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Emotions and gender in oral history: narrating Italy's 1968

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The year 1968 was and remains an emotion-laden topic in Italy, and yet few historians have used emotions to parse the history and memory of this period. This paper draws on a collection of interviews with former activists in the student movement and the New Left to explore the ways in which expressions of feeling in life-history narratives can flag up possible lines of difference in women's and men's stories. It draws on three emotive themes – rebellion, violence and liberation – to explore the interaction between gender, feeling, narrative, and what the author calls the 'third person in the room': meta-narratives of 1960s activism that can exert a powerful weight on the interview, blending and blurring the lines of individual and collective experience.

Keywords: emotions; gender; oral history; 1968; activism

Introduction

The year 1968 – 'Il Sessantotto' – is a historical moment rife with emotional overtones: protesters' anger and alienation stand alongside the exuberant embrace of new social and political ideas, and it is this emotional dimension that makes 1968 so persistently fascinating. Rarely, however, do historians and sociologists explicitly consider the emotions of the period of broad-scale activism that erupted in Italy (and globally) in the late 1960s and stretched through much of the 1970s (a period referred to here, in a symbolic sense, as '1968').[1] Oral history offers a window onto the question of how it felt to be an activist in this period, and this article seeks to use the emotional layers in oral sources to shed light on the different ways in which 1968 was experienced in Italy, the different ways in which it is remembered, and the points at which collective narratives and dominant images of the period intersect with individual experience.

If we use oral history to sketch an emotional map of 1968, one of the clearest layers of complexity is a gendered one. There has been surprisingly little work done by historians on 1968 and gender – surprising because challenges to traditional gender roles constituted a vital part of the activism of the period.[2] Oral history is a particularly valuable tool for revealing divergences in women's and men's ways of speaking of the period. Interviews reveal a complex mixture of joy, pride, anger, pain, guilt and sadness; these feelings are present in both women's and men's stories, but there are some notable differences if we examine the points at which they enter the narrative. Women and men often experienced 1968 differently, and their lives may have followed very different trajectories in the years

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after, particularly if they took their activism in new directions (into the feminist movement, for example). They may remember the period in different ways, and they may relate in different ways to dominant cultural images of the 1960s and 1970s. Emotions can act as filters that reveal these differences, pointing to the diversity of lived experience, divergences in memory patterns, and differing interactions with culturally derived notions of what it means to be a 1968 activist. In exploring these differences, this paper does not seek to make generalisations about men's and women's experiences; it does not aim to state how all or even most men or women lived through the period and narrate it now, but rather draws on patterns evident in a relatively small sample of interviews to raise a key question: do women and men tell notably different stories of 1968, and if so, why?

This article uses as its key source interviews with roughly 50 former activists in Italy, collected by the author in 2008 and 2009 as part of a major comparative research project, entitled 'Around 1968: Activism, networks, trajectories', that uses oral history to explore 1968 in 14 different European countries.[3] It concentrates on interviews with individuals who were active in the student movement and the extra-parliamentary left in Rome, Florence and Venice. Interviewees were selected using the 'snowball' method – each interviewee was asked if she or he could suggest the names of others who were active in the same circles during the period in question – and with one exception (the oral historian Alessandro Portelli) were not previously known to the author. They did not know that gender differences would be among the foci of the study; indeed, I confess as the interviewer that gender issues were not among my principal interests when I conducted the interviews. It was only later, going back again and again to the recordings, that I realised that some gendered patterns were evident in these narratives, and that these raised many interesting questions about the nature of narrative, representation and memory where '1968' is concerned.

A brief note on notation: in the excerpts from interviews quoted here, an ellipsis in square brackets ([. . .]) indicates that material has been cut, but an ellipsis on its own (. . .) indicates a pause in the conversation. Because emotions can be conveyed by silence as much as by speech, it is important to note that there are points at which interviewees struggle to find the words to speak of difficult and sometimes painful topics.

Emotions and oral history

As a tool for exploring the emotions, oral history has considerable strengths, and it is surprising that those interested in emotions in history have so rarely turned to oral sources. It is equally surprising that so few oral historians work explicitly with emotions, although many use the emotional content of their interviews implicitly. Oral sources, after all, offer a window onto intimate feelings such as guilt, grief and love, as well as onto the more conventionally 'public' emotions such as anger (Cubitt 2001). Both oral history and the rapidly growing sub-field of the history of emotions place emphasis on the value of subjective human experience, and both explore the nexus between the personal and the social or collective in new ways. Pioneers of new theories and approaches in oral history, such as Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini, have demonstrated that the value of oral history lies in its ability to lay bare the social construction of memory, arguing that 'there are no "false" oral sources . . . . Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did'

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(Portelli 1981, 99–100). Over the last two decades, oral historians have increasingly wedded their approach to the emerging field of memory studies, using interviews to explore the ways in which identity is constructed through the narration of shared histories; rather than take memory at face value, oral historians have understood 'memory's insistence on creating a history of itself, which is much less and perhaps somewhat more than a social history'.[4] Similarly, amongst scholars who work with the emotions, social-constructivist philosophers such as Rom Harré and James Averill, and historians such as Peter and Carol Stearns, remind us that emotions are socially constructed – there is a 'constitutive role played by language, moral norms and institutions of different cultures in creating emotions'.[5] This article takes the view that an explicit analysis of the expression of feelings in oral sources will shed particular light on the ways in which individual life stories converge with, overlap and are shaped by collective narratives and experiences. Expressions of feeling also reveal points of tension between individual and collective narratives, exposing moral conflicts, uncertainties and insecurities.

Despite the similarities between their two sub-fields, historians of the emotions and those who use oral history have rarely had much to say to each other. One of the reasons for this may stem from the challenges inherent in the methodology of oral history. For those who are interested solely in the ways in which emotions were constituted in the past, oral sources have their limitations, for they are narratives constructed in the present (or at the time of interview), and they tell us as much about the emotional state of the interviewee in the present – and how she sees herself, how she wishes to be seen, how she situates herself within broader social and political contexts, and so on – as they do about her past emotional experiences. With regard to the specific context of 1968, it should not be surprising to find that activists interviewed about their experiences four decades in the past remember doubts, fears and ambivalences that they did not acknowledge, or were not aware of, at the time. In plumbing interviews for emotional patterns, we must not take these testimonies for granted: these are emotions mediated by memory. Rather than opening a direct window onto the emotions of the past, oral sources illuminate the ways in which 1968 has reverberated down and through the trajectories of activists' lives.

Emotions defy any easy definitions; indeed, in his groundbreaking theoretical work on the history of emotions, William Reddy devotes more than a hundred pages to exploring the meaning of the concept (Reddy 2001). In this study, I wish to stress that I do not attempt to plumb the complexities of the concept of emotion; rather, my focus is on the expression of feelings, and the ways in which this expression indicates different approaches to narrating the experience and memory of 1968. Feelings are explored here through tone as well as through words, based on the understanding that feeling is expressed in language not only through vocabulary and grammar, but also through intonation and cadence (Wierzbicka 1999, 29). Working from digital recordings rather than transcripts, I have listened for variations in tone through the interview, and have explored the shifts in meaning behind these variations. This approach only touches upon the surface of what could be called emotions in oral history – it does not, for example, begin to explore the complexities of individual psychology – but I offer these initial observations as an open question to oral historians: How could we better incorporate the study of the emotions into our work?

Emotions provide a particularly useful set of filters for exploring the ways in which dominant cultural images of the 1960s shape individual memories and narratives. As I conducted the interviews for this project, I noticed that interviewees often seemed to

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relate their own personal experience to something which could be called a meta-narrative of ideal activism, or an idealised model of a 1968 activist. This model, which stems in part from the collective experience of protest in these years and in part from cultural images that have developed in the 40 years since 1968, acts as a frame of reference with which individual experience is constantly compared. It can have a pronounced impact on the interview, weighing on the narrative as if the model itself were a third person present in the room. Complex individual memories are reflected and refracted through this idealised image, and the interviewer must be aware that the speaker may bend his or her story better to fit the ideal, precisely because the speaker assumes that this is what the listener wants or expects to hear.

This idealised image is not gender neutral. American historian Sara Evans has recently argued that the image we hold of a typical '60s activist is inherently male, built around 'an immense amount of masculine display – verbal combat, sexual conquest, and militaristic fantasies associated with battles in the streets' (Evans 2009, 336). Luisa Passerini has seen the image as less overtly masculine, but still inherently male: the 'young hero' of 1968 is 'at times semi-adolescent, at times androgynous, but more boy than girl, although softened by thoughtfulness and indignation...' (Passerini 1996, 32). Because of the gendered nature of the model, male and female interviewees have a different emotional relationship with it. This was true in 1968, and it remains true now: as they narrate their past experiences in the present, interviewees are constructing their own identities as men and women. Because the idealised model of a '68 activist is male, men may weave the model into and around their own life stories more easily and more readily, perhaps, than women. This is particularly true at the most powerfully emotional points in an interview: it is here where convergences and tensions between individual and collective are most apparent. Through an analysis of three highly emotive themes – rebellion, violence, and liberation – this paper will explore the interplay between gender, feeling, narrative and the 'third person in the room'.

The emotions of rebellion

The notion that the youth of 1968 rebelled en masse against the authority of parental figures is so deeply enshrined in dominant images of the period – both in Italy and elsewhere – that it poses a particular challenge for oral historians. The theme of rebellion against parents (and here I will concentrate on parents themselves rather than on other authority figures such as teachers, professors, priests, youth group leaders, and so on) is almost always a key component of interviews with former activists. But is this the case because the act of rebellion was a vital part of the individual's life story, or because it is an *expected* component of the former activist's story? Interviewees may assume that the interviewer wants and expects to hear a story of rebellion against parents, and may be only too willing to provide this narrative thread because it underlines the speaker's credentials as an activist and as a genuine participant in a larger, collective act of rebellion.

Family dynamics, both in the past and in the present, shape the emotional tone of the narrative in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Interviewees may speak in tones that convey both resentment and guilt, or pride and disappointment; they may speak of respect for their parents and at the same time of their desire to shock them (Jasper 1998, 405). Family dynamics are notoriously complex, and we should seek to avoid any easy

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simplifications where issues such as rebellion against parents are concerned; however, bearing the diversity of individual experience and family relationships in mind, there are some distinct patterns that emerge where speakers discuss rebellion, and these patterns are often the most clear along the lines of gender.

In her masterful work on Italy's 1968, *Autobiography of a generation*, Luisa Passerini uses the language of psychoanalysis to explore the ways in which male and female interviewees, all former activists in the Italian student movement, describe their relationships with their parents. Passerini argues that there is a discontinuity at the heart of the majority of these life-history interviews, but that this sense of rupture is different where interviewees speak of their fathers and their mothers, and different again for men and for women. She finds that former activists tend to speak of their fathers as ambiguous figures who provoke ambivalent feelings: they are at once loving and distant, authoritarian and weak-willed (Passerini 1996, 22). Male and female interviewees alike speak of fathers in these ambivalent terms, often stressing at once a certain continuity with fathers' beliefs (by pointing out the aspiration for liberty and justice that many fathers espoused, whether they were liberals or further to the political left) alongside a sense of moral discontinuity with fathers who did not live their lives according to these precepts. Although Passerini does not explicitly explore the emotions, she implicitly illuminates a complex mixture of pride and disappointment in these narratives of relationships with fathers.

The same sense of ambivalence, however, is not in evidence where Passerini's interviewees speak of their mothers – and here she suggests a discernible difference in the narratives of male and female interviewees. She observes that while men might, particularly in retrospect, connect with the strong elements in their mothers' personalities and in turn with their 'inner mother', women's relationships with their mothers are more often described in terms of a need to reject this most primary of female figures: 'the distancing appears in retrospect as not so much a conscious act of subjectivity as an obscure impulsive reflex, almost a spontaneous withdrawal, an unmediated repulsion, out of nausea, disgust, aversion' (Passerini 1996, 33). Discussions of the mother are punctuated by a sense of disquiet, both towards the mother as an individual and towards the feminine figure in a symbolic sense. The nature of women's rebellion against their mothers, she argues, is thus very different from that against their fathers.

Taking Passerini's lucid observations forwards, an explicit probing of the expression of feelings suggests that many of the men and women in this sample do speak of rebellion against their parents differently, and that these differences are shaped on the one hand by divergent experiences, particularly of familial obligations and expectations, and on the other hand by different relationships with idealised narratives of rebellion. These patterns can be illustrated with two examples. Consider the feelings apparent in the following two descriptions of clashes with parents over the issue of staying out late, one from a man, and one from a woman. The man, Piero De Gennaro, cut his political teeth in the *Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana* (the youth wing of the Communist Party, FGCI) before ultimately directing his activism into a cultural circle affiliated with the extra-parliamentary left organisation *Il Manifesto*. Here he describes tussling with his parents over the right to attend late-night meetings at the FGCI headquarters:

> I remember evening discussions that would finish late at night, with shouting, and some fighting [laughs] .... I remember that for us this was, we were, remember that this was '68 –'69,

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> we were 15, 16 years old, right? Around that, anyway. Thus we had to conquer, we had a battle where our parents were concerned. It wasn't simply a given that we could stay late at the headquarters, and return home late... it wasn't like that, even if our parents were on the left, and were very open. [...] They wanted us to be home by a certain time. They were afraid, worried, because there was a certain climate, there were attacks, fascist attacks, and they were afraid of this. But for us, it was a growing experience.[6]

De Gennaro speaks here in tones that are light-hearted and punctuated by laughter, but that reveal pride in the memory of rebellion. He uses the language of battle to describe the experience, and implies that he was ultimately the victor in this battle; he speaks of the need to 'conquer' as if this clash with his parents was an extension of his activism, a struggle that he needed to take part in and to win. This is a story of action that begins with a fight and ends on a positive note: the act of rebellion was a 'growing experience', a rite of passage. The speaker sets up an implicit contrast between his parents' fear and his own bravery, and in so doing constructs, whether consciously or unconsciously, a certain type of masculinity – active, proud, brave fighter – in his narrative, one that has clear echoes with the idealised model of a '68 activist.

Now compare De Gennaro's description with that of Liliana Ingargiola. Ingargiola began her activist career in the Radical Party, militating over such issues as conscientious objection, but over time devoted a greater and greater part of her energies to the party's feminist wing, the *Movimento di Liberazione della Donna*. Here she speaks of an argument she had with her mother over the right to stay out late that ended with her decision to leave home:

> I started to spend time at [the Radical Party's] political headquarters, and I started getting home just a bit after when I was supposed to. I would leave there around 6 p.m., and according to my parents I had to be home by 7 p.m., and they were counting the minutes. And I came home at 8 p.m. and my mother hit me. And I remember that this was something that really shocked me, and from that point onwards we clashed as we never had before. At that point I decided just to, to go, to get myself out of there. [...] And that was... I didn't have the courage to say that I was leaving home. As I was loading my things in the car of a friend who had come to help me move, my mother said to me 'I know you're leaving home', and I said to her 'That's right. Ciao.' And I went just like that, with my mother refusing to look me in the face.[7]

There is no positive element to Ingargiola's description, no pride, no sense of having won a battle; in fact, she states that she 'didn't have the courage' to tell her family that she was leaving home. In contrast to the comfortable jocularity of De Gennaro's story, Ingargiola's narrative is marked by sadness and anger; it is a story of rebellion, but not one that points towards broader cultural tropes of rebellion in this period. Following on from Passerini's observations, this is a story of the speaker's rejection of her mother, but it is equally a story of the mother's rejection of her daughter.

The tangle of painful emotions that weave through this narrative suggest both that parents had very different expectations of daughters and sons, and that the memory of these familial obligations, 40 years on, can remain difficult to process. This is a pattern in many women's stories, suggesting a collective experience; however, it is a pattern that defies any easy comparison with idealised stories of rebellion in and around 1968. These stories are painful to recall because they are ultimately about parental shame. The parents in De Gennaro's narrative are angry because they are *afraid* for their son, but the mother in Ingargiola's story is angry because she is *ashamed* of her daughter; because a daughter who breaks her curfew is not only disobedient, in the eyes of her parents,

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but also possibly promiscuous. Underlying this sense of shame are issues of sexuality and family honour, reminding us that, in the Italy of the 1960s, even politically left-leaning households could be strikingly morally conservative.[8] Sons may certainly have come into conflict with their parents' expectations, but daughters were expected to be obedient, to dress demurely and to behave themselves in public in a way that sons were not – social codes of propriety and moral behaviour underpinned these moments of tension between parents and daughters. There is a conflict, in many of the interviews with women in this sample, between the memory of the need to assert one's will, and the memory of the sense of disloyalty this provoked; in the words of another interviewee, Mariella Eboli (who was involved in the same circle as De Gennaro), her parents 'never could have thought that their daughter, who was very quiet, respected, a model daughter, could first of all . . . they could never believe that she could do something against their will, so it was like . . . a betrayal, and this is, I think, the main thing'.[9] To cast aside the role of the 'good daughter' meant assuming the burden of this sense of betrayal, and the raw emotions apparent in these descriptions suggest that, decades later, this disappointment – of parents for daughters and of daughters for parents – remains one of the defining feelings connected with the act of rebellion for a notable number of women in this sample.

The emotions of violence

Discussions of violence often play a prominent role in interviews with Italian activists, and it is unsurprisingly a particularly emotion-laden topic. The issue of violence signals an important aspect of the Italian memory of 1968: both at the individual and the collective level, the events of 1968 are often remembered as part of a trajectory that culminated in the *anni di piombo* – the 'years of lead' – that were marked by escalating left- and right-wing terrorism. Regardless of whether or not an interviewee believes that the street violence of the late 1960s led directly to the terrorism of the 1970s, the memory of the 'years of lead' is a constant presence in interviews with former activists, and interviewees may re-evaluate and even re-imagine their earlier actions and opinions in light of the later developments of the *anni di piombo* (independently of whether they were in any way associated with groups that took up armed violence). The sometimes-violent altercations that were part of the Italian experience of 1968 – between left- and right-wing groups, or between activists and police – are constantly qualified in the interview by speakers eager to demonstrate that they in no way condone the terrorism of the 'years of lead'. Here, perhaps more than with any other topic, emotions delineate the boundaries of a morality tale: interviewees weave anger and disgust into their narrative to demonstrate their own firm rejection of the terrorism of the 1970s, even where this means re-imagining the very different violence of the 1960s.

For many male interviewees in this sample, narratives of violence are shaped by two competing forces: on the one hand, the need to show that they were not afraid of engaging in combat; on the other, the desire to demonstrate that they condemned and condemn the idea of violence in anything other than symbolic form. This pattern is illustrated by the following excerpt. Alessandro Portelli, who discovered politics as an exchange student in Los Angeles in 1960, but who only came to direct activism when he joined a group associated with *Il Manifesto* in his late twenties, here describes an incident that happened

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after the 'soft' *Il Manifesto* and the 'hard' *Potere Operaio* began to explore a possible merger:[10]

> You had to prove that you were not against the *Potere Operaio* thing because you were a coward. So one night I find myself in Montesacro with a bunch of people from the other side [...] and they're going to throw a Molotov bottle at the Spanish Embassy. So I say of course I'm coming. These Molotov bottles... were in the trunk of my car... and they started throwing these bottles, and they missed, the bottles didn't explode, etc. So that's my experience of guerrilla warfare [laughs]... when we thought about violence we thought about the barricades, we thought about mass... we weren't talking about murder.[11]

A remarkable number of things happen in this short excerpt. First of all, Portelli outlines the importance of demonstrating that he was not *afraid* of violence, suggesting both that his peers expected a degree of openness towards a certain type of violence from male activists, and that he had a need to prove his bravery to himself as well. Second, he sets up an opposition between himself and the *Potere Operaio* activists, and pokes fun at them in a subtle way ('they started throwing... they missed'), calling into question their bravado while being vague about his own role in the incident. Third, he draws a line between acceptable and unacceptable violence, introducing the idea that certain symbolic acts of violence may have been considered acceptable ('we thought about the barricades'), but firmly separating his own group's opinions about violence from those who followed the route towards terrorism ('we weren't talking about murder'). The tone of the narrative betrays the mesh of emotions here, switching from the light and gently ironic to the serious and even pleading. This pattern, seen in a number of interviews with men in this sample, bears the marks of two opposing collective narratives: the speakers weigh their own actions against that of the idealised street-fighting man (sometimes, as here, using irony to distance themselves from the image), while at the same time wrestling with the loaded memory, both personal and collective, of the *anni di piombo*.[12]

The women in the sample, however, relate very differently to the question of violence, because it is a very different type of violence that figures most prominently in their stories. Whereas the men often speak of aggression from police, neo-fascists or rival segments of the New Left, these women concentrate on the violence that they experienced at the hands of their own male comrades. This type of violence is almost entirely absent from academic and popular histories of Italy's 1968, and here these women's stories remind us that there is much work still to be done on activism and violence in and around 1968. The tone of these narratives is significantly different from that used by many of the men when talking about violence: the mix of humour, self-mockery and seriousness is replaced here by confusion, anger, shock and disappointment. In the following excerpt, Lia Migale, who was active in the student movement before becoming a leading member of the Roman branch of the extra-parliamentary organisation *Lotta Continua*, describes how male stewards from the group attacked a women's march in late 1975, a famous incident that in part led to the group's demise, after female members left en masse in 1976 (Bobbio 1979):

> Okay. The demonstration arrived, and I had organised a big group of women factory workers who were then occupying their factory, so myself and a friend who was also doing this work went with all these women, and then, as you know, the men from *Lotta Continua* arrived and attacked the march. This happened. Then there was this huge fight... this huge fight, the march split, at a certain point it became clear that it was the men from *Lotta Continua* who were attacking the march, but it wasn't clear why. [...] We tried to form a line between

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> the marchers and this bit of *Lotta Continua*, and I organised this so that the situation wouldn't degenerate, but it led to a terrible fight.

When I ask why she thinks the men attacked the march, she answers:

> Well, I asked them, I said 'you've been working with me for a whole year, we've talked together every day, how did this idea ever get in your heads?' And they responded 'we don't know why we did it, we didn't understand [what we were doing]'. And there were huge ... it was absolutely a moment of intense emotion.[13]

The events that Migale describes here clearly mark a watershed moment in her life-history narrative, and yet there is a disconnect between her words ('it was a moment of intense emotion') and the flat, emotionless tone in which she tells this story. Migale's description of the attack on the demonstration reminds us that the most painful moments of lived experience, the ones associated with the most troubling memories, can be difficult, if not impossible, to describe in their emotional complexity. This is all the more true where these stories do not fit into established narrative patterns. In Portelli's narrative, he gently mocks the image of the street-fighting man, but the image nonetheless exerts a certain weight on the narrative; in Migale's story, the image is twisted into something monstrous. Migale's story is specific to a certain context – what happened within *Lotta Continua* was a famously severe example of male activists turning on their female counterparts – but other women in the sample recall that they felt they were the targets of male comrades' violent words, gestures or actions. This is an aspect of Italy's 1968 that calls out for further research.

The emotions of liberation

Liberation from power structures, liberation from social mores, sexual liberation: the concept of liberation was an integral component of both political and lifestyle activism in and around 1968. However, the gulf between the theory and practice of liberation could be huge, particularly where sexual liberation was concerned. As Sara Evans has observed, male leaders of the student movement who championed the sexual revolution 'had no intention of eroding the power and authority of men over women' (Evans 2009, 336). As was true for women in other countries, many Italian women soon realised that the sexual revolution may have been liberating for men but was often constraining for women, who felt pressured to be sexually available; the Italian feminist slogan 'compagni in piazza, fascisti a letto' (comrades in the piazza, but fascists in bed) points to this tension.[14]

In the issue of sexual liberation, there is a remarkable divide between the remembered emotions of the time, and the feelings and interpretations of the speaker in the present, making it a particularly poignant example of the power of oral history to illuminate emotional changes over time. However, only an incomplete example can be offered here. While many of the women interviewed for this study readily discussed issues of sexual politics, none of the men did so. This is not because these issues were unimportant to men, but because it is not easy for a male interviewee in his late fifties or sixties to discuss these matters openly with a female interviewer in her thirties. Oral history is a dialogue between two people, and the interviewer shapes the process by her very presence (Grele 1991). I include this example here in the hope that future research will allow for a comparison with men's narratives of sexual liberation.

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Those women who do speak of the sexual revolution often recall that it was predicated on a rejection of sentimental emotions: idealised activists were meant to have sex without the complications of love or romantic sentiments. This revolt against romance may have been taken up in earnest by women (and men) at the time, but female interviewees in the present speak of the limitations of this emotionless state, recalling the extent to which it was unsustainable in practice. In the following excerpt, Rosetta Stella, who was active in the Roman student movement and directed part of her energies into the 'social and political' aspects of a radical left-wing Catholic base community, recalls the idea that 'real' activists didn't fall in love:

> The other experience that I lived through in '68 was the discovery of myself, of my own sexual desire. This was really important in '68, because the sexual revolution was happening, let's call it that. And it happened in a disorganised fashion . . . with a certain amount of excess, if you will, that didn't . . . that didn't help with real sexual liberation, let's say. But I did discover the Pill, which I of course hid from my parents, because I was a perfect little girl at home, but then outside all that stuff happened. [laughs] The Pill, and then . . . a sexual education that was quite aggressive, with this revolt against the emotions, meaning that everything that was romantic was considered wrong, because real revolutionaries [*la vera rivoluzionaria e il vero rivoluzionario*] didn't have feelings.

Stella illustrates this idea with an anecdote:

> A friend of mine, her boyfriend had been in the hospital because he'd been in a little accident, and so this friend said to me 'let's go pick Attilio up from the hospital today.' But as we were going to get him, she said to me 'listen, I have to ask you something. I've got my period, but given that he's getting out of the hospital he's going to want to make love, and I can't do it. Could you do it in my place?' [laughs] And so what happened? I didn't do it, but I did have to think about it. You couldn't just say no, you had to think about it, and [laughs] there were some mental gymnastics involved in finding a way to say no.[15]

What is fascinating in this excerpt is the gulf between the emotions of past and present: Stella speaks of a rejection of sentimental feelings, but does so in a narrative punctuated by laughter and delivered in a gently self-mocking tone. She sets up a contrast between her younger self, who strove to conform to the image of a 'real revolutionary', and her present self, who implies through her ironic tone that these youthful attempts to put sentiment aside were naïve, laughable and even ludicrous.

Stella's anecdote serves to illustrate both the extremes to which this emotional detachment was taken, and the peer pressure that drove the process. The young Stella may have shaped her behaviour to model that of the idealised activist, but her older self rejects the ideal itself. This example reminds us that, while women may relate less easily to the idealised model of a 'real revolutionary' as they remember their experiences of '68, this does not mean that they rejected this ideal at the time; indeed, quite the contrary may have been true. As we have seen, women activists in 1968 were often casting off traditional models of femininity and searching for new ways of living as women; they may have tried on the mantle of the 'real revolutionary', but found over time that it never quite fitted comfortably.[16] For some women activists in this sample, this sense of non-belonging propelled them into the women's movement that took off in Italy in the early 1970s. As Maria Paola Fiorensoli, active in the Roman student movement before becoming involved in feminism, recalls, the 'road to the feminist collectives' began with student activism in the universities, 'because at the assemblies, few women, really few women . . . well, above all, [for women] there was silence. [. . .] The chance for a *compagna* to speak never arrived.'[17]

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Conclusion

There is much further work to be done on the uses of feelings as tools for parsing oral history narratives; or, viewed from the opposite direction, much work that remains to be done to test the strengths and limitations of oral history as a methodology for studying the emotions in history. Oral history may not offer a direct window onto past emotions, but it exposes the contrast between remembered past feelings and present reinterpretations, telling us something of former activists' experiences in 1968, of the trajectories of their lives in the 40 years since, and of the ways in which individual memory and collective narratives can coincide or clash in their life histories.

An exploration of emotions can reveal not only something of the diversity of lived experience in and around 1968 – a diversity that is often missing from popular and academic accounts of the period – but also draws attention to the power of idealised narratives in shaping the individual's story. Whilst steering clear of generalisations – there was no 'male' or 'female' experience of 1968, just as there is no one way of speaking of the events of the period – patterns evident in the sample of interviews used in this paper suggest that women and men active in 1968 do often narrate their experiences differently, for a variety of reasons. If (some) men and (some) women remember and relate the story of 1968 in notably different ways, this is not only because their experiences were different at the time, but also because they connect differently with the broad cultural assumptions and dominant narratives that constitute the collective memory of 1968. Because there is a strong masculine dimension to idealised models of activists from this period, men may weave aspects of this ideal into their descriptions of their own individual experience more readily than women, and may have a different emotional relationship with the ideal: whether they embrace it with pride or reject it using irony, this ideal exerts a particular weight on the narrative, shaping the speaker's own assessment of his time as an activist. For women, there is often a more pronounced disjuncture between personal experience and this mythical ideal, and as a consequence we can glimpse a largely unfamiliar 1968 in their narratives, one that is punctuated by a different set of emotions. Here, disappointment and a sense of non-belonging point to tensions and clashes between experience, memory and the dominant narratives that are the 'third person in the room'. Some of the differences explored in this paper are particularly acute in the Italian case, but most have broader implications, and it is my hope that this brief study will serve as a spur towards further research into the emotional history and memory of Europe's 1968.

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Notes

1. For an overview of the events of Italy's long 1968, see Lumley (1990), Migone (1991), Marwick (1999), Horn (2007) and Hilwig (2009).
2. Two exceptions are the recent studies by Frazier and Cohen (2009) and Evans (2009).
3. This AHRC-funded project is a major collaborative effort, involving 14 historians at 13 separate institutions, and the work presented here has evolved out of the author's collaborative work with other members of this project. In particular, some of the ideas explored here were first

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examined in a paper co-authored with Robert Gildea entitled 'Voice and gender: 1968 in France and Italy', presented at the Oral History Society Annual Conference, Glasgow, July 3-4, 2009.

4. Passerini (1996, 23). Other works that explore the importance of memory and subjectivity in oral history include Portelli (1991, 1997, 1999), Thomson (1994, 1998), and Mouton and Pohlandt-McCormick (1999). For a classic study of the social construction of memory, see Halbwachs (1950).
5. Dixon (2003, 247). See also Averill and Nunley (1992), Harré (1986), and Stearns and Stearns (1986). For an overview of the 'constructionist' approach to the emotions, see Thoits (1989).
6. Interview with Piero De Gennaro, December 11, 2008.
7. Interview with Liliana Ingargiola, November 26, 2008.
8. Lieta Harrison's remarkable mid-1960s study of girls and their mothers in Milan, Turin, Rome and Palermo showcases this contrast between conservative parents and daughters whose attitudes towards sexuality were changing. See Harrison (1966). Parents were particularly strict in the South, where codes of morality were most deeply linked to concepts of family honour. Ginsborg (1990, 244).
9. Interview with Mariella Eboli, June 29, 2008.
10. Bascetta et al. (2008, 256–57). The two groups toyed with the possibility of a merger in 1971, but the plans were never carried through.
11. Interview with Alessandro Portelli, December 12, 2008.
12. For an analysis of the connections of the street violence of the late 1960s and the terrorism of the 1970s, see Della Porta (1995). Cento Bull and Giorgio (2006) provide an excellent collection of essays that reveals the complex trajectories of protest in the 1970s, and that contextualises the emergence of terrorism.
13. Interview with Lia Migale, December 4, 2008.
14. Casa Internazionale delle Donne archives, Pompeo Magno collection, box 1, file 1, 1976.
15. Interview with Rosetta Stella, December 8, 2008.
16. On this sense of discomfort, see Passerini (1996, 144–48).
17. Interview with Maria Paola Fiorensoli, December 11, 2008. Historians of the women's movement of the 1970s do not agree on the importance of 1968 with regard to the later development of feminism; some argue that feminism was a direct offshoot of the student and New Left movements, some argue that it was an indirect development, and still others see feminism as having roots that are largely independent of the protest movements of the 1960s. On this debate in the Italian case, see Rossi-Doria (2005).

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