5 Walking in the city: the monkey parades

Introduction

> 'Monkey parades', I may say for the edification of readers who may be mystified by the term, is a commonly used description of those stretches of streets, to be found in all towns, where youths and girls parade up and down each Sunday night.[1]

The young working class spent much of their time on the street. From socialising in busy central thoroughfares, walking through local markets, travelling to the dance hall or cinema, as well as walking to work, or running errands, young people led a largely pedestrian existence. Historians have traced the practice of walking in the city, from the trudge of the policeman walking his beat, to the lounge of aristocratic walkers of leisure, the brisk and efficient march of the middle-class commuter, and the activities of specialist street-walkers, those who plied their trade in the streets and public spaces of the city.[2] Much less is known about the walking activities of young people.[3] For the young working class in this period, walking was a feature of life, a virtually universal experience. It offered opportunities for knowing, understanding and even shaping the city. It was an essential form of transport and often merely practical, and unconsidered movement from A to B. Yet walking was not simply a necessity; it could also be a form of informal entertainment in its own right, and young men and women strolled, promenaded, cruised, loitered, skulked and tramped across the city. Young couples often walked the streets together, and walking had long been an established part of courtship. Rebecca Solnit suggests that, much like marching together can affirm and generate solidarity between a group, the delicate act of matching the rhythms of their strides aligns two people emotionally and bodily: 'perhaps they first feel themselves a pair by moving together through the evening, the street, the world'.[4] Thomas Hardy's Jude catches the first glimpse of his future wife while out walking, and courts her by escorting her six miles on foot to see the glowing lights of a nearby town. Stan and Lily Hall walked across York, from Hungate to Heslington, as well as down Lord Mayor's Walk and around the busy central streets of the city, and Lily remembered it being 'freezing cold' as they stood 'canoodling' in a lane.[5] Young courting couples were often referred to as 'walking out' or 'stepping out', illustrating the way such relationships often played out in the streets, and the importance of walking as a youthful leisure practice.[6]

Walking out was at least in part designed for display: for much of the time it was a public activity, marking two young people as recognised courters. Walking out could also provide a shared seclusion for secret conversations; it provided couples with the opportunity for both sociability and intimacy. It also used outdoor space in particular ways, and was often place and age specific. At certain times and in distinct spaces, a casual walk around could become a promenade; particular streets and public spaces could gain semi-official recognition as a place for young people to gather, meet and parade. The 'monkey parades' were a popular youth custom on Saturday and Sunday evenings, a custom that saw young people gather and parade up and down particular streets, socialising with friends, and showing off in front of the opposite sex. The young working class of Liverpool gathered on the Landing Stages at George's Pier on the Mersey to promenade, much to the disgust of a local journalist who wrote of the 'permitted indecency and immorality on the Landing Stage'.[7] In Manchester, the monkey parades saw the young working class from surrounding areas gather in Oldham Street, where, as Jenny Birchall has examined, on Sunday nights the street was described as having been 'given up to the carnival revels of Manchester's vagabonds. Here scenes may be witnessed which, we venture to say, are unparalleled in any city or town in England'.[8] While journalists may have been keen to highlight the extreme nature of the behaviour of young men and women in *their* towns and cities, scenes of young people parading the streets were to be found across Britain. The monkey parades in turn-of-the-century Hackney witnessed London youths exchange winks and smirks,[9] and in York young people gathered in Coney Street with the hope of meeting a potential partner. Rowntree noted how in York 'the main street was so thronged with [young working people] that it was difficult to make one's way through it'.[10]

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the social interactions and experiences of the young working class regularly took place in the streets of the city, and while they could enjoy considerable freedom in their interactions with one another, some young people could find themselves in conflict with the law, reform institutions or the intentions of other residents. Civic authorities, police, magistrates and middle-class commentators all attempted to regulate young working-class behaviour in the streets and public spaces of their towns and cities, and certain streets became central to debates about access to and use of public space. These debates involved anxieties both about who was using public space, and acceptable behaviour within it. However, young working-class men and women continued to use central streets as a site for their social activities, challenging attempts by the police and moral commentators to regulate their behaviour, and in doing so contested spatial meanings. The street was a space

in which authority was demonstrated, yet it was also a site of resistance, and the monkey parades provide an example of how ideas about class, gender and generation were incorporated within competing constructions of space. Streets and public spaces were not a passive backdrop to the lives of the young working class; through their leisure and courtship activities, the meanings of these spaces were constantly redefined. The young working class played an active role in understanding, engaging with and shaping their environment.

This chapter therefore provides a detailed focus on the monkey parade, a youthful activity that formed a key part of the social lives of many young working people, and played out primarily in the central streets of towns and cities across Britain. It traces competing narratives of surveillance, control and resistance, and argues that young people's parading was a process of negotiation as competing interests sought to secure access to public space. Space takes on the attributes of those who enjoy it, and the young working class were able to actively carve out spaces of their own, despite the ongoing hostility of other residents. As young working-class men and women responded to and challenged regulations on their behaviour on the monkey parade, they were able to negotiate new understandings of public space.

'Just a plain street': Coney Street

> 'It's a street. Just a plain street, don't you know; with shops and houses in it, and pavements, and roads, and tram-lines. You couldn't see no difference between it and any other street if you wasn't told it was the Monkey Parade.'[11]

Streets are a 'primary ingredient of urban existence', and those streets at the heart of the town or city were important physical locations, but they were also cultural spaces, framing social interactions.[12] For the authorities, central streets were thoroughfares and not a social location. Through the management of the physical environment and the attempted regulation of behaviour, these spaces at the heart of the city were the focus of much attention. As a space for socialising and courting, they were also a site of contestation and resistance. Streets could be sites for more or less dramatic acts of transgression, but challenges to regulation could be apparent in even the most mundane of routines.[13]

Central streets were complex entities, made up of a range of competing and overlapping spaces that could expand, contract and shift in response to the passing of time or season. As busy central thoroughfares, they were used by a diverse range of pedestrians, and

invested by residents and observers with a variety of meanings and uses. The street was experienced by no two people in the same way. One central thoroughfare in York, Coney Street, provides a useful example of how such locations were placed in debates about access to and use of public space, and their role in discussions about appropriate conduct in town and city centres (see Figure 5.1).

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Coney Street may have been 'just a plain street', but on Saturday and Sunday evenings it became the site of the popular 'monkey run' in York, and witnessed young working people from across the city gather and parade up and down. Bertha Linfoot recalled how 'you couldn't move down Coney Street at night time'.[14] Running parallel to the River Ouse from Spurriergate to St Helen's Square, Coney Street was at the very heart of York and formed the main route from Ouse Bridge to the Museum Gardens area. Palliser notes that it was perhaps the first street in York to be paved, and it remained an important thoroughfare throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[15] One York resident recalled that in the early twentieth century, 'York was known as the three P's – poor, proud and pretty.'[16] There were certain parts of the city that more respectable residents would have taken care to avoid, such as the Water Lanes, with their reputation for crime and prostitution, the overcrowded houses of the Hungate district, or the yards and alleyways off the main Walmgate thoroughfare. Coney Street, however, could not be defined as a particularly middle- or working-class space, and was unusual in its lack of residential premises. As the site of the Mansion House and Guildhall, the *York Herald* offices and numerous banks and solicitors' premises, it was obviously frequented by respectable residents on legitimate business. In the map accompanying his survey of poverty in the city, Rowntree assigned Coney Street the light pink colour which identified it as one of 'the main business streets' (see Plate 1).[17] It acted as the main thoroughfare between the Assize Courts and the Guildhall, and as a central location the street was accessible and was regularly used as a pedestrian route. For anyone walking the river bank on the east side it was a necessary detour as the bank was inaccessible between Lendal and the Ouse Bridge. It was well known as a centre of consumption, and local history studies have focused almost exclusively on its position as a commercial centre.[18] Street directories illustrate the wide variety of shops available, from Winspear's high-class perfumery, the large department store Leak and Thorp's, to smaller shops suitable for those with a more modest budget. The servants' registry located at number 43 further demonstrates that it is difficult to limit the space to particular groups of users.[19] It was also located conveniently close to the Parliament Street Market, which on Saturday evenings provided a

source of free entertainment, as well as cheap food, and in 1915 the Picture House Cinema opened on the street. On a day-to-day basis, Coney Street was clearly not limited in its use to particular social groups (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3).

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Young working people used the street for everyday purposes, such as shopping or simply walking through. Their behaviour was rarely problematic for observers when they used the street in this way. However, while it contained a diverse group of users, Coney Street was most commonly utilised by different groups at particular times of the day, night or week. The working and middle classes both used Coney Street, but often for different reasons, or at different times. Respectable shoppers and those with legitimate business in the street walked the pavements of Coney Street primarily during weekdays; however, magistrates and observers were concerned with behaviour in the street in the evenings, when the young working class claimed it as their own. It was on Saturday and Sunday evenings that the use of the street, and their behaviour within it, saw the young working class threaten constructions of the city centre as an orderly, civic and commercial space.[20] Concerns were centred around what might happen after the shops had closed and the streets were no longer populated by a majority of 'respectable' citizens: 'you know, after the shops closing Coney Street was absolutely packed with people walking up and down'.[21]

The ability of unruly crowds to threaten orderly public space is evident, and large-scale disturbances of public space, such as riots or civic and royal celebrations, have received attention from historians.[22] The power and potential of urban crowds to undermine the construction of public space as civil, clean and orderly has been well established. Mark Harrison has argued that even 'the self-confident solidity of Georgian squares became shaky when repeatedly occupied by shabby but sober political aspirants'.[23] However, it was not just urban crowds or major events that were of concern to those who attempted to manage public space; obstructing the street in any way could be perceived as a challenge to the order of public space.

Kate Hill has examined concerns over working-class use of museums and galleries in Sheffield when 'roughs of both sexes' began to use these sites as a meeting ground. In Birmingham, young people were accused of turning the Museum and Art Gallery into a 'monkey run' in 1931. During a council meeting to discuss the behaviour of young people, one alderman noted that as a free gallery, a public space, 'it was impossible to select who should be permitted to enter', but concerns were expressed over how to regulate the

behaviour of those young men and women whose 'glances were directed more at the opposite sex than at the beauty of the paintings'.[24] In a range of contemporary accounts, the everyday social activity of young people gathering on Saturday or Sunday evenings was presented as both a disruption and a pollution of orderly public space. The monkey parades attracted the interest and imagination of the authorities and middle-class observers, who were particularly concerned with those practices which obstructed the street, or were perceived as a nuisance. The young paraders, gathering in central streets and thoroughfares, were 'out of place'.

Attempts to manage public space could curtail young people's movements around the city, but these efforts were also ignored or resisted by the young men and women who used the central streets to parade and socialise. Socialising in the evenings may not have presented such an explicit threat as a large political gathering, yet the young working-class presence in the street, and responses to this, had an impact on understandings of these spaces. The tension between attempts to manage and control the streets and the behaviour of city dwellers is arguably one of the most enduring features of town and city life. As places where people live, work, play, consume and socialise, these tensions should perhaps not be surprising. Spaces are marked as particular kinds of place – they are gendered and classed – but these meanings of space are socially constructed, and therefore can be changed. Every society produces its own space,[25] and through the repeated nature of their social activities, the young working class were able to transform the way these central spaces were understood. The public street actively structured the way young people behaved, even as it itself was shaped by their repeated social activities. The young working class socialising and flirting on the monkey parade challenged the norms of conventional behaviour and consumed the space according to their own needs. This chapter will go on to consider the dynamic nature of this relationship between young people and their environment by exploring the development of the parades, and then closely examining both the criticisms levelled at participants and the experiences of the young men and women who themselves paraded the streets.

The 'weekly institution': young people and the development of the monkey parades

> It has grown into a weekly institution in all large towns has this social parade on Sunday night.[26]

On Saturday and Sunday evenings, young men and women gathered in certain central streets of towns and cities across Britain to walk up and down, socialise with friends, and show off

in front of the opposite sex on the monkey parade. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'monkey parade' as 'an evening parade of young people especially for the purpose of meeting members of the opposite sex' and notes it was chiefly a dismissive term.[27] The use of 'monkey' certainly implies mischievous behaviour, and perhaps murkier connotations of young people behaving in a way that was seen as debasing or regressive, with hints at racial degeneration. This reading is supported by some discussions of the term in the press, with the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* arguing in 1932 that taking a stroll along one of the city's parades confirmed that 'both sexes had degenerated since the war' and where the 'silly inane chatter reminds one forcibly of the zoo'.[28] These remarks echoed earlier commentators who discussed the behaviour of young people on the parades in the late nineteenth century. The young men and women gathering on the 'monkey's parade at Bow' were described as 'human baboons', with one journalist suggesting that the occupants of the monkey house at the zoo would be able to teach the paraders better manners (see Figure 5.4). The *Yorkshire Evening Post* commented that the term 'monkey parade' was 'rather an insult to the well-behaved members of the simian species'.[29] The monkey parade was also known by a range of alternative names, including 'monkey run', 'monkey walk', 'bunny run', 'chicken run' and 'hen walk', and these local variations similarly imply mischief making on the part of the paraders.[30] While these terms were used by the parades' critics, they were also regularly used by the participants themselves. John Allan told the York Oral History Project that 'you just simply walked up and down the monkey run' on Coney Street, and Mrs Radnell discussed the parade in Arnold, Nottingham where she met her husband: 'it used to be called the monkey run, down there'.[31]

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The parades were an early form of identifiable youth culture: young men and women differentiated their behaviour from adults by gathering in particular public spaces. These primarily working-class young men and women would dress up in their Sunday best and parade up and down a particular street, with a focus on 'picking up': 'all the young people would make for Coney Street … and they'd walk up and down, up and down, and you know, sort of eye each other'.[32] The parades could simply be a means of socialising with friends, but they were often seen as a means of meeting a potential partner. Commentators discussed the centrality of the parades to working-class courtship, with Arnold Freeman noting in 1914: 'we should remember that it is nearly always in the street that the working boy makes the acquaintance of the girl he will afterwards marry'.[33] Unlike dance halls, participation was free, as long as a parader was already in possession of suitable clothing. The prevalence of

unattached members of the opposite sex made parading better for picking up than the cinema, or markets and fairs, and it was a definite focus: 'many a romance started from raiking [parading]'.[34] For Matt Houlbrook, the monkey parade was the heterosexual equivalent of homosexual cruising, predicated as it was on moving through defined city spaces, gazing and searching for contact.[35] Many couples, once courting, drifted away from the parades and walked out together in different parts of the city: 'later on, when it sort of developed as something more serious then we used to meet and go to the pictures'.[36]

Promenades were well established by the middle of the nineteenth century in many towns and cities. In 1859, the *Yorkshire Gazette* carried a lengthy report about a meeting held at the Guildhall to discuss ways of preventing 'the disgraceful scenes that take place every Sunday evening'. The deputation discussed the 'grievous annoyance' to residents and church-goers, and the 'demoralising effect' caused by the gatherings of young people in the central streets, including Coney Street. One magistrate noted that 'passing up and down the street' was 'almost impossible'. The Lord Mayor concluded the meeting, identifying behaviour on the parades as 'exceedingly disreputable, and a disgrace to the youths of this city … it held out a poor hope for their future prospects'.[37] In September 1860 both the *York Herald* and *Yorkshire Gazette* reported on a case of disorderly conduct heard at the York Police Court in which 'a youth' was charged for his behaviour in Coney Street with two other young men shortly after six o'clock. During the case, heard before the Lord Mayor, it was noted that many representations by concerned York citizens had been made about the condition of Coney Street and other central streets in the evenings, and in closing the case the Mayor noted the importance of putting 'a stop to these disgraceful proceedings'. The young defendant was fined ten shillings and costs.[38] Andrew Davies has traced references to the parades in Oxford Road, Market Street and Stretford Road in Manchester in the 1860s, and in the 1870s the *East London Observer* discussed the monkey parade on Bow Road, describing scenes of 'vulgarity, rudeness, and immorality' and providing one of the earliest uses of the term 'monkey parade' in the press.[39] In Bolton, Hannah Mitchell described the scenes of young people walking up and down the main streets as 'the working girls' equivalent to the London season'. While Mitchell and her friend Sallie enjoyed the weekend promenades of the late nineteenth century, and were 'not averse to a mild flirtation', they did not 'adopt the custom of "picking up" that was common among the young people of the town at the time'.[40] Rowntree highlighted the large numbers of young working people who, at the time of his first survey, spent their evenings promenading:

> [In 1899] a large proportion of young working people spent their evenings lounging about in the neighbourhood of their houses or promenading up and down certain streets in the city. The main street was so thronged with them that it was difficult to make one's way through it and a number of policemen were required to keep people moving and to prevent the horseplay between youths and girls becoming too obstreperous. Youths used to boast about how many girls they had "got off with" during the evening.[41]

By 1904, one journalist noted how the parades had 'grown into a weekly institution in all large towns', and oral history respondents also emphasised the dominance of the monkey parade in the working-class social calendar.[42] As part of his investigation into the life of workers in the north of England for the Christian Social Union, Charles Russell recorded the custom, noting that the 'footway and roadway are alike taken up, and crowds, on the whole merry, pass up and down for some two hours … both sexes take part … usually in little knots of three or four or more boys or girls'.[43] Fred Milburn, who joined the police in the years after the First World War, recalled policing the Coney Street monkey run: 'I promise you when I was on the job we had something on to keep them moving too – thousands of them.'[44]

The parades remained an important feature of youthful leisure and courtship into the twentieth century, providing a popular alternative to the increasingly developing commercial leisure venues. In *Nights in Town,* Thomas Burke detailed the regular promenade of young working-class men and women along the south side of Clapham Common, describing the often intricate rituals that saw young men and women "click" with one another:

> It is a great game, this 'clicking'; with very nice rules … On Clapham Common, the monkey's parade is South Side, and the game is begun by strolling from 'The Plough' to Nightingale Lane. As you pass the likely girls you glance, and, if not rebuffed, you grin. But you do not stop; you walk on. At the second passing, you smile again and touch their hand in passing, or cry over your shoulder some current witticism, such as: 'S'nice night, Ethel!' or 'I should shay sho!' And Ethel and Lucy will swing round, challengingly, with scraping feet, and cry, 'Oooh!' You linger at the corner, still looking back, and you see that they, too, are looking back. Ethel asks Lucy, 'Shall we?' And Lucy says 'Oooh – I d'no' and by that time you have returned and stopped. You say: 'Isn't it cold?' Or 'Isn't it hot?' And then: 'Where are you off to in such a hurry?' 'Who – me?' 'Yes – you. Saucy!' 'Oo! I d'no.' 'Well – shall we stroll 'cross the Common?' 'I don't mind.' And so, imperceptibly, you and your friend move in the same direct as Ethel and Lucy. You have 'clicked'. You have 'got off'. Your arm

seeks hers, and soon you leave the Parade for the soft furze-bushes of the Common, I repeat – a great game.[45]

Historians have also discussed the monkey parades in the twentieth century, largely focusing on their continued importance as a means of socialising and meeting potential partners, despite the powerful counter-attractions of the dance hall and cinema.[46] Andrew Davies has suggested this was due to the 'unrivalled' opportunity offered by the parades for meeting members of the opposite sex, and this enduring popularity underlines the centrality of communal leisure forms in wider working-class culture.[47] Rowntree noted in his second social survey of York that 'today [1941] the promenading of streets has almost ceased', and oral history respondents pointed to the increase in motor traffic during this period as a key contributing factor to the steady decline of the parades.[48] Some observers suggested that the opening of cinemas in certain towns on a Sunday led to a decline in the popularity of promenading, and this idea has also been put forward by David Fowler in his study of interwar youth culture.[49] However, the monkey parades continued as an important communal form of leisure for many young people, even in towns where commercial entertainments like the cinema were available on a Sunday. In 1939 a correspondent to the *Nottingham Evening Post* commented that 'this type of person [young people who parade the streets] would prefer the streets or park no matter how many places were open'. As one reader noted in his letter to the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 'I challenge those who think that Sunday cinemas will end the "monkey parades" to show me one town where this has happened. The parades go on as before. They always will, so long as there are teenagers.'[50] The parades also continued to attract periodic criticism from observers during the war and into the post-war period. During a youth leaders' conference in Huddersfield in 1941, the Reverend J. B. Middlebrook, the Chairman of the Huddersfield Youth Committee, stressed the importance of tackling those young people who spent their leisure time 'merely wandering about aimlessly', concluding that 'because of the conditions brought about by the war, many young people were getting out of hand', and concerns about the parades during the war were often connected to broader fears around moral dangers for young women.[51] In Northern Ireland, the *Londonderry Sentinel* noted in 1949 that while it had been 'a long time since the monkey parade was last mentioned … don't think that this nuisance, nay, plague has vanished from the Carlisle Road', and the following year the same paper asked, 'can the authorities do nothing to make Carlisle Road a thoroughfare where, on Sunday evening, people can walk without the ever-present danger of being jostled off the footpath?'.[52] In 1954, the *Daily Mirror* mounted a defence of the parades from criticism put forward by Father Peter Stanley in Darlington of

the ‘spivs, yahoos and painted trollops’ that populated the town’s monkey walk. The *Mirror* discussed the enduring popularity of the parades, even in the face of existing competition from commercial leisure opportunities and other youth provisions, including Darlington’s ‘five cinemas, theatre, two dance halls, forty-seven pubs [and] a funfair, twenty-four dramatic societies and seventy youth clubs’. Journalist Keith Waterhouse visited the town, and spoke to a number of young men and women on the parade: ‘I stopped one and asked him why he chose to do so. “Seventy youth clubs are there?” said eighteen year old Frank Webley, a clerk. “Well, THIS is our club – those streets here. We meet each other and walk round … we just like to be out on the streets, strolling, talking, meeting friends. What’s wrong with that?”’.[53]

As a popular street custom, the monkey parades can be traced from the mid-nineteenth century in many towns and cities across Britain. They remained a significant feature of youthful leisure through the early twentieth century, and endured as a courtship ritual into the post-war period, when the popularity of the more formalised promenading of the streets eventually declined.

The ‘disgraceful proceedings of boys and girls’: the monkey parade and its critics

> The Lord Mayor concurred in the Chief Constable’s remarks … as to the disgraceful proceedings of boys and girls in the thoroughfares on Sunday evenings, and observed that they seemed to think that they could take the streets under their control. They must be taught that they could not do so, and the citizens must be protected against the nuisance.[54]

On Saturday and Sunday evenings, young working people gathered to parade up and down certain central streets of their towns and cities. These parades were subject to sporadic police attention from their outset, and faced criticism from a range of observers concerned with working-class youthful behaviour taking place in city centre spaces. Young men and women on the parades were observed – by the policeman stationed to keep them moving, by ‘concerned’ citizens and ratepayers, by journalists, and by representatives of the civic authorities. ‘In Coney Street at night time – between six and ten especially on a Sunday night – there were always three policemen on duty. They were needed to keep the people moving and allow access for people who wanted to move along the streets. You had to keep them on the move, otherwise the street was blocked up.’[55]

Observers of the parades were concerned that the rules and conventions of public space were challenged by the social conduct of young working people. Other users of the street could find themselves jostled off the footpath, might witness coarse behaviour or be exposed to obscene language. The *Daily Telegraph and Courier* reported on the 'fine art' practised by young paraders in 'pushing people off the pathways, or bumping them against the shutters, or suddenly swinging from a lamppost and butting a pedestrian in the stomach'.[56] The 'idle and senseless' nature of 'loafing up and down' busy central streets attracted the attention of concerned 'citizens' and 'ratepayers', who wrote to the local press complaining about the state of central streets on Saturday and Sunday evenings, and the activities of the young people gathered there.[57] In London, one local resident wrote of his 'little adventure' on the Bow Road parade, where he witnessed scenes of 'vulgarity, rudeness and immorality'. This correspondent recognised the accessible, public nature of the space, noting that while 'we cannot keep these unruly people away' from the street, a greater police presence might help to 'restore order'.[58]

Many of these writers contrasted young people's activities on the parades unfavourably with the culture of self-improvement, and the tone of these criticisms remained relatively constant across the period. In 1889 'E.C.' complained in the *York Herald* about the planned closure of the promenade along the Bar Walls, which offered 'one of the few clean walks' in the city, in contrast to the 'very frequently disorderly streets, Coney Street to wit'. A correspondent to the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* in 1912 addressed his letter to the parents and children of the city, and made an appeal to the young people who went parading: 'go to church or chapel. If not, then stay at home and read some good healthy literature', with another asking: 'why cannot these vulgar plebs just step a little out of their usual promenade and go to … places of good influence?'. In 1938 the Reverend E. Castledine similarly appealed to young people to 'come to church' instead of parading the streets.[59] Sunday evenings were a particularly popular time to promenade, partially because other commercial entertainments were closed, though this alone does not explain the continued popularity of the parades. Many young people also gathered on Saturday evenings, but the use of Sundays made the parades particularly distasteful to some observers, with the York Penitentiary Committee warning of the dangers of 'getting into bad company on Sundays instead of attending a place of worship'.[60]

A correspondent to the *York Herald* summed up the thoughts of many similar writers when he claimed that the young people of the city indulged in 'loafing up and down Coney Street' because they were 'entirely at a loss to know what to do with themselves', and in 1926

the parades were described as a 'hopeless experience of aimless promenaders'.[61] To these observers, loitering was not only a waste of leisure time and potential, but the young working class were also impeding access for others who wished to use the street. 'Disgusted' suggested that one solution to the 'rowdyism' on the High Street parade in Sheffield, 'for the sake of all decent pedestrians', would be to offer a particular building for paraders to meet: 'and if it be furnished with a lethal chamber for the more rampageous of the monkeys, so much the better'. Others were less murderous in their suggestions, but continued to recommend alternative locations, in order to 'leave the main street free for pedestrians'.[62] For these commentators, the streets were no longer thoroughfares, but spaces in which young working-class men and women could flout conventions.

The parades also exerted an element of fascination for local journalists, and others who felt the need to witness the parades with their own eyes. These accounts demonstrate an intermingling of disgust and dismay over youthful use of space, but also captivation, particularly on the part of those who spent numerous evenings observing young working-class behaviour on the parades. In 1937 one Mass Observer diarist wrote at length about his local parade in Bedford, which he declared 'worthy of a special Mass Observation'.[63] As with concerned residents and correspondents, many press reports focused on young people's behaviour on the parades as being out of place. Young working-class men and women were condemned for 'invading' the 'principal and most respectable thoroughfares'.[64] In 1895, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* commented on the ability of the young paraders to turn a respectable, central thoroughfare into 'a howling wilderness', and another journalist reported how young people in 1904 '*converted* Robertson Street into a kind of social centre on Sunday night' (emphasis added).[65] These concerns about the ability of young people to compromise space continued later into the twentieth century, and journalists maintained their observations of the streets. In 1939, one journalist who styled himself as 'onlooker' argued that the 'hobble-de-hoy' type of young people were 'uncouth' anywhere, but that in the 'public streets' and on 'the Sunday night monkey parade' they were 'particularly obnoxious'.[66]

Letters, articles and commentaries in both the local and national press display clear evidence of the parades creating tensions over young people's use of city centre streets. While letters to the press may have had very little direct bearing on the young working class that gathered in the streets, the greater attention, observation and police action they inspired could certainly be felt by the young men and women who participated in the parades. The *East London Advertiser* claimed success in its campaign to draw attention to the 'monkey parade', which 'woke the police up to the necessities of more efficient patrol of this main

thoroughfare … from our knowledge of the force, officers only require their attention directed to a nuisance to take steps to stop it'. The *Yorkshire Evening Press* warned paraders to remember that 'the proper place for a monkey is not on a parade, but in a cage'. In Brighton, the appointment of the new chief constable led the *Brighton Gazette* to suggest that due to the 'street rowdyism' of the monkey parade, the 'poor chief constable will have to live in the streets, and make the streets his sole concern'. One journalist described the police acting as 'a sort of master of ceremonies' on the parades, and Davies found that police harassment was a common feature of retrospective accounts of the Manchester and Salford parades.[67]

Magistrates and the police were increasingly concerned by the independent working-class youth culture they saw on the streets, with their attention focused both on the use of central thoroughfares, and the nature of the behaviour of young people as they gathered in these spaces. In York, the *Herald* reported on the Sunday 'Coney Street nuisance' in 1871. The chief constable placed PC Denham on special duty on the parade 'in consequence of frequent complaints as to the disorderly state of [the street]'. Denham found a number of boys larking about and heard repeated disgraceful language; the chief constable summed up by declaring 'he should have to put the whole force [on Coney Street] if things did not alter'. Just a month later, the *Yorkshire Gazette* reported the arrest of two young men for 'disorderly conduct' in Coney Street. PC Maude reported to the court that the 'lads were shouting and pushing each other about' and 'behaved with great rudeness to passersby'. The Lord Mayor gave a speech at the hearing, noting the 'disgraceful state' of Coney Street in the evenings. In closing, he declared he 'believed York was the worst place in England, with one exception, for [disorderly conduct] offences'.[68] While it is not clear which other town the Mayor was referring to that prevented York from achieving the dubious honour of worst town in England, what is evident is the use of Coney Street by young people on the monkey parade was a matter of concern for the police and magistrates, and continued to be so. As another case from 1882 demonstrates, the complaints from authorities emphasised both the disruptive nature of the transgressions of young working people and concerns over access to and use of public space. The young working class were taking over respectable sites, and clearly represented a threat to the 'proper' use of such spaces. Commenting on the 'disgraceful proceedings' of young men and women in the central streets of York, the Mayor noted that young people 'seemed to think that they could take the streets under their control. They must be taught that they could not do so, and the citizens must be protected against the nuisance'.[69]

The police and magistrates put forward increasingly coercive measures to try and maintain these central thoroughfares, and in York they made explicit their intention to regulate the space of Coney Street. The increasing visibility of the young working class in these central streets was clearly perceived as a challenge to notions of orderly public space. Following a charge of disorderly conduct against 'a youth' on a Sunday evening in 1882, the chief constable 'complained greatly' of the disorderly conduct 'of boys and girls in Coney Street' and 'hoped the Magistrate would assist the police in putting it down'. When sentencing, the magistrate intimated that 'similar offenders' would in future 'be more severely dealt with'. In October 1885 one York magistrate dismissed the case of two girls 'of about fifteen years of age' for being disorderly and obstructing the thoroughfare in Coney Street, largely on account of their young age. However, in response the chief constable forcibly replied that 'the disorderly conduct complained of was caused chiefly by juveniles the age of the defendants'. The magistrate noted that in future 'all would have to be punished'.[70] In 1889, a number of lads were charged for their disorderly conduct in Coney Street, for pushing each other and brawling. PC Harrison complained that people could not get along the footpath on account of their conduct. The Lord Mayor took this case as an opportunity to comment on the use of Coney Street by young people, declaring that 'everyone [in York] was crying out about the nuisance caused by disorderly lads in Coney Street, and the evil must be stopped'.

In an example of the wider cooperation between different penal and charitable organisations in the city, at the 1896 annual meeting of the York Penitentiary Society the Dean of York raised the question of why it was that girls went astray. He noted that, although he 'was otherwise engaged on a Sunday evening', he was informed that 'the conduct of boys and girls promenading on Coney Street on Sunday evenings was much to be deplored', concluding that the practice was 'doing a great deal to contaminate and spread evil amongst the rising generation of the city'. The Lord Mayor acknowledged the Dean's comments, and in reply noted the 'great difficulty' faced when attempting to deal with these cases from the bench. However, he had noticed an improvement in the Coney Street parade of late; 'he believed the Chief Constable was taking an interest in the matter, and endeavouring to put a stop to this rowdy conduct on a Sunday night. (Hear, hear)'.[71] By 1900 it was reported that 'the York police are using every effort to put a stop to the nuisance caused every Sunday night in Coney Street … by young people of both sexes obstructing the footpath'.[72]

Some young people actively challenged attempts by the police to regulate and control their behaviour and use of the central streets. One Sunday evening in May 1885, three young

women were standing on the footpath in Coney Street in conversation with other girls, and were asked to 'move on' by PC Hawkins. However, the girls 'only laughed at him', then were subsequently taken to the police station and charged with obstruction. Before the magistrate, the chief constable noted how such behaviour by young girls on Coney Street had become a 'fearful nuisance', which the magistrates must put down. The girls were fined one shilling, but told if they appeared again before the bench they would be dealt with more severely. In 1888 seven youths were charged for disorderly conduct and annoying other pedestrians in the Bow Road, but when at court 'seemed to treat the matter as a joke'.[73] Other young men and women complied with efforts to control their use of space, while others simply avoided detection. Two young men and a young woman appeared before the police court in one weekend in York, charged with obstructing the footpath in Coney Street. However, all three were dismissed with a caution as they 'moved on' when requested.[74]

The parades continued to attract the attention of the police until their decline, and young people's use of these central spaces remained a concern. Young men and women could still find themselves charged with obstruction, and the police and magistrates regularly kept up their cooperation to suppress the parades across Britain. Following the charge of several young men and women for obstructing the footpath on the 'monkey's parade' at Chelmsford, Superintendent Attridge hoped the cases would be 'a warning to others'. In 1935 two 'youths' and two girls were fined at the Nottingham Police Court as 'an example' to other young people, with PC Colson noting that 'what is a peaceful walk on week nights is nothing but a bear garden on Sunday nights'. In Chorley, Superintendent Hogg complained about young people 'causing an obstruction' in Market Street, and plain clothes men were placed on the street to keep an eye on proceedings.[75]

The repeated criticisms of young working people expressed at the police courts and in the press reinforced perceptions of their behaviour as disorderly and lacking respectability. Concerns about their leisure activities in the central thoroughfares of towns and cities across Britain were about more than simply expressing the inconvenience to other street users; the use of these streets by the young working class was clearly perceived as damaging to notions of civilised city centre spaces. Young men and women were 'taking over' city centre streets and claiming public space in a way that challenged middle-class perceptions of it. Criticisms of the behaviour suggest a lack of understanding of or appreciation for the importance of the street to the social lives of young working people. However, these criticisms were not only classed, or focused on youthful behaviour, they were also gendered. The sexualised nature of the interactions between young men and women made the parades seem particularly

threatening to many observers. Jenny Birchall has examined criticisms of young women on the Oldham Street parades in nineteenth-century Manchester, and the apparent eagerness of young women to contribute to ribald jests in their interactions with young men were a particular worry to middle-class moralists across Britain in this period.[76] Letters of complaint and police reports suggest that young women's behaviour was under constant scrutiny. Concerns were expressed about young women gleefully embracing the bad language of boys, reflecting the opportunities the parades presented for 'unladylike' behaviour. Three young women were fined the unusually high amount of ten shillings, or faced with prison for ten days, for their behaviour on the Bow Road parade. These 'well dressed young girls' had been pushing 'respectable persons' off the footpath, and had been seen 'laughing and shouting at lads'. In Liverpool, Hugh Shimmin noted that the young women who were attracted by 'the game of the Landing Stage', with 'their gaudy dress, rude speeches and unseemly conduct', were not yet 'social evils' but were well on their way to becoming outcasts from decent society. Henriette Fogg was admitted to the York Penitentiary, a reform home for 'fallen' women, in July 1892 after another home refused to house her because of her bad language. Henriette, who was fifteen, told the Penitentiary Ladies' Committee she learnt such language on Sunday evenings in Coney Street. One aggrieved correspondent wrote to the *Hull Daily Mail* about his 'annoyance and disgust' over the 'bad language used by girls' on the parades.[77] Young working-class women were seen as employing masculine characteristics, swearing and instigating sexualised encounters. In Sheffield, a correspondent to the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* argued: 'it is very unbecoming of the young women who race backwards and forwards [on the monkey run], giggling and behaving like lunatics rather than respectable young ladies, and I think they ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves'.[78] The language used to describe these young female paraders reinforced the perception of them as lacking respectability, and confirmed that their presence in the streets was seen as threatening to the social order.

Others focused on the moral dangers for young women represented by the parades. The York Penitentiary Society warned of the 'danger for young girls' that was to be found in parading, noting that 'a thirst for amusement and excitement out of doors' led many a girl to ruin. In Harrow, local residents petitioned the council to put a stop to the 'unseemly behaviour' on the parades, complaining that 'it really was not fit for decent girls to go along the road on a Sunday night'.[79] The fact that the parades involved groups of mixed sexes was central to their condemnation: young working-class women were openly displaying their interest in the opposite sex. The *Daily Herald* wrote of the girls wandering up and down,

'their eyes flashing invitation to the young men as they brushed by'.[80] The parades were a form of performance, one which involved particularly gendered routines and displays. As one oral history respondent recalled, 'girls used to walk down on one side [then] you'd come back again and walk on t'other side'. While it was the young men who were expected to make the first approach, 'it was the women who determined they were going to be asked'.[81] Andrew Davies found that in Manchester and Salford, girls were far from passive in the process of 'clicking', and it was the displays put on by young women and girls that provoked the harshest criticism.[82] Expectations and concerns about young working-class use of space reflected the prevailing gender order, and the moral consequences of behaviour were much more greatly emphasised when talking about young women. For young men, disorderly offences could be overlooked, or put down to youthful high spirits. It seemed inevitable that boys would be 'a nuisance', and seek female companions, but the behaviour of young women was seen as more subversive. In Manchester, Charles Russell described the young men who took part in the parades as merely adhering to 'what is the fashion of their kind', and that 'making an acquaintance' with a girl was a 'feather in their caps'.[83] Female paraders became the focus of anxieties about the use of these public spaces by young working people, and were held responsible for the conduct of the young men on the parade. In Clapham, one police constable complained about the parade on St John's Road, arguing that 'the lasses incited the lads to make a disturbance', while in Hull, 'Tracker' claimed that 'having a decent female companion will no doubt influence a boy to choose the straight path', but through chance acquaintances, 'the influence of a girl who possess a bad character will drive a boy to further harm'.[84]

Journalists, the police and concerned observers continued to question the monkey parade and young people's use of space throughout the period, though into the twentieth century increasingly more balanced voices were also heard. Criticisms began to focus less on an invasion of space, and more on the lack of improving qualities offered by the parades. To many observers, these young men and women were simply doing nothing, loitering for no apparent reason, and it was important for alternative facilities to be provided to 'positively reduce the number of local "monkey runs"'.[85] In Sudbury, Ipswich, Father Moir 'solved the town's problem' of the parades by organising an alternative 'threepenny hop', recognising that young men and women needed somewhere to meet.[86] In 1904 one journalist was asked to observe the parade of St James Street, Burnley; he concluded that while those who complained about the use of the streets by young working people had 'legitimate grounds' for their concerns, as far as possible 'rowdyism and bad behaviour are sternly repressed'. Writing

thirty-three years later on the 'time worn controversy' of the same parade venue, another journalist argued that the authorities would never stop the congestion of the streets by asking young people to 'move on', but only by providing some other means to occupy their time at the weekends.[87] George A. Greenwood followed parades in Leeds, Wakefield, Dewsbury and Batley, and concluded that 'nothing I saw among the enormous crowds in those four towns struck me as being either improper or indecent'. Though the young men and women on the parades were a 'formidable block' to other pedestrians, 'the suggestion that these young men are all libertines and those young women are all unfortunates is a foul aspersion upon thousands of clean-minded and clean-living mill workers, shop assistants, clerks, teachers and the like'.[88] As Charles Russell noted of the parades in Manchester: 'sometimes there is an element of roughness, sometimes there is a measure of disorder, sometimes a considerable degree of coarseness in the remarks which are passed, on the other hand, there is much harmless enjoyment'.[89] 'Fancy Free' in the *Burnley Express* argued in 1936 that the parades had been taking place 'for many a generation', and criticised the 'wholesale and indiscriminate, and often unfair' condemnation of the paraders. While promenading may indeed have been senseless and a waste of leisure time, he reminded his readers that many of the parades' most vocal critics may even have 'done a bit themselves', concluding that paraders were not 'depraved or immoral', but simply 'merry and thoughtless'.[90]

'Our bit of fun': young people's experiences of the parades

> 'I was one of them, oh yes, as I say, until you were sixteen or eighteen or nineteen [Coney Street] was where everybody congregated. All the youths and lasses used to congregate there. That was, as I say, the main parade ground, especially on a Sunday.'[91]

The condemnation of the monkey parade expressed in newspaper correspondence, proclaimed by middle-class observers and heard at court was not the only narrative of this social activity, and despite criticisms of their behaviour, young people continued to use the streets as a venue to parade and socialise. Oral history respondents and those involved in the parades as young people present a much more positive view of the lively sociability of the promenade, and did not view their street behaviour as particularly unruly: 'that's what you did when you were in your teens'. Ruth Redpath recalled that 'Coney Street was known for picking up girls, you know, and we used to have a laugh and walk down Coney Street'.[92] The behaviour of young men and women on the parades evidently provoked concerns, but a

participant-based viewpoint offered by oral history respondents and those young paraders who wrote to the press provides an alternative version to the use of this space, and it is important to imagine the streets through the eyes of the young men and women who used it in this way. A picture develops which does not involve an invasion of respectable space, with the possibility of immorality and danger around the corner. Many of the young working class did not see the parades as sensational or scandalous, but simply as an everyday social activity. They made use of the streets and central thoroughfares in their daily lives. While issues of memory and nostalgia must be considered when discussing retrospective oral accounts of the parades, what these interviews do reveal is how the respondents interpreted their own lives as young people. The oral testimony gives a rich insight into the parades and provides a level of individual experience that cannot be found in outsider observational accounts. The dialogue with the present found in these retrospective accounts can be useful; it reveals something about how the paraders perceived their own role in the past, and how they constituted their own understandings of the events.

Much of the oral testimony highlights the everyday nature of the parade – it was 'our entertainment' or 'our bit of fun'.[93] Alice Hick recalled that in York 'everybody used to do it, and it was crowded in Coney Street'. In Keighley, Hilda Ogden attended the parade on Spring Gardens Lane with friends. They would 'run out' from church 'as fast as we ever could' to attend, and her testimony suggests the importance of the monkey parade as a place to socialise and meet a potential partner: 'they always had a special place where you could meet boys and girls and – that was it'.[94] In Peckham, Grace Bessie Beals recalled how young men and women would attend with the explicit intention of 'getting off': 'if you saw one you liked you looked back and then they'd follow you and all that business'. For Lily Umpleby, who walked the High Row parade in Darlington, this role was of primary importance: 'if you hadn't met somebody before the night was over like it was terrible'.[95] Mr Salt met his wife on the Cross Lane parade in Salford: 'we was always up and down Cross Lane Sunday night'.[96]

This sense of the parades as an everyday social activity is supported by those who responded to criticisms of their behaviour by writing to the local press. In 1910, following a spate of letters and commentaries on the parades in Sheffield, one young woman wrote to the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* to call out the unfair criticism: 'we work hard during the week and want a bit of a run round on Sundays'.[97] One correspondent, signed 'A Young Person', argued that the attempts by the police to move paraders on was having a detrimental effect on the relationship between young working people and the police: 'instead of making the rising generation look up to and respect the police, it is making us hate them'. In 1924 one young

'monkey' wrote to the *Dundee Courier* to ask if those who complained about the parades could 'suggest something else for us poor paraders to do', and 'observant youth' argued there were very few alternatives for young people.[98] While observers criticised the young paraders for loitering or simply doing nothing, 'doing nothing' could be an intense experience, full of expectation.[99] Young men and women could socialise, gossip and make plans. In 1939 one young man wrote to the *Northants Evening Telegraph* to 'state the case for the defence' of the parades, arguing that it was 'the most natural thing in the world' for young people of both sexes to meet together, 'unrestricted and quite apart from their elders'. One ex-parader argued: 'I don't walk the "bunny run" as there is no need, for I am married and have a car these days, but I remember all too well the time I used to, and was it fun? I'll say it was!'[100]

Far from the disorder envisaged by middle-class observers, many young women had strict home times set by their parents. Jane Wilsher was not allowed out to socialise or parade after ten o'clock – 'right 'til I got married I wasn't allowed' – and in Stoke-on-Trent, Alice Elizabeth Banks's father was very strict about her curfew: 'I had to be in be ten. Says women are no good on the streets after ten.' Others, like Lily Hall, participated in the parade only after completing her household chores and attending church: 'we'd come away from church, my friend and I, and then we'd go walking down Coney Street … and I used to love to go to church, I loved that church'.[101] Young people's use of these streets clearly differed from that of middle-class adults, though some working-class parents at times welcomed young people's parading, against the wishes of the police and middle-class authorities. For other parents, their concerns about the parades did not seem too far removed from the criticisms expressed by middle-class commentators. Alethea Asplinn recalled that 'mum's warned you not to go' on the Coney Street parade, and Mary Alexander's parents explicitly forbade her from attending: 'it was not quite the thing for you to go there'.[102] In Dewsbury, Superintendent Barraclough told the bench that he had received 'several complaints from parents about what their girls had to put up with' on the parades.[103] Working-class parents may have been able to control behaviour at home and in the local neighbourhood, as well as set strict home times, but they often had very little direct influence on young people's behaviour on the parades. Other young people attended the parades without parents' permission, or knowledge, like MG, whose father did not know she went parading.[104]

Young people, however, did not lack self-regulation on the parades. They developed their own rules of participation and entry. Care was taken over appearance and dress. What constituted respectability for the young men and women involved in the parades may not have been recognised by outsiders, but young people were adhering to their own values.

Behaviour considered too rough was not accepted by the other paraders. Mr Kendrew told the York Oral History Project that 'there was no rowdiness or owt'.[105] The parade was a chance to engage with fashion, and young women would often make their own clothes, stretching a tight budget as far as possible. Clothes suitable for parading could be difficult to afford, but were an essential part of the weekend ritual – those without suitable clothes to parade would not attend. Some pawned their clothes during the week, only to reclaim them on Saturday ready for church and social activities: 'there was very few people who could afford to dress … you could make yourself look tidy. They [the paraders] would have the best suit on a Sunday, and by the Monday that suit would be in the pawn shop … then they'd get dressed up again'.[106] James Butterworth explained that young men would spend a considerable amount of time and effort preparing their clothes for parading, and Mr Salt recalled the special suit he saved for the parades: 'Oh, I had a good suit for Sunday.'[107]

Appearance in general was important, particularly for young women on the parade. Mary Barnes recalled that young women on the parades 'used to take care of [their] appearance and you know get a pretty dress and that sort of thing and er … bit of lipstick, bit of powder'.[108] Annie Pinder noted that just after the war, young working-class girls 'had to have your face dead white and your lips thick', although much like her mother's response, these efforts may not have been entirely appreciated by the parades' observers: 'Glory be to God, you're like a ghost. You'll frighten people. Will you wash your hands and face, and take that off.'[109] To outsiders, these attempts may have demonstrated a lack of modesty and taste. The Reverend Chancellor Austen addressed the annual meeting of the York Penitentiary Society, noting 'some of the questionable new fashions were not in the direction of modesty, and must tend sooner or later to bring trouble and disgrace', and the Society warned about 'the love of dress, which is the cause of very much mischief and leads many into temptations'.[110] One correspondent to the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* commented sneeringly on the 'girls with their cheap and gaudy dress, and men in the latest cut of the 20s and a "perfect fit" suit'. Another described the young women as 'powdered and painted with a total lack of artistic effect'. However, for the young working-class men and women involved, wearing 'Sunday best', doing hair and wearing make-up helped to address the sense of performance of the monkey run, and one young parader responded to complaints about 'cheap and gaudy dress' by noting: 'we shop girls dress as we can afford and be as bright as we can be'.[111]

The young men and women who promenaded the streets also used the phrases coined by critics to describe their own activities on the parades. One press report on a 'gang' of boys

and girls who spent their weekends marching about the pavements, several abreast, noted that they 'termed their proceedings the "monkey parade"'.[112] Naming their activities on the central thoroughfares as the 'monkey parade' or 'bunny run', young working people were able to claim possession of both the act of promenading and the street itself.

Many concerns about the parades were related to the very visible horseplay between young men and women. In New York, Kathy Peiss examined the way young people used the streets to explore sexual feelings, and how with 'no supervision but the cop on the beat, young women could be unladylike and unrestrained on street corners and doorways'.[113] As Lily Hall noted; 'that's what you did in your teens and that – looking for boyfriends'. Vera Tomlinson remembered 'the girls used to go showing off to the boys, walk about giggling and carrying on'.[114] It was such free and easy associations that troubled the parades' observers, but how did the young women involved in the parades define their own behaviour? Clearly their ideas about respectability and appropriate behaviour may not always have aligned with the behaviour expected by middle-class observers. The parades offered a chance to flirt and socialise in a way that was not taken altogether seriously: as Mrs Allan cheerfully recalled to the York Oral History Project, she went to Coney Street 'looking for some talent (laughs)!' Mrs Duckers, who promenaded in her youth, noted that in Highgate young people would walk around the bandstand, 'give one another the eyes you know – a bit of fun, that's all'.[115]

Brad Beaven has noted that male youths demonstrated a remarkable propensity to manipulate and customise their surroundings, gathering in city centre spaces to flout moral codes.[116] The behaviour of young women, however, was clearly seen as more subversive, and thus their ability to manipulate their surroundings must be highlighted. However, courtship and the process of negotiating relationships that often took place on the parades was a decisive moment in the life cycle, and could be fraught for some young women. Not all concerns about behaviour on the parades were entirely misplaced. When PC Denham was sent on special duty in Coney Street on Sunday evenings after frequent complaints about inappropriate behaviour, he witnessed one youth 'seize a young woman round the waist, put her on to her knees and use disgusting language', before noting that the same young man then went on to 'repeat this conduct … with another young woman'. On the Bow Road parade in 1888, two 'respectably dressed young men' were fined 40 shillings after harassing girls who they had kissed 'against their will'. In 1894, the same venue saw a number of young men charged for their conduct while promenading, after a constable on special duty on the street

saw the youths ‘molesting respectable females’. The constable reported that owing to the young men’s conduct towards them, one young girl ‘screamed out’.[117]

The role of gender was clearly important in shaping young people’s experiences of the streets, alongside class and generation. The monkey parades are often represented in the oral testimony as a site of freedom for young women, but they could also be a space where young women were subject to harassment, and it is important not to gloss over narratives that hint at gender conflict. Hannah Malton recalled walking along Coney Street in York during the war and hearing footsteps behind her, before she was picked up by a soldier: ‘he lifted me up and I screamed and he put me down and I ran’. She recalled that ‘after that I never went out unless I went with someone’.[118]

Young people on the parade were subject to a degree of both peer group and adult scrutiny, and particular codes of behaviour developed by the paraders meant young working people, and often their parents, saw the monkey parades as a relatively safe space to explore friendships and relationships. As one journalist noted: ‘the parades take place under the glare of the arc lamps, where the police are in constant attendance … there is no opportunity, in such circumstances, for the misbehaviour that may have full play in by-lanes and dark and quiet places’.[119] One woman who had paraded in her youth, and wrote in defence of the parades to the *Northants Evening Telegraph*, also emphasised the relative safety of the parades, particularly for young women: ‘where does he want young girls to go? Along the lonely roads, where it is more dangerous, or in a pub? I should say the bunny run is the safer place’.[120] Vera Tomlinson’s oral testimony also hints at the potential dangers for young women if they moved outside of the well-lit, well-observed promenade space: ‘but you never went under Scarborough Bridge, you kept out of the way … it was pitch black, you don’t know who’d be there’.[121] The ‘pitch black’ space under the railway bridge bordered the edge of the city centre in York, and such marginal areas could hold uncertainties for young women in particular. Similarly, for some parents, it was preferable for young people to meet in a public and somewhat regulated environment than a secret, and potentially dangerous, one. For some, even cheap dances, in which young people might socialise without adequate supervision, were unthinkable. MG was not allowed to go to any army dances ‘because me dad wouldn’t have allowed it, to go into t’Barracks dances’. Alice Elizabeth Banks’s father discovered she went to ‘cheap’ sixpenny hops and banned her from attending again.[122]

By continuing to occupy the space of the monkey parade, young working-class men and women engaged in an ongoing process of establishing claims to the use and enjoyment of public space, and increasingly challenged outsiders’ interpretations of it. The young working

class saw these central thoroughfares as sites of social engagement, and the streets formed an important, if not central, element of their social lives. These streets and public spaces could be a space over which young people had a powerful influence. The young working class claimed these central streets as their own on Saturday and Sunday evenings, and paraded up and down in their 'Sunday best', away from parental supervision, often under the watchful eye of a police constable or two, or perhaps a local journalist, noting down street customs and commenting on their behaviour.

Conclusion

Central thoroughfares were contested sites in which multiple uses and meanings of space clashed and coexisted as members of different groups sought to use these streets in their own way. Letters to the press, police complaints and the recollections of paraders offer clear evidence of a discrepancy between how some residents thought central streets should be used and how some people used them. Young working-class men and women utilised the central streets and public spaces of their towns and cities to socialise with friends and potential partners, and at times their use of these spaces came into conflict with the intentions of other residents and city dwellers. For middle-class commentators, the street was a thoroughfare, a civic or commercial space, to be used for little more than an efficient route from A to B. Young working people related very differently to these streets.

When people act in a space, what they do and how they act is responsible for the meanings that space may have. While their socialising on Saturday and Sunday evenings may not have presented such an explicit threat as a large political gathering, young working people's presence in the street, and the authorities' responses to this, had an impact on the understandings of these spaces. Particular sites are left with the imprint of major events, but perhaps it is the more everyday practices that are of significance. As Tim Cresswell notes, places are continuously enacted as people are going about their daily lives, and the sense of place that is expressed is heavily dependent on the reiteration of practice on a regular basis.[123] Concerns about the behaviour of working-class youth were spatially contextual and dependent, and central thoroughfares were at the forefront of ongoing disputations about appropriate use of public space in Britain.

This chapter has focused upon the young working class who paraded up and down busy central streets on the monkey parade, and has attempted to demonstrate that these young men and women were not only socialising but also confronting the meanings of city centre streets and spaces. Some young men and women actively challenged controls on their

behaviour, others cooperated with the authorities, and other young people simply avoided the police and other observers, but the repeated nature of their social activities enabled the young working class to negotiate a new understanding of the street. By demanding central streets as their own on Saturday and Sunday evenings, and using the monkey parade as a venue to socialise with friends, display fashion and independence from parental authority, as well as search for a potential partner, young people made a distinct claim on these spaces. The repeated nature of their social activities helped to challenge the way these spaces were understood. Young paraders challenged the norms of behaviour and consumed space according to their own needs. They used central streets and public spaces in a particular way, and in doing so differentiated their behaviour from that of adults, though experiences of the streets were also informed by class and gender. Young working-class men and women on the parades were able to make their own conventions, and the monkey parades are an important example of young working people creating their own, distinct, culture of the street.

Notes

<Endnote>

[1] *Sheffield Independent*, 17 November 1936.

[2] For example, see P. Andersson, *Streetlife in Late Victorian London: The Constable and the Crowd* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); J. Guldi, 'The history of walking and the digital turn: stride and lounge in London, 1808–1851, *The Journal of Modern History*, 84:1 (2012), 116–144; J. R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992).

[3] One notable exception is Simon Sleight's study of youthful walking in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century London, New York and Melbourne. S. Sleight, 'Rites of passage: youthful walking and the rhythms of the city, c.1850–1914', in C. Bryant, A. Burns and P. Readman (eds), *Walking Histories, 1800–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 87–112.

[4] R. Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 232.

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[34] Interview with Vera Tomlinson, born 1916, YOHP.

[35] M. Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 67.

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[40] H. Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*, ed. G. Mitchell (London: Virago, 1977), p. 83.

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[47] Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, p. 102. This point is also made by Andrew August in his study of working-class culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. August, *The British Working Class*, pp. 207–220.

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[94] Interviews with with Alice Hick, born 1901, YOHP, and Hilda Ogden, born 1902, 2000int128, The Edwardians.

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</Endnote>