London School of Economics students urged their fellow colleagues to “come together and demonstrate not only their solidarity with the Vietnamese but their solidarity with each other, a solidarity which [was] ultimately going to form the basis of the only real challenge to the kind of society [they] live[d] in.”

paved the way for students and workers in all capitalist institutions.²⁰ From 1960 to 1970, LSE witnessed twenty-four marches, eight pickets, three sit-ins, and four teach-ins where students attempted to function as the main voice for political opposition.²¹ Based on these statistics and documented calls for demonstration, the counterculture needed educated individuals to function as the leaders of their resistance to the status quo. Throughout the 1960s, the university setting provided a fertile breeding ground for political collectivization, allowing a diverse student body to converse frequently and in close proximity, which could only aid the exchange of ideas. Historian Jeremy Suri notes that “educational institutions provided the *infrastructure* for dissent within many societies. The words of prominent iconoclasts—writers as well as musicians and artists—supplied the *language* that allowed men and women to express their anger as they had not before.”²² Student leaders in these universities provided dissatisfied citizens with a new vocabulary for articulating and acting out their frustrations. In this setting, the British counterculture prompted its students to question the status quo, take a role as political activists, and use rhetoric to fire up a dissatisfied citizenry.

During an era marked by the intensity of the Cold War, British citizens in the 1960s started to question domestic and international status-quo policies. They asked why their government continued to hold on to destructive nuclear weapons that were capable of inflicting traumatic harm. They distrusted the American motives in the Vietnam War and called for its immediate end. Those who had taken on these roles as activists were mostly the college-educated, as they developed their leadership and communication skills that were essential to start a mass movement for change. As the British counterculture grew throughout the 1960s, more activists were willing to share their discontent with politics but were also willing to question everyday customs in society.

II. Customs

The British counterculture of the 1960s introduced new customs that challenged the older generations’ traditions and ideals. One of the most significant cultural developments in the 1960s was British Rock ‘n’ Roll and folk culture. Musicians and groups such as *The Beatles*, *The Who*, *The Zombies*, *The Rolling Stones*, and *The Kinks* became hugely popular, with multitudes flocking to see live performances. Testimony from those who experienced the 1960s music culture do reveal its enjoyable aspects, but also its commodification. Counterculture participant Jeff Dexter says music festivals “destroyed the underground” where everyone was trying to make a buck after Woodstock.²³ Counterculture historian Arthur

²⁰ Dave Slaney, “The Occupation of LSE” (1968), in *Voices of 1968*, ed. Mohandesi, Risager, and Cox, 234-235.

²¹ Webster, “Protest Activity in the British Student Movement,” 177.

²² Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 88.

²³ Green, *Days in the Life*, 318.

Marwick notes that this commodification resulted in British citizens' desire for something new and different. For example, *The Rolling Stones* were told by their manager Andrew Oldham to project a wild and anti-social image to distinguish themselves from the popular *Beatles*.²⁴ Because various movements in their country and around the world affected British citizens, they turned to music that mirrored their frustrations and need for change. People wanted to listen to music and mingle at live shows but in doing so created a mass market that allowed for the capitalist strategies of the music industry to infiltrate what had once been a personal and meaningful aspect of 1960s music. Despite this, the music culture of the 1960s provided a discourse from which young counterculture members were able to assess and challenge societal norms.

Young British citizens during the 1960s also expanded the drug culture and gave it greater publicity. Many social activists and counterculture-related journals at the time advocated for the use of drugs, especially marijuana, and pushed for its legalization.²⁵ For example, the LSE Students' Union's weekly paper, *The Beaver*, published several articles about the benefits of the legalization of marijuana. According to its editors, there was a "fascist climate of public opinion in Britain" and the government would

undoubtedly make itself very unpopular if it relaxed the harsh laws against pot at this moment. A minority of people would praise the government for being liberal-minded, but the vast majority of the British public would mark down yet another notch of grievance against it.²⁶

According to historian Elizabeth Nelson, there were two features of drug-taking that related to the heart of the counterculture:

it emphasized the user's separateness from a society which was regarded with contempt, and it reflected the importance attached by the counter-culture to the concept of 'self' as central, the belief that no social or political liberation could take place unless its primary concern was the freedom of each individual.²⁷

By participating in drug culture, whether it was by smoking marijuana or taking LSD, counterculture members sought to create new meaning in a society from which they felt disconnected. Similar to the effect of Rock 'n' Roll and folk music, drugs gave young British counterculture members the opportunity to challenge societal norms, even if it meant harming their bodies. With the increased exposure to drugs in their physical forms and in the press, British youth began to connect counterculture with drug culture, producing anxieties for the older generations.

²⁴ Marwick, *Sixties*, 460.

²⁵ Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 127. Ali signed a petition to legalize marijuana and said there was some truth to the argument that big capitalist lobbies knew that marijuana was less harmful than tobacco and alcohol and refused to legalize it because "they fear[ed] massive loss in profits on drink and tobacco."

²⁶ "Deadly Pot," *The Beaver*, January 16, 1969.

²⁷ Nelson, *British Counter-Culture*, 93.

With various organizations calling for change, British youth also pushed for new conventions of expressing sexuality. In tune with the self-indulgent aspects of drug culture, and some would say as a result of drug stimulus, British youth became more open to expressing their individuality and sexuality. Edited by Jim Anderson with the help of high school students, the *Oz 28: School Kids Issue* of *Oz* magazine is the epitome of British youth culture wanting to explore perceptions of sexuality. This issue of *Oz* magazine contains multiple images with nude and phallic imagery displaying vulgar sexual situations, such as a comic strip depicting an anthropomorphic bear having intercourse with what seems to be a human named “Granny.”²⁸ One youth contributor, Roger Vartoukian, exclaims on one page: “Animals it seems have got a good thing going; they are protected and left to do what they want. Why can’t this sexual freedom be extended to us, after all, we’re only animals!”²⁹ According to *Oz* editor Jim Anderson: “We were into sexual freedom and sexual liberation and if we wanted to publish a picture with sexual content it would also have a point to make, and we would insist on publishing it.”³⁰ Referring to the content and imagery portrayed in this issue of *Oz*, Gender Studies scholar Melanie Bell points out that when it came to the representation of women’s sexuality, they were “frequently reduced to nothing more than a sex object, paraded across a range of cultural texts for the pleasures of the heterosexual male.”³¹ Counterculture participant Nicola Lane affirms Bell’s observation, stating that the 1960s were still male-dominated with

a lot of girls just [rolling] joints—it was what you did while you sat quietly in the corner, nodding your head. You were not really encouraged to be a thinker. You were there really for fucks and domesticity.³²

Despite this, however, the increase in sexual activity among youth became a key factor of the counterculture movement. British youth felt more comfortable actively expressing their sexuality and acting on their sexual urges, topics that were seen as taboo by their own parents and older generations.

This sense of being able to openly express their sexuality was not confined to heterosexual individuals. The counterculture also experienced a more accepting perspective of homosexuality. Passed in 1967, the Sexual Offense Act decriminalized homosexual acts in private between two men following protests and lobbying from organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front. Commenting on his involvement in group meetings despite being heterosexual, activist Andrew Lumsden observes: “The counterculture was there, drag queens were there, a

²⁸ Anderson, *Oz 28: School Kids Issue*, 14-15.

²⁹ Anderson, *Oz 28: School Kids Issue*, 14.

³⁰ Green, *Days in the Life*, 383. Anderson would later use this philosophy during the 1971 obscenity trial of the *School Kids Issue*.

³¹ Melanie Bell, “Young, Single, Disillusioned: The Screen Heroine in 1960s British Cinema,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 42 (2012): 79-96, here 81.

³² Green, *Days in the Life*, 321.

minority of lesbians, heavy-duty political people. Various people who'd worked on the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform in the 50s and were horrified by the blatancy, the dangers, the backlash and so on."³³ With the prominence of activist voices against the state and changing views of society, homosexuals now felt more confident to be themselves and pursue their own interests.

As activists of the British counterculture were voicing their political dissent, they created new customs that would characterize their movement. With its emphasis on pleasure seeking and self-indulgence, the counterculture embraced Rock 'n' Roll and folk music as a means of expressing a longing for something different. Similarly, drug culture became a key characteristic of the counterculture, with participants actively engaged in marijuana and LSD experimentation as a means of protesting societal norms. Drug culture heavily impacted its participants' desire to express new forms of sexuality, with British youth increasingly engaged in sexual activities. As the British counterculture embraced these new customs that older generations had traditionally viewed as taboo subjects, it also featured images that came to be associated specifically with the idea of Britishness.

III. Images

British youth involved in the 1960s counterculture displayed elements of dress and fashion that highlighted their new attitudes of opposition toward the status quo. In order to be perceived as an authentic activist during this time, one had to have a certain look against conformity. According to counterculture participant Jeff Nuttall, male activists

appeared in the standard uniform at the time which was tattered jeans and dirty old donkey jackets. Everyone wore black. Really filthy: the tidemark around the neck was a badge of authenticity. Long black hair, filthy hair, always looking dead miserable as though they hadn't had a night's sleep for at least a week.³⁴

Historian David Fowler argues that men in the late 1960s British counterculture would not have had the confidence to sport such a different physical image if they had not been influenced by the Mods of the 1950s who dressed in tailor-made suits and hung around drug-fueled dancing clubs.³⁵ By dressing the way they did, the Mods of the 1950s and the males of the 1960s counterculture showcased their authenticity and opposition to traditional roles of masculinity imposed by adults who had lived during World War II. In a search for discipline and structure in a world running amok, adults valued the image of a clean-faced and well-dressed youth. As the counterculture started to gain momentum in the mid-1960s, British male citizens felt the need to display themselves in a way that differentiated them from older members of society and donned a dirtier and messier look. One was

³³ Green, *Days in the Life*, 321.

³⁴ Green, *Days in the Life*, 7.

³⁵ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 132.

not fully an active member unless one talked the way activists were supposed to talk, meaning with authority and confidence, and looked the way activists were supposed to look—a way that distanced them from so-called normal society, resulting in a new image of ironic conformity.

Britain during the 1960s set the standard for women's counterculture fashion. Films and newsreels from the archives of the British Pathé showcase the unique fashion statements many women during the 1960s made in an attempt to express themselves freely. Following a day in the life of the editors of *Intro* magazine in 1967, a British Pathé newsreel describing "Swinging Britain" recorded some of London's most outrageous fashion. The audio commentary remarks that these young people were "social rebels" that had an image that was "way out and weird." The video features women wearing orange hats with holes and even paper dresses, with one having the image of Bob Dylan's face printed on it. The tape also shows women parading in brightly colored short miniskirts and dresses embellished with tasseled fringes as they dance frenetically to psychedelic music.³⁶ According to counterculture historian Arthur Marwick, Mary Quant became the most influential British fashion designer during the 1960s when her "skirt(s) got shorter" and "stocking(s) became bold and patterned," even leaving fashion writer Ernestine Carter to declare 1963 as the "Year of the Leg."³⁷ At first unique to the London counterculture, this quirky and often scandalous fashion quickly became transnational. Wearing more revealing clothing and outrageous outfits provided women with a means to communicate their individuality, especially given that louder males often diminished women's political voices. Many British women felt the need to combat the conformity of docile housewives that had become popular during the postwar period. They rediscovered fashion as a form of self-expression against traditional values of modesty. However, this also became problematic, as the media often portrayed them only as sexual objects who did not have an active or prominent leadership position in social movements.

Central to the 1960s British counterculture was the image of the deviant youth. Teenagers and young adults during the 1960s had different perceptions of society, themselves, and their role in the status quo than the older generations. Youth distrusted the policies of their government, questioned the values placed on them by their parents, and felt the need to find a meaningful and "real" lifestyle. Sue Miles, a member of the 1960s counterculture, said her involvement was a protest against the values imposed on her by society: "We don't want jobs, fuck you! We don't want to go and do that—that's the last thing we want [...] I think it was

³⁶ *Swinging Britain Print* (London: British Pathé, 1967), accessed May 4, 2019. Audio commentary: 00:18; images of women wearing orange hats with holes: 00:29; images of the Bob Dylan-inspired paper dress: 02:39; images of the happening containing a psychedelic performance: 05:05-06:20. Interestingly, this segment also shows male performers wearing henna, a dye for temporary body art, on their faces, which reflects counterculture males' desire to be different from the status quo.

³⁷ Marwick, *Sixties*, 66.

probably the first time the children went to college without any idea of getting a job at the end of it.”³⁸ Journalist Nigel Fountain views the 1960s counterculture as a “lucky generation,” for

they missed the war, and grew up in a world where the expansion of affluence seemed infinite. With the typical gratitude of the young, they responded with protest, argument, and what their parents regarded as deviant behavior.³⁹

Both Miles and Fountain highlight the new sense of entitlement that many youths experienced after their parents saw greater prosperity after World War II. The late 1950s and early 1960s also witnessed a large increase in college attendance rates, where students were able to converse and debate with a variety of intellectuals. Observing that their parents were able to financially prosper due to the availability of consistent work, counterculture youth wanted to break free from this mold. Going to college, music concerts, or even just talking to new people made them value the importance of self-expression and the need for personal gratification.

Throughout the 1960s, the counterculture featured images that came to be associated with Britishness. Males in the counterculture were expected to have their hair longer and dress in disheveled clothing as a means to appear authentic. They were also expected to be college-educated or at least have the ability to communicate their thoughts in a meaningful and provocative manner. Women, however, remained marginalized, as few ever became prominent political leaders and organizers. Nonetheless, women, too, seized opportunities to express themselves more liberally through fashion, particularly in the freeing sense of miniskirts and clothing embellishments. At the center of the counterculture was the youthfulness of the men and women involved. With a lively energy to pursue their interests, the youth led the way through these social movements in an attempt to challenge and change traditional views and values.

Conclusion

As the world was experiencing many new changes and shifts in power, the British citizenry turned to counterculture ideals to voice their dissent. Print and visual media, testimonies, and official documents reveal insightful occasions of British youth culture fulfilling their roles as activists and creating new customs and images to differentiate themselves from previous generations. By questioning the status quo, participants in the British counterculture took the role as activists against what they perceived as injustices. Trained in the college setting to lead and communicate effectively, the youth protested against Britain’s stockpile of nuclear weapons, against their government’s alliance with the imperialist power of the United States, and against the latter’s involvement in Vietnam. Along with their role as activists, the British youth also introduced new customs into the

³⁸ Green, *Days in the Life*, 32-33.

³⁹ Nigel Fountain, *Underground: The London Alternative Press, 1966-74* (London: Routledge, Publishing, 1988), vii.

counterculture. They listened to music that reflected their sense of disillusionment and took drugs in an attempt to find stimulus in a society they deemed lacking in personal enjoyment. Freedom to express one's sexuality had been seen as taboo by the older generations, but the culture created by the youth thoroughly embraced sexuality. The movement's images of Britishness centered on appearances where men were expected to dress in a certain disheveled manner to reflect authenticity and women expressed themselves freely through scandalous fashion statements.

If using a cultural lens to study the social movements of the 1960s can shed light on the complex relationships between individuals, the state, and society in Britain, further analysis of other areas in the world can enrich the study of the global 1960s. Studies examining the social movements in specific African, Latin American, and Asian countries during the 1960s can provide greater knowledge about the transnational aspect of counterculture ideals. Not only did 1960s British counterculture highlight the appeal of building a common struggle, it set the tone for embracing a life where one need not feel ashamed of voicing one's opinion or acting to fulfill one's own self-interest. In the words of John Lennon:

We need to learn to love ourselves first, in all our glory and our imperfections. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others or our potential to create. Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ Quoted in Luminita D.Saviuc, *15 Things You Should Give Up to Be Happy: An Inspiring Guide* (New York: Perigree/Penguin Random House, 2016), electronic edition.