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## Editorial

### Katie Milestone and Joan Ormrod

The 1960s is a decade that continues to hold great fascination, even as we move towards the third decade of the twenty-first century. The iconic symbols of the 1960s seem never to have gone out of fashion; mini cars and miniskirts, op art designs, Quant/Sassoon-inspired bob hairstyles, to name a few. Recent high-profile publications such as Jon Savage's (2016) book on the pop cultural explosion of 1966, Stuart Cosgrove's (2016) exploration in his book *Detroit 1967* of the social and political sea change in soul city, Detroit, against a back drop of the Vietnam war, growing urban unrest and the unravelling of Motown records, and a new 2018 musical biopic dedicated to Dusty Springfield (written by Jonathan Harvey), demonstrate the persistent interest in this most celebrated and scrutinized decade.

This special issue is dedicated to exploring aspects of girls' and young women's encounters with the 'swinging sixties' in a variety of contexts and geographical locations. It is very hard to generalize about young women's experiences in the 1960s as so much changed so quickly from the start to the end of the decade. The early 1960s remained strongly melded to the 1950s in terms of how women were expected to look and behave. The mid-1960s, as Savage notes, explode into something very exciting and creative and, on the face of it, young women had opportunities and freedoms that were unimaginable even five years before. The late 1960s have an angrier and more radical atmosphere where anti-Vietnam sentiments and the global protests of 1968 heralded a cultural sea change. The women's

liberation movement in the latter part of the 1960s becomes far more visible, radical and outraged about women's oppression and inequality.

This special issue of 'Representing style and female agency in the 1960s' emerged from a symposium, *Dolly Birds and Swinging Cities: Women and Popular Culture in the 1960s*, held in May of 2016 at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The symposium explored female bodies in popular culture of the 1960s, a time of great change in attitudes towards female bodies and identities. The era followed on from conservatism after the Second World War, when women were expected to become housewives and mothers in the domestic sphere. Despite this, 30 per cent of women were employed outside the home. There were radical changes in attitude from the beginning to the end of the decade. At the end, more women worked outside the home and women were not expected to resign from employment when they married.

The 1960s was a time of paradoxes in the ways female bodies and identities were perceived. The contraceptive pill became available at the beginning of the decade. This, and countercultural influences, changed attitudes towards female sexuality. At the beginning of the decade, women were expected to assert the moral imperative denying sex before marriage, as they were the ones who would bear the brunt of any accidental conceptions. A woman who epitomized female modesty and demureness at the beginning of the decade was film star Doris Day. By the end of the decade, women were expected to be more liberated in the era of 'free love'. Of course, this is a broad generalization because the dissemination of the Pill was not even. It was available only to married women long before it became available outside marriage. Regions away from major cities were slower to take it up and

change attitudes towards sex outside of marriage. Society still frowned on single mothers, as dramatically realized in the BBC television play, *Cathy Come Home* (1966). Further, the pill meant that women could be pressured into having sex. It was no accident that Doris Day, lampooned in the 1960s, was recovered by second wave feminists in the 1970s, as a symbol of female emancipation when women realized they did not have to have sex if they did not want to (Haskell 1974).

The early 1960s saw the beginnings of second wave feminism with books such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which critiqued the domestic duties imposed on women as a type of prison. A new type of female body was emerging from the early 1960s, one that was active and located in the public sphere. The New Woman was promoted by Helen Gurley Brown's book *Sex and the Single Girl* (1964) and put into practice by the launch of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, edited by Brown. *Cosmo* was the 'handbook for the working girl' (Radner and Luckett 1999). Suddenly it was glamorous to be a single girl. As if to illustrate the positive aspects of the female body a number of fantasy femmes, *Honey West* (1965–66), April Dancer (*The Girl From UNCLE*, 1966–67) and Emma Peel (*The Avengers*, 1961–69) appeared on television. These spy girls gloried in their singleness. Their bodies connoted power and agency in public spaces. They wore clothes such as jump suits that enabled their bodies to fight. The New Woman was an individual who did not need a man to validate her gloriousness. She took pleasure in gazing at herself and her consumer identity (Radner and Luckett 1999).

Fantasy spy television series revelled in consumerism, eating and drinking fine foods, driving fast cars and wearing fashionable clothing. Notions of female beauty and the ideal body changed in this era. Models such as Twiggy and Jean

Shrimpton promoted the active female body in the ways they danced and moved whilst modelling clothes. In boutiques, models danced on raised plinths (Fogg 2003). The model's body became more androgynous and younger with flat breasts on which the shift dress hung beautifully. It was an era when the ideal female body was young and not fully formed. Clothes made for this figure were supposedly liberating – however, the miniskirt and the lack of corsetry required a much more draconian beauty regime. Women had to slim to look good in these fashions. The corset may have disappeared, but what replaced it was self-discipline and starvation.

Music played a huge part in this general consumption. At the beginning of the decade, London and Britain were the centre for radical change in cultural values by the mid-decade with northern cities becoming the focus of attention. The British pop music invasion made British culture, music, fashion, television, films irresistible. By the end of the decade, San Francisco and the hippie counterculture led the way for softer types of music and fashion, a return to rural values and a more laidback approach to life.

This special issue focuses on young women and their interactions with, and representations within, the popular culture of the time. The case studies are North American and European and therefore a future collection exploring similar themes in terms of young women in non-western contexts would be a welcome area of research. We are interested in the concept of style and female body.

The papers here explore the complexities of how the body was variously hidden, revealed, sexualized, infantilized, styled, represented and radicalized. How much agency did young women have? What constraints from earlier decades remained? The collection of works here scrutinize some of the iconic symbols of the

decade notably the bikini, the sunglasses and the go-go dancer. These two objects of young women's fashion and the objectified, gazed upon go-go dancer provide rich case studies by which to examine the complex contradictions faced by the 1960s girl.

The first article in this issue by Vanessa Brown, 'Cool, sunglasses and the modern woman – icons of the 1960s' uses sunglasses to explore the notion of 'cool'. She focuses on two powerful examples of sunglass-wearing women. One is fictional, Holly Go-lightly as played by Audrey Hepburn in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Edwards, 1961). The other is Kathleen Cleaver, the civil rights activist. Brown argues that sunglasses and notions of 'cool' enable a reinvigoration of the appeal of Hepburn and Cleaver.

The second article by Ewa Mazierska, 'From a lady to a lost "Prole": Girls in the city in Polish cinema of the 1960s and early 1970s' provides an overview of changes in cultural expectations and concerns over the roles of young women in the 1960s but from the point of view of Eastern European cinema. Acknowledging the vast sociocultural changes of the 1960s, Mazierska compares the representation of women in films from the early 1960s with those of the early 1970s. These changing representations, she argues, show the changing context and meaning of 'the girl'.

Mel Gibson's article, "'Who's the girl with the kissin' lips?": Constructions of class, popular culture and agentic girlhood in *Girl*, *Princess*, *Jackie* and *Bunty* in the 1960s' also provides an overview of the expectations placed upon girls in western culture but through the lens of magazines and comics. Examining a range of comics published in the United Kingdom throughout the 1960s, like Mazierska, Gibson proposes that the concept of 'girl' is a social construction.

In '1960s surfsploitation films: Sex, the bikini and the active female body', Joan Ormrod compares the bikini in fashion and consumer culture promotion with film promotion in the surfsploitation genre, a genre that exploited the surf boom of the early 1960s. Alongside the miniskirt, the bikini is often regarded as one of the ultimate symbols of the playful rebelliousness and youthful freedom for the young 1960s women. Yet as Ormrod points out, the surfsploitation films, so important in promoting the bikini, reveal the paradoxes of freedom versus constraint in perceptions of the bikini in the 1960s.

The next two articles by Georgina Gregory and Katie Milestone deal with female pleasure in dance. Georgina Gregory's piece, 'Go-go dancing – femininity, individualism and anxiety in the 1960s' scrutinizes the female body in terms of both agency but also in terms of how the experience of go-go dancing can be seen as expressing a range of contradictory and conflicting emotions experienced by a generation of women presented with a range of new choices in the process of individualization. For women, as theorists such as Lisa Adkins (1999) have explained, women's apparent move towards equality and female empowerment is often met with conflicting responses about what is 'appropriate femininity'. Thus, women often remain judged, constrained and discriminated against, which calls in to question the popular notion that from the 1960s onwards women incrementally experienced more equality and freedom as time passed by.

Finally, Katie Milestone's paper, 'Swinging regions: Young women and club culture in 1960s Manchester' examines the ways in which women in a regional city accessed elements of a 'swinging sixties' lifestyle. Her essay is based around interviews with women who actively participated in Manchester's coffee club and discotheque scene in the mid to late 1960s. Milestone explores the gendered

dynamics of the cultural north–south divide and ways in which girls in the regions carved out access to the style and experience of the ‘swinging city’. Her interview data reveals high levels of creativity and agency from her interviewees and explores the ways in which encounters with popular culture, notably night clubs, pop music and fashion, impacted on the women’s wider life choices and experiences. She also reflects on cinematic representations of young women in the north of England in this period and their relationship to the ‘real-life’ experiences of northern girls.

This collection of papers aims to stimulate a debate that explores and challenges perceptions of female agency in the 1960s, a decade that evokes myths of freedom, licence and creativity. However, as many of these articles show, it is an era of paradoxes where freedom and equality remain tantalizingly elusive often due to debates surrounding fashion, film and consumption.

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Katie Milestone began researching gender and popular culture whilst undertaking her PhD at the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture. She lectures in Sociology and Media at the Manchester Metropolitan University and has researched and published a number of works on gender, popular music, creative industries, popular culture and Northernness.

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