Bringing back 'Victorian Values'

The conservative attitude towards the permissive society of 1970s Britain

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Figure on the title page:
A student anti-abortion march from the British Medical Association headquarters in Tavistock Square to Downing Street in London, June 1977, *March for Life UK,* available at https://www.marchforlife.co.uk/history-of-march-for-life/ (accessed at 27 July 2020).

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Introduction

On Monday July 4th, 1977, leader of the British Conservative Party, Margaret Thatcher prepared a speech for the next generation of Conservatives in London. There she tried to stress that the following message on the foundations of British conservatism: "*Religion gives us not only values—a scheme of things in which economic, social, penal policy have their place—but also our historical roots.*"[1] This interpretation of conservatism, and the way it would bring about positive change in Britain, played a central role in Thatcher's entire political career and the way in which she shaped her social and cultural policy. Her aim to bring back the 'Victorian values' were part of a larger movement with the aim of countering the social and cultural revolution of the Sixties.[2]

Britain after the Second World War was largely shaped by the tumultuous search for a new role in the rapidly changing world. They had to come to terms with the consequences of the war in terms of economic developments, new (armed) world conflicts, decolonisation and disintegration of the British Empire, and a society with a changed attitude towards life. In the two-and-a-halve decades that followed, Britain developed itself into a modernised country with a considerable role to play in the world. By many Brits seen as the gloomiest period since the Second World War, the Seventies, however, were dominated by the feeling of nationwide crises. Academic research points to a crisis on many fronts, among which, issues with social change such as emancipation, relationships, family, and morals.[3]

This image of Seventies gloominess stands in stark contrast with that of the colourful 'Swinging Sixties'. However, not everyone saw the youth-driven cultural revolution as an asset to British society. Opposition was voiced before the decade was out and stayed present until well into the Nineties. This countermovement became very prominent in the Seventies by claiming that the country was not only deteriorating on, for example, an economic level but also on a moral one. Several politicians and civilians took it upon themselves to cleanse Britain of the 'moral pollution' from the Sixties and tried to take Britain back to a time with respectable family values. The movement's convictions were born out of conservative, traditional, and Christian rhetoric and focused on the idea that the British society had become too 'permissive'. The family unit had been the tower of strength for everyone who felt that the changes in the world around them were slipping through their fingers. But their ideals of the perfect family unit were threatened by increasing permissiveness regarding divorce, contraception, and abortion regulations.

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[1] Speech to Greater London Young Conservatives (Iain Macleod Memorial Lecture), 4 July 1977, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website (MTFW) 103411.
[2] Andy McSmith, *No Such Thing As Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London 2011) 4-5.
[3] Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London 2009) 2.

Thatcher's aim to return to Victorian values or virtues represented this wider societal current in post-war Britain. Previous historical works often look into this conservative attitude as a subtopic of historical works regarding the conservative attitude in general, as well as an antagonist in historical research on progressive emancipation movements. This thesis aims to provide a contribution to that existing historiography concerning British post-war conservatism and social-cultural developments in Britain from the Sixties onwards by combining these discourses. Therefore, at the core of this thesis will be the following research question: **What was the British conservative attitude towards the permissive society of 1970s Britain?**

As mentioned before, the conservative attitude has been researched for a long time. This has been done most often, with a predominantly political approach to the topic. In addition, there is a very extensive academic discourse on Britain in the Seventies and all the unrest that took place. For this thesis, it is important to look at the existing historiography on Britain in the Sixties and Seventies in general, on the conservative/traditional perspective on society, and on the existing research on the themes of family life and welfare.

Firstly, it is of great value to look at some broader works with the focus on modern British history; works that have placed the concept of permissive society in context and elaborate on cause and consequence in the complicated social-political landscape of the time. Several works provide an interesting look into the British society in the Seventies. For example, in his books *Seeking a Role* [4] and *Finding a Role?* [5], Brian Harrison looks at the developments within Britain over a long period of time and with a very wide focus. A wide variety of aspects is discussed in a structural manner that still does justice to the complicated underlying relations. The researches both boast an impressive bibliography which makes these books an important gateway to the existing historiography on the topic. The usage of ego documents, political pieces, and government documents paint a vivid picture of the internal British debates at the time. Another valuable contribution is the book *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, edited by Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton, and Pat Thane[6], which provides the view of many different authors on several different themes that characterising the decade. It provides a more personal account to the existing historiography by focusing on slightly more cultural and social related topics. Therefore, it combines very well with Harrison's more general and political approach. In addition, the 'reassessing' aspect of the research provides an interesting look into a more meta level discussion of the Seventies. Lastly, two other authors that have written works that are less academic and more journalistic. They provide an interesting overview of the decade by giving more attention to the way in which the British

[4] Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951-1970* (Oxford 2009).
[5] Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role?: The United Kingdom, 1970-1990* (Oxford 2010).
[6] Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton, Pat Thane eds., *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester 2013).

public experienced the time. Therefore, there is more focus on popular culture and the daily life of many people. These works include Andy Beckett's *When the Lights Went Out* [7] and Dominic Sandbrook's *Seasons in the Sun*[8] and *State of Emergency* [9].

Secondly, it is of great value to look at some works with the focus on morals and values in post-war Britain and that of the conservative perspective specifically. The abovementioned books each contribute to this historical debate by using a chapter or more to elaborate on the topic of societal change and adapting frameworks of morals and values. In addition, several other works provide valuable insights on this topic on a bigger scale. For example, Callum G. Brown's book *The Battle for Christian Britain* [10] provides valuable insight into the development of Christian sentiments in post-war Britain and its influence on the moral framework of the people in the country. As a predominantly Christian country, the church had a lot of influence in the conservative way of thinking and is therefore of great value for this research. It elaborates on the role of Christian pressure groups in censorship of the British media and their response to an increasingly secularising society. Prominent figures from the conservative movement, such as Thatcher, often emphasised the need for more 'good Christian values'. In addition, Amy C. Whipple's article 'Speaking for Whom?'[11] provides insight in one of these British Christian pressure groups, namely the Nationwide Festival of Light (NFOL). The research looks into the people behind the organisation and especially the way in which they framed themselves to be the voice of the silent majority in Britain wanting to slow down the moral liberalisation on the Sixties. Finally, an addition that provides a look into the developing concepts of conservatism is Margaret Thatcher's autobiography *The Path to Power* [12].

Lastly, it is of great value to look at some works with the focus on the themes of family life and welfare. The abovementioned books all discuss family life and societal welfare to some extent. However, in order to gain more insight in the specific moral changes in the permissive society, it is necessary to also look at other works that are more specific. The concepts often focus on the changing relationship between men and women, especially within the family unit, and the way in which women became less dependent on their male partners. This is why these works often find their origin in the discourse on feminism and women's rights. For example, Anna Coote's and Beatrix Campbell's book *Sweet Freedom*[13] provides

[7] Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*.
[8] Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle For Britain, 1974-1979* (London 2012).
[9] Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain 1970-1974* (London 2010).
[10] Callum G. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain: Sex, Humanists and Secularisation, 1945-1980* (Cambridge 2019).
[11] Amy C. Whipple, 'Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the 'Silent Majority'', *Contemporary British History* 24:3 (2010) 319-339.
[12] Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London 1995).
[13] Anna Coote & Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Oxford 1987).

valuable insight into the development of the concepts by looking at many aspects of the women's daily life. Such as, employment, law, education, family(planning), and sexual attitudes. The research has been based on sources with strong feminist roots and has been conducted in the early Eighties. Therefore, this work also forms a window into the spirit of the time close to the Seventies. In addition, an important author in that same period in time is Sheila Rowbotham. Her research on the changing role of the woman has been influential in many newer and more contemporary works. For example, her book *Hidden from History* [14] does not only pay attention to the abovementioned aspects, but also to the relation of class and equality regarding family life. This research, too, has been conducted in the Seventies and provides an interesting insight in the contemporary dominant societal ideas. Lastly, Barbara Caine's book *English Feminism* [15] provides necessary insight in the development of family life and welfare on a grander scale and over a longer period of time. The research was conducted at a later moment in time and therefore contains more of an analysis of the narrative. However, the research focusses on the specific feminist movement that fought to acquire equality for women and not separately on a description of the life of women at that time.

In recent years, debates on the permissiveness of the modern society have been pronouncedly visible media. Themes such as divorce rates, marriage trends, abortion laws, and sexuality have remained relevant topics of discussion in our society. A society in which many people feel like change is going too fast and that action required to keep it in hand. As mentioned before, research on specifically the conservative attitude has been often conducted as part of a research on a wider subject. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to this existing framework by analysing and characterising this attitude of the conservatives and placing it in context of the very tumultuous Seventies.

At the foundation of this socio-political piece lie two sets of primary sources that have been used to define the phrase 'conservative attitude'. The first set consist of speeches, interviews, diary fragments, and parliamentary debates that together represent the attitude of conservative politicians. Since this research concerns people with a socially and societally conservative mindset, often referred to as small-c conservatism, the used sources have not been limited to members of the Conservatives Party but include Labour and Liberal politicians as well. The content of this material, naturally, is very heavily politically biased but particularly suitable for this research. The second set consists of newspaper articles and conservative periodicals that together represents the conservative press. The following publications were used in this thesis: The *Times*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail*, and the

[14] Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (Third Ed., London 1977).
[15] Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford 1997).

Spectator. The newspapers have been selected because of availability and because they provide a look into the heart of the British conservative argument. The newspapers can all be positioned as conservative sources which makes them heavily biased but particularly suitable for this research. As with all sources, there often is an underlying political motivation or objective. It is therefore extra important to be aware of the makers' views and goals regarding the subject. These kinds of sources are particularly suited in this case due to the political nature of this research. Furthermore, several kinds of sources have different limitations and strengths. Official political papers are often well recorded and well structured, making it slightly easier to find valuable information. However, it is a recording in a moment in time of the formal business of government and this makes it difficult to gain insight on the more social and 'soft' side of politics. Finally, the personal diaries and memoirs do present the opportunity to gain sight into the more social side but are heavily influenced by the flaws of human memory and emotions.

The vast majority of these primary sources are British and originate from the period of 1967 to 1979. Among them are newspaper articles, interviews, speeches, and ego documents such as diaries and memoirs. They have been selected by way of looking into the conservative activities and arguments and selecting three case studies that function as anchor points for the analysis of the sources and the structure of this thesis. The first case study is the debate surrounding the divorce peak in 1971. It contributes to the theme of family life and welfare by looking into the development of the marriage and divorce trends. The second case study is the debate surrounding the National Health Service Reorganisation Act in 1973. It contributes to the theme of family life and welfare by looking into the development of the increased accessibility and usage of oral contraceptives. The third case study is the debate surrounding the Abortion Act in 1967 and the amendments to this law in 1975, 1976, and 1979. It contributes to the theme of family life and welfare by looking into the development of the increased accessibility and usage of abortions.

The structure of this thesis consists of four chapters with several subchapters. The first chapter elaborates on the social changes that took place in Britain in the Sixties and how the conservatives experienced these rapid changes. It provides context about how the themes of family life and welfare were experienced before and during the period in which the rapid and far-reaching social change took place. Furthermore, it looks at the roots and the realisation of the conservative organisations that opposed the increased permissiveness of society. The second chapter elaborates on the conservative attitude towards the permissive society by looking into the case study of the debate surrounding the divorce peak in 1971. It provides historiographical context on contemporary marriage trends, and looks at the conservative attitude towards it, through the material from conservative politicians and the conservative publications. The third chapter elaborates on the conservative attitude towards

the permissive society by looking into the case study of the debate surrounding the National Health Service Reorganisation Act in 1973. It provides historiographical context on the accessibility of contraceptives, the pill in particular, and looks at the conservative attitude towards it through the primary sources. The fourth chapter elaborates on the conservative attitude towards the permissive society by looking into the case study of the debate surrounding the Abortion Act in 1967 and the amendments to this law in 1975, 1976, and 1979. It provides historiographical context on the accessibility of abortions as a treatment and looks at the conservative attitude towards it through the primary sources.

1. The Swinging Sixties and social change

Britain after the Second World War was largely shaped by the tumultuous search for a new role in the rapidly changing world. The country had to come to terms with the consequences of the war in terms of economic developments, new (armed) world conflicts, decolonisation and disintegration of the British Empire, and a society with a changed attitude towards life. In the two-and-a-halve decades that followed, Britain developed itself into a modernised country with a considerable role to play in the world. By many Brits seen as the gloomiest period since the Second World War, the Seventies, however, were dominated by the feeling of nationwide crises.

This image of Seventies gloominess stands in stark contrast with that of the colourful 'Swinging Sixties'. However, not everyone saw the youth-driven cultural revolution as an asset to British society. Opposition was voiced before the decade was out and stayed present until well into the Nineties. Several politicians and civilians took it upon themselves to cleanse Britain of the 'moral pollution' from the Sixties and to go back to a respectable Britain. The movement's convictions were born out of conservative, traditional, and Christian rhetoric and focused on the idea that the British society had become too 'permissive'.

In order to understand this conservative movement in the Seventies as best as possible, this chapter provides an overview of the social and cultural changes that took place in the Sixties. It aims to contribute to the research by providing context to the case studies in the next three chapters, as well as placing the conservative movement in the wider development of conservatism in post-war Britain. The first subchapter provides an overview of how British culture and society changed during the Sixties, whereas the second subchapter looks at the family ideals of the conservative movement at that time. The chapter argues that the conservative attitude towards the permissiveness in the Seventies was built on them defending their ideals of the perfect family.

1.1 The Swinging Sixties and increasing permissiveness

According to Brian Harrison, "*the phrase 'the Sixties' conjures up at least four images: of youth revolt, relaxed manners, political radicalism, and puritanism repudiated.*" [16] Like many other decades, 'the Sixties' came to be remembered more as a symbol with cultural significance and less as a simple overview of the decade's events. The fact that people see a period in time in such a way is an interesting development for historians to determine. These kinds of 'labels' can be useful in researching public opinion and bigger societal changes, but also give a distorted image of the often more nuanced situation. For example, social changes

[16] Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role,* 472.

are regularly portrayed as very abrupt and far-reaching influences on people's daily life. However, social changes are rarely sudden nor does a society change in a uniform way. Major change will not be accepted by everyone equally or on the same pace. Changes can be controversial and will therefore cause opposite reactions throughout society. This can slow down the spread or acceptance of a change in society. In the case of the Sixties in Britain, London set the pace and the rest of the country slowly followed.[17]

There is no exact consensus among historians on how British society changed in the Sixties and Seventies and how this change took place. However, some five key changes can be identified that can provide valuable insight in the different kinds of changes that took place and how far-reaching these developments were.

All these changes formed a new British society in which progressive ideas were more commonly supported and visible in people's daily life. Contemporaries labelled this as the 'permissive society' which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "*a form of society characterised by tolerance and liberal attitudes towards sexual behaviour, drug use, etc.*" [18] The term emerged in the Fifties and was mostly used by opponents of the social change. Therefore, it carried a predominantly negative connotation.[19]

To begin with, for the first time since the Second World War, the Christian community in Britain was confronted with a steep increase in secularisation. From 1962 onwards, the Church of England saw a decrease in membership, confirmations, church weddings, and recruitment through Sunday school among other things. In addition to the changes in the field of morality, another part of Christian life was changed drastically. The sober and unmaterialistic puritan lifestyle that originated from the second half of the sixteenth century had remained a big influence on British life until well into the twentieth century. However, a counter movement arose during the nineteen Fifties. This can, partly, be ascribed to the large influence of American popular culture in Britain since the end of the Second World War. Their less formal way of dancing, dressing, making music, spending money, making films, and talking had loosened Britain up. The progressive countermovement made the British society not only more individualistic and secular, but more materialistic and focused on consumerism as well. For example, partners were less often seen as a single unit and more as different individuals.[20]

In addition, a sexual revolution took place that was characterised by the notion of sexual liberation. Dominant traditional ideas about who was allowed to have sex with who,

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[17] Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 469-474; Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role?,* 209-211; Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society, and Politics* (London 2005) 116-120.
[18] 'Permissive, adj. and n.', Oxford English Dictionary Online, available at www.oed.com/view/Entry/141216 (accessed at 26 July 2020).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Harrison, *Seeking a Role,* 474-480; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain,* 123-138; Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 165-179.

under what conditions this was allowed, and what should happen to people who do not fit the approved picture, all changed drastically. According to Brown, liberalisation took place "*of views and practices towards premarital heterosexual intercourse, homosexual relations, the nature of sexual practices, sexual knowledge and fertility control, accompanied by declining guilt, shame and fear of social ostracism over sex.*" [21]. It enabled younger generations to live their lives with more sexual freedom and outside the moral framework that had been established by older generations. This meant that it became increasingly normal among the younger generations to have sex before marriage and to experiment more. As will be elaborated on in chapter four, another example of this change is the Abortion Act which was implemented in 1967. It showed that British society felt ready to legally support or confirm the changing notions that had emerged in the previous years. Although, it is important to state that this law was, and remains, very controversial, which shows therefore that it was not accepted or supported by everyone in society. Other changes include more freedom and acceptance regarding sexual relations outside of marriages and having children out of wedlock. One of the biggest changes in that time was the growing sense of agency in establishing and shaping one's individual relationships.[22] Part of this manifested itself within the structure and ideas surrounding the concept of family as an important unit in British society. This concept of family was primarily applied to heterosexual couples and still favoured the male role within the family. As explained later on in this chapter, the roles of men and women within the family unit did change during the Sixties. Also, the new moral framework did provide more room for the gay and lesbian communities to become more visibly active nearing the end of the decade, especially within the liberal sphere of 'Swinging London'.[23]

Furthermore, second wave feminism brought along great changes in the way large parts of society viewed the role of women within and outside the family unit. According to Caine *"the earlier discussion had focused on the demands of maternity and of family life, the late 1950s and early 1960s also brought discussion of the need for social change and reform."* [24] A consensus exists that this social change and reform was based upon a central paradox. Namely, on the one hand, that it was expected of women that they devoted themselves to their families and subsequently give up much of their independence or ambitions for a career. On the other hand, because roads to good education and career

[21] Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 180.
[22] Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 31-45; Tim Newburn, *Permission and Regulation: Sexual Morality and the Criminal Law in Britain, 1955-1975* (PhD dissertation, University of Leicester, 1988) 14-20; Ben Daniel Mechen, *Everyday Sex in 1970s Britain* (PhD dissertation, University College London, 2015) 20-23; Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975* (Oxford 2004) 225-230; Coote & Campbell, *Sweet Freedom,* 230-235.
[23] Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 91-94.
[24] Caine, *English Feminism,* 248.

opportunities were open to them, women were seen as fully emancipated. Therefore, the fact that women were not equally represented in, for example, parliament, was reduced to women not working hard enough.[25] Women tried to break out of the traditional mould of being only housewife and mother. In the Sixties, it became more common for these kinds of topics to be discussed on a national level and with a serious attitude. As will be elaborated on in chapter two, an example of this is the Divorce Reform Act which was passed in parliament in 1969. It showed that British society felt ready to legally support or confirm the changing notions that had emerged in the previous years. The new law enabled married couples who had been separated for two years or longer to end their marriages without having to prove that either of them were at fault. Although this law was progressive, it did still impose a two-year period for couples to have been separated and was therefore still quite restrictive.[26]

Also, a big change took place with the demographic trend of the period. According to Brown, this social change manifested itself in the "*advent of ultra-low fertility, […] diminishing and later marriage; and strong connection between declining religiosity and increasing female participation in the labour market.*" [27] The higher level of education, the increased opportunities on the job market, and the increased permissiveness of society led to women waiting longer with getting married and getting children. In addition, contraceptives became more widely available and this too led to the large drop in the fertility rates. There was a peak in 1964 of 2,93 children per women and from then on it would drop for thirteen consecutive years to 1,66 in 1977.[28]

Lastly, a steep increase of the development of youth culture and generation gaps took place. Almost all the above-mentioned changes manifested itself in the generation gap that developed in the Sixties. The somewhat troublesome relationships between the different generations have, to greater and lesser extent, always existed. However, the Sixties are responsible for the term 'generation gap' and not without reason.[29] The widening cultural divide between the generations is often assigned to the increasing self-consciousness of the youth in the mid-1950s and was caused by the decreasing fragmentation among the youths. That is to say, until well into the Fifties, there were very few things institutions that brought youth together. Therefore, teenagers were often confined to their direct social circle. For example, schools were most often divided by gender and sometimes also social class. In

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[25] Caine, *English Feminism,* 247-249; Coote & Campbell, *Sweet Freedom,* 85-89; Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*, 137-140.
[26] Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 179-181; Coote & Campbell, *Sweet Freedom,* 85-89; Newburn, *Permission and Regulation*, 351-357.
[27] Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain*, 180.
[28] Office for National Statistics, *Births in England and Wales*, available at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2018 (accessed at 12/7/2020).
[29] Harrison, *Seeking a Role,* 474-475.

addition, there were few ways for teenagers to express themselves, such as through music. However, things changed in the early Sixties.[30]

Several factors contributed to the increasing self-awareness of the British youth in the Sixties. Firstly, the teenagers were discovered to be a lucrative commercial category with which a lot of money could be made. Secondly, the quality of the education improved in addition to more children going to school and for a longer period of time. Also, the increase in mixed schools allowed boys and girls to form groups more easily. Lastly, through television, radio, pop festivals, and underground press, more contact was possible with other teenagers all over the world. It allowed the average British teenager to draw together with peers and group together on the basis of preferred music or fashion styles. It created a bigger (visible) gap between the generations. For example, in comparison to their (grand)parents, the teens from the Sixties started to dress down and followed the likes of James Dean and Elvis Presley in wearing denim jeans instead of wearing hats and formal attire.[31] The generation gap became most visible in the different styles of clothes and music. For example, youth culture was dominated by Mary Quant's and John Bates' miniskirts and minidresses and popular pop and rock groups such as The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, and The Kinks.[32]

As mentioned before, social change does not happen in day. Just like the increasingly visible generation gap, the increasingly informality of clothing and manners was set in long before the beginning of the Sixties. The relaxation in manners manifested itself, firstly, in the increasing progressiveness of school programs. Punishment was becoming less harsh, curriculum became more focused on the child and its talents, and the relationship between pupils and parent received more attention. Secondly, personal relations had become less formal since the end of the Second World War. This became clearly visible in the communication between husbands and wives who more often used the first name to refer to each other in the company of others. It even became more common to use first names only in less intimate relationships. Thirdly, theatre, film, and television picked progressive ideas up rather early on in the process. Radical new concepts, such as the 'angry young man', became a popular subject for drama productions. And lastly, the idea of meritocracy, being able to make it on the bases of abilities instead of a person's background, became widespread among all apart from the adult elite.[33]

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[30] Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 484-487; Caine, *English Feminism,* 240-244.

[31] Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 484-487; Caine, *English Feminism,* 240-244; W. D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture, and Decline in Britain 1750-1990* (London 1993) 152-157.

[32] Eugenia Paulicelli, Drake Stutesman, and Louise Wallenberg eds., *Film, Fashion, and the 1960s* (Bloomington 2017) 17-19, 133-136.

[33] Harrison, *Seeking a Role,* 476-480; Caine, *English Feminism,* 244-252; Coote & Campbell, *Sweet Freedom,* 204-215; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London 1979) 176-182.

1.2 The conservative family ideal

The 'family' was one of the most important units in Britain's post-war society. The concept of the nuclear family, and how this was interpreted, influenced the lives of the British people on a very personal but also national scale. It played an integral role in the shaping of national policies regarding welfare, economy, culture, and in the notions on state influence or interference. As previously mentioned, the way people viewed the family unit changed drastically in the Sixties. The conservative attitude in the Seventies was built on the idea that this ideal was being threatened by the increased permissiveness in society and, therefore, that it had to be protected.

At the core of the socially conservative's convictions stood their concept of the ideal family. The family unit was characterised by a clear-cut view consisting of a heterosexual married couple who would stay together their whole life and would have children born in wedlock. The husband was at the head of the family unit and provided the family with income, whereas the wife was tasked with bearing children, raising children, and keeping the house. As stated by Harrison, "*exemplified in the royal family, endorsed by political and religious leaders, and built into the welfare structure, this ideal of the nuclear family might sometimes through death infertility, and divorce prove impracticable, but such anomalies were usually thought regrettable […].*" [34]

Many people, consciously or unconsciously, aspired to have such a family. However, as with most ideals, the notion was very far removed from reality. For example, for many working-class families it was not possible to live of a single income and often both parents had to work. The inflexible and rather rigid perspective on family life meant that many families were not accepted and frowned upon by large groups in society. This included families where someone was suspected to be anything other than heterosexual, where daughters were suspected to have had an abortion, and therefore ad sex before marriage, and where couples got divorced. Despite its unrealistic character, people held on to this idea of the perfect family well beyond the Sixties. Such an integral part of people daily lives was not going to be changed very easily or swiftly.[35]

To the dissatisfaction of the British traditionalists and conservatives, this notion of the perfect family changed dramatically in the Sixties. The increased permissiveness of the society allowed for the framework of acceptable family formations to be widened considerably. These societal changes were, eventually, recorded on a legal level as well. The conservative's family ideal was, in their eyes, threatened by laws that relaxed many regulations concerning the family unit. The ideal family with married parents, no sex before

[34] Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 29.
[35] Harrison, *Seeking a Role,* 29-31, 510-511; Janet Newman, *Sex Education and Social Change: Perspectives on the 1960s* (PhD dissertation, Open University, 1990) 180-184; Coote & Campbell, *Sweet Freedom,* 85-90.

marriage, and children born in wedlock was no longer protected as such in British law. The Seventies saw laws that relaxed conditions on divorce, the use of contraception, and abortion. These three concepts formed the foundation of the conservative attitude towards the increasing permissiveness of the British society in the Seventies.

In conclusion, the social change that took place in the 1960s was far-reaching and had tremendous influence on the way ordinary British citizens lived their lives. Firstly, for the first time since the Second World War, the Christian community in Britain was confronted with a steep increase in secularisation. It changed the way people utilised the set of Christian morals and values that they had grown up with and led, although somewhat indirectly, to an increase in individualism, materialism, informality, and general permissiveness. In addition, a sexual revolution took place in the Sixties. It was characterised by sexual liberation and increased permissiveness regarding people's notions on sexual relations between unmarried couples. In addition, less social reprimand took place towards people who did not conform. Also, second wave feminism changed the way people looked at women and their function within the family unit. It became more acceptable for women to be more independent, to aspire a career, and to share tasks within a family more equally with the men. Furthermore, developments on the fronts of abortion and contraceptive, among other things, resulted in a steep drop in the fertility rates of Britain between 1964 and 1977. Suggesting that room for alternate family situations were indeed made good use of by people. Lastly, that a steep development in youth culture and the generation gap made all these big changes more tangible by putting the liberal and more permissive moral framework of the younger generation directly opposite of the more traditional and Christian framework of the older generation.

With the conservative attitude built on the idea of the nuclear family, the increased permissiveness in society threatened their way of living. Social change regarding divorce, contraception, and abortion triggered the response that their aspired way of living had to be protected. These major changes in society were very controversial at the time and therefore caused significant opposition.

The next chapter will delve deeper into the conservative opposition towards these social changes by looking at the conservative attitude towards 1969 Divorce Reform Act and the divorce peak that followed in 1971.

2. The conservative attitude and the 1971 divorce peak

Britain after the Second World War was largely shaped by the tumultuous search for a new role in the rapidly changing world. The country had to come to terms with the consequences of the war and in the two-and-a-halve decades that followed, Britain developed itself into a modernised country with a considerable role to play in the world. By many Brits seen as the gloomiest period since the Second World War, the Seventies, however, were dominated by the feeling of nationwide crises.

This image of Seventies gloominess stands in stark contrast with that of the colourful 'Swinging Sixties'. However, not everyone saw the youth-driven cultural revolution as an asset to British society. Opposition was voiced before the decade was out and stayed present until well into the Nineties. Several politicians and civilians took it upon themselves to cleanse Britain of the 'moral pollution' from the Sixties and to go back to a respectable Britain. The movement's convictions were born out of conservative, traditional, and Christian rhetoric and focused on the idea that the British society had become too 'permissive'.

In order to understand the conservative movement in the Seventies as best as possible, this chapter elaborates on the case study of the divorce peak in 1971. The first subchapter elaborates on the Sixties roots of the debate on divorce rates and places the case study in the wider development of the conservative movement of the Seventies, whereas the second subchapter elaborates on this conservative attitude by looking at the speeches, interviews, and parliamentary debates of conservative politicians and by looking at the articles, and letters published by conservative periodicals and newspapers.

This chapter argues that the conservative attitude towards the permissive society of the Seventies was characterised by the notion that divorce was immoral and that the institution of marriage should be defended. This idea was built on three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that, as a sacred institution, marriage should be protected, the idea that the institution of marriage protected good Christian morals and encouraged good behaviour, and the idea that the government and the older generation had to set a good example for the rebellious and permissive youths.

2.1 Social change and the married couple: The Divorce Reform Act 1969

On October 22nd, 1969, the Divorce Reform Act was approved in the British parliament. It stated that a petition for divorce could be presented to the court if the marriage had broken down beyond repair. This presented a big change compared to the previous situation. Before 1969, divorce could only be filed if one of the married partners had committed a matrimonial offence. This included adultery, shown behaviour of which it cannot be expected to live with,

and deserting a partner for a period of at least two years.[36] There was always a guilty party and the morally disagreeing nature of the petition meant that getting a divorce often had significant negative influence on a person's social life and career. The morally judging nature of this component was mostly replaced with a new, less guilt driven divorce law. The Divorce Reform Act allowed people to petition for divorce without having to settle on a guilty party and the conditions for a successful petitioning were expanded. This changed the principles on which the divorce law was grounded from the principle of matrimonial offence to the principle of marriage breakdown. It allowed couples to divorce on the ground of having a marriage which was irretrievably broken down. This could be proven by the three aforementioned matrimonial offences and, from 1969 on, also if "*the parties to the marriage have lived apart for a continuous period of at least two years".*[37]

The law was created to solve an issue which had become increasingly problematic in the increasingly permissive British society. Namely, that is was not possible for couples to get divorced by mutual consent. Before the 1969 law, people were able to get a divorce quite quickly. According to M. Antokolskaia, "*the only condition was that the husband was prepared to behave 'like a gentleman' by playing guilty in divorce proceedings initiated by the wife."* [38] Both sides of the political spectrum agreed that this had to change, but the parties did not agree on how this should be resolved.

The law reform had been shaped by two big reports. One report was published by a group of experts led by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other report was published by a group of experts appointed by the Law Commission. Both parties agreed that the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage should become the new ground for divorce, but they disagreed on how this should be established in court. The archbishop's report proposed a full inquiry in the couple's claimed marriage breakdown, whereas the Law Commission opposed this because it would become too much work for the courts. They eventually settled on the two-year waiting period for couples who wanted to divorce by mutual consent. This caused the Divorce Reform Act 1969 to become rather contradictory. On the one hand, couples were able to divorce by mutual consent, but only after having been separated for two years. On the other hand, couples were able to divorce almost immediately, but one of them had confess to having committed one the matrimonial offences.[39]

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[36] Divorce Reform Act 1969, section 1-2, available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1969/55/contents/enacted (accessed at 6 July 2020).
[37] Ibid., section 1.
[38] Masha Antokolskaia, 'Divorce Law in European Perspective' in: Jens M. Scherpe eds., *European Family Law Volume III: Family Law in European Perspective* (Cheltenham 2016) 46.
[39] Antokolskaia, 'Divorce Law in European Perspective', 46-48; H.A. Finlay, 'Reluctant but Inevitable: The Retreat of Matrimonial Fault', *Modern Law Review* 38 (1975) 153-173: Jennifer Levin, 'The Divorce Reform Act 1969', *Modern Law Review* 33 (1970) 623-648.

The true progressiveness and effectiveness of the law has been questioned by academics at the time and in more modern times. For example, Antokolskaia states: "*Despite proclaiming irretrievable breakdown of marriage as the sole ground for divorce, it effectively retained the old fault grounds, while also introducing the possibility of a no-fault divorce."* [40]

The Divorce Reform Act became law on January 1st, 1971, after receiving the Queen's signature. It caused a significant peak in the amount of divorces that were petitioned that year. The year 1970 saw well over seventy-four thousand divorces, which rose to almost hundred twenty thousand divorces in 1971.[41] The delay between 1969 and 1971 was caused by the intention of the parliament to first reform the law on matrimonial property before the new divorce act was signed off on.[42]

2.2 The conservative attitude towards divorce

As mentioned previously, marriage played a central role in the notions regarding the perfect family and the perfect family life. Around the time of the Divorce Reform Act 1969, the concept of the nuclear family changed drastically and the increased permissiveness in society allowed for a broader view of possible family formations. Since this momentous change concerned a very central notion based on their morals and values, the conservatives in Britain reacted quite strongly to the new law. This subchapter focusses on this conservative attitude and elaborates on it by looking at two different sets of sources. The first set consists of sources produced by conservative publications such as *The Times, The Sunday Times, The Daily Mail,* and *The Spectator*. The second set consists of sources produced by conservative politicians and sources with regard to parliamentary debates.

The conservative attitude which is represented in these sources is characterised by their opposition towards the concept of divorce and their defending attitude towards the institution of marriage. This attitude can be characterised by three different recurring themes. The first theme is based on the idea that marriage was a sacred institution which had to be protected. The second theme is based on the idea that the institution of marriage protected good morals and encouraged good behaviour. The third and final theme is based on the idea that the government and the older generation had to set a good example.

Firstly, the idea that marriage was a sacred institution and had to be protected played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. As mentioned before, the Church of England played a tremendous role in the conservative attitude, because many of the conservative's moral compasses had been formed by the morals and values of the

[40] Antokolskaia, 'Divorce Law in European Perspective', 47.
[41] Office for National Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces in England and Wales,* available at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/divorce/bulletins/divorcesinenglandandwales/2018 (accessed at 6 July 2020).
[42] Finlay, 'Reluctant but Inevitable', 153-173: Levin, 'The Divorce Reform Act 1969', 623-648.

church. Marriage was seen as a sacred institution to which a couple should stay true to. It was therefore in the conservative's interest to protect the institutions by opposing relaxations in the laws on divorce. However, the reality of daily life was often not as rosy as described in the holy scriptures. Even within the church and the conservative community, there was a call to modernise and meet Christians somewhere in the middle.

The debate within the church ranged from clergy supporting the idea of giving people a second chance by allowing them to divorce, to clergy emphasising that divorce was against church morals and should never become an escape route for unhappy couples. An example of this more liberal end of the spectrum is the Bishop of Chester who stated that "*we have got to re-examine the attitude of Christians when a marriage has obviously broken down.*" [43] The possibility was mentioned that a religious service could be created that allowed people a second church wedding. This was mostly ushered concerning women who had been "*discarded against their will by a husband who had deserted them.*" [44] This showed that the within the religious sphere, the idea of martial offence was still very much dominant, because only the 'innocent' partner was deemed worthy of continued support of the church and the community. Another example of the possibilities of divorce within church was widely reported on by the national news. The national press reported on a vicar who was allowed to divorce and remarry, but it was severely frowned upon by the leading figures within the Church of England. According to the newspapers, the Bishop of Birmingham strongly advised the vicar that the man could not stay active in his parish, because it would not have been deemed suitable that such a person would lecture the parishioners on the virtues of marriage.[45]

The more traditionalist end of the spectrum was supported by a large group of clergymen and Christians in Britain. The dominant point of view was characterised by the idea that marriage should not become a "*terminable contract*" [46] and that it should never become a way out of an unhappy marriage. The Archbishops of York and Canterbury stated, in a nationally published pamphlet, that even though divorce was allowed in some circumstances, "*it should not be misunderstood as the church surrendering its view of marriage or agreeing on all the points with the Act's provisions.*" [47] The 'Act' being the new, more relaxed, divorce law. The idea that divorce should not provide an easy way out of an unhappy marriage played a central role in understanding the disapproving attitude of the conservatives towards divorce. It can be explained, partly, by the fact that the conservatives

[43] 'Church 'rigid' over divorce', *The Times* (15 January 1970) 2.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Arthur Osman, 'Bishop's 'resign' advice to vicar planning divorce', *The Times* (15 January 1971) 2; 'Divorce vicar' told to quit', *The Daily Mail* (15 January 1971) 3.
[46] 'Church 'rigid' over divorce', *The Times* (15 January 1970) 2.
[47] 'Church's duty to mend breaking marriage', *The Times* (4 December 1970) 3.

believed divorce to be immoral. However, the conservative publications also show that they envisioned a large role to play for marriage counselling. The notion of immorality is emphasised by underlining that people should not take the decision lightly. For example, a judge who states that "*it was undesirable that agreements in divorce suits […] should be reached in any kind of hurry.*" [48] The advice was given to couples to take the time to reflect on the marriage and possibly seek reconciliation.

As mentioned previously, the Divorce Reform Act was based on the principle of irretrievable breakdown of the marriage. However, it was up to the judge to decide whether a marriage was indeed broken down to the point where reconciliation was no longer possible. This was one of the frequent arguments that the conservatives pointed out. Because marriage was a sacred institution, everything should be done within one's power to save the relationship. Reconciliation could take place through marriage counselling and pastoral guidance. The National Marriage Guidance Council played a large role in the conservative's ambitions to reduce the amount of divorces.[49] The Church of England issued a pamphlet calling upon all their local churches to take up an active role in make counselling agencies available to everyone who considered divorce. The Archbishops of York and Canterbury stated: "*we believe that the clergy will rightly see the provision of opportunities for such reconciliation as a crucial part of their pastoral ministry.*" [50]

Secondly, the idea that the institution of marriage protected good morals and encouraged good behaviour played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. The idea that divorce itself was immoral forms a red thread through all the conservative's arguments against it. Therefore, protecting the institution of marriage was, in its own right, a way of protecting good Christian morals. However, the conservative attitude was divided on how immoral divorce was and what should be done about it.

On one side of the debate were the conservatives who claimed that "*an institution so universal and so immediate to their lives*" [51] should be actively protected. For example, divorce judge Sir Jocelyn Simon resigned from his position as president of the National Marriage Guidance Council (NMGC), because he disagreed with an article in their organisation's newsletter that had implied approval of the new law.[52] The author of this newsletter, Mr Alastair Service, can be seen as a representative of the other side of the debate. Namely, the side that underlines that they disagree with the increased permissiveness regarding divorce but claim to understand that society changes. Mr Service's take on the issue

[48] 'Agreement without haste', *The Times* (30 November 1972) 24.
[49] Annual Report of the National Marriage Guidance Council 1971, Wellcome Library, available at https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16236191#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=165&z=-0.7951%2C0%2C2.5902%2C1.3613 (accessed at 2 July 2020).
[50] 'Church's duty to mend breaking marriage', *The Times* (4 December 1970) 3.
[51] Edward Norman, 'Religion', *The Spectator* (17 April 1971) 11.
[52] William Breckon, 'Marriage council judge quits', *The Daily Mail* (25 March 1970) 9.

was presented as: "e*ither it will become perfectly acceptable at all levels of society that the young will live together unmarried or else a divorce in the mid-20's will become accepted as a perfectly ordinary part of life. Society will be formed to recognise this fact."* [53] This thought was affirmed in several publications.[54]

In addition, the conservative emphasised that the institution of marriage encouraged people to be more self-disciplined and responsible. Margaret Thatcher, in particular, was very keen on this point. At the start of the Seventies, she was spokeswomen for education within the Conservative Party and became Education Secretary after the Conservatives won the general election in June 1970.[55] In her capacity as such, she regularly emphasised her opinions about the younger generation and the future of the country. Her expectations of the new decade were not very rose-coloured. In her New Year's message to the members of her Finchley constituency, Thatcher said that "*there are many differences between the changes I should like to see and those I expect to see in the 70's."* [56] She felt like the youths of her day were no longer being brought up with the core values of a good Christian family. Those core values included being responsible and self-disciplined. For example, in a radio interview for BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour,* Thatcher states that the definition of 'permissive society' should underline that "*a certain amount of self-discipline has broken down, that things have gone beyond the usual moderation and that the Permissive Society seems to some extent to be undermining family life and the family as unit of society*." [57] Furthermore, at a later point in that interview, Thatcher voices her concerns that people used their newfound freedom created by the Divorce Act to escape from consequences and walk away from the responsibilities to their families.[58]

Lastly, the idea that the government and the older generation had to set a good example played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. As mentioned before, Thatcher was rather critical of the permissive attitude among the younger generations and this notion was widely supported by other conservatives in parliament. For example, Mr Peter Fry, Conservative MP for Wellingborough, seized his opportunity to share his perspective on the matter in the debate on the permissive society in the House of Commons. He states that it was not his intention to "*sermonise or launch an attack on the younger generation"* but that "*what I sincerely believe is required is for the older generation*

[53] Ibid.
[54] Vincent Mulchrone, 'In the club where divorce is key…', *The Daily Mail* (26 June 1970) 6; Shaun Usher, 'And on TV tonight', *The Daily Mail* (23 February 1972) 21; Norman, 'Religion', *The Spectator* (17 April 1971) 11; Patrick Cosgrave, 'Women (2)', *The Spectator* (27 November 1971) 11.
[55] Harrison, *Finding a Role?*, 385.
[56] 'New Year Message', 2 January 1970, MTFW 101709.
[57] 'Radio Interview for BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour* ("*Permissive or Civilised*"), 9 April 1970, MTFW 101845.
[58] Ibid.

to set a worthwhile example." [59] Thatcher continues in the spirit of this argument by ascribing the part of role model to the British government and the legislators as well. Moreover, she claimed that the government should actively 'help' the society through legislation that encouraged moral behaviour. She states: "*I think as a legislator, you have to legislate to try retain the good standards and the best things in your society. Now, if everyone had very strongly religious views and acted in accordance with all the best principles, you would not in fact need to have so much legislation about these things."* [60]

Furthermore, within the political sources, special attention is paid to the debate on what comes first: societal change or legislation. On one side of the debate are the people who believe that societal change comes first and that it is the purpose of parliament to acknowledge this change by modernising laws. On the other side of the debate are the people who believe that parliament should guide societal change, or set the pace, by setting an example through controlling to what extent laws get modernised.

The conservatives most often find themselves on the latter side of the debate. As mentioned earlier, Thatcher believed wholeheartedly in the role of the legislator as retainer, and maybe protector even, of good principles. She states: "*I think people are asking [...] Parliament for legislation to uphold standards until such time as everyone can exercise the amount of self-discipline that they reject things that you and I would reject."* [61] This suggests that at least some British people shared her opinion and felt like the government should have interfered more when it came to moral issues such as divorce. Another example of this attitude was expressed in the House of Commons by Mr Peter Fry. He received a letter from a constituent who stated that the relaxation in the divorce law had been "*distressing not only to myself, but to thousands of ordinary people like me, who are eagerly waiting for someone who will make a stand."* [62] Mr Fry underlines this message by stating that the younger generation needs help in acquiring skills such as discipline and leadership. The government, according to him, "*should play their part because after all they do much to the climate of the times."* [63]

In conclusion, the conservative attitude which is represented in the political and published sources are characterised by their opposition toward the concept of divorce and their defending attitude towards the institution of marriage. This attitude was characterised by three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that, as a sacred institution, marriage should be protected, the idea that the institution of marriage protected good Christian morals and encouraged good behaviour, and the idea that the government and the older generation

[59] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 801 cols. 39, 4 May 1970, available at https://bit.ly/3gqezIY (accessed at 3 July 2020).
[60] 'Radio Interview for BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour* ("*Permissive or Civilised*"), 9 April 1970, MTFW 101845.
[61] Ibid.
[62] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 801 cols. 39, 4 May 1970, available at https://bit.ly/3gqezIY (accessed at 3 July 2020).
[63] Ibid.

had to set a good example for the rebellious and permissive youths. With the family unit being fundamental to the conservative's view of a successful and virtuous life, they took it upon themselves to protect the interests of the conservatives in Britain with regard to the issue of divorce. However, the conservative attitude cannot justly be characterised as a strongly united front defending the institution of marriage and solely opposing the concept of divorce. Even though the vast majority of the conservatives where very much against divorce and saw it as threat to their family ideal, there was room for debate on how realistic a world without divorce truly was. As with every opinionated group of people, there was a more liberal and a more traditional side in the debate.

The next chapter will elaborate on the conservative attitude regarding the increased accessibility and usage on contraception. It does this by looking at the conservative attitude towards the National Health Service Reorganisation Act in 1973 which made contraception widely available and state funded.

3. The conservative attitude and the NHS Reorganisation Act 1973

Britain after the Second World War was largely shaped by the tumultuous search for a new role in the rapidly changing world. The country had to come to terms with the consequences of the war and in the two-and-a-halve decades that followed, Britain developed itself into a modernised country with a considerable role to play in the world. By many Brits seen as the gloomiest period since the Second World War, the Seventies, however, were dominated by the feeling of nationwide crises.

This image of Seventies gloominess stands in stark contrast with that of the colourful 'Swinging Sixties'. However, not everyone saw the youth-driven cultural revolution as an asset to British society. Opposition was voiced before the decade was out and stayed present until well into the Nineties. Several politicians and civilians took it upon themselves to cleanse Britain of the 'moral pollution' from the Sixties and to go back to a respectable Britain. The movement's convictions were born out of conservative, traditional, and Christian rhetoric and focused on the idea that the British society had become too 'permissive'.

In order to understand the conservative movement in the Seventies as best as possible, this chapter elaborates on the case study of the NHS Reorganisation Act of 1973. The first subchapter elaborates on the Sixties roots of the debate on accessibility and usage of oral contraception and places the case study in the wider development of the conservative movement of the Seventies, whereas the second subchapter elaborates on this conservative attitude by looking at the speeches, interviews, and parliamentary debates of conservative politicians and by looking at the articles, and letters published by conservative periodicals and newspapers.

This chapter argues that the conservative attitude towards the permissive society of the Seventies was characterised by the notion that the increased accessibility of oral contraception was immoral and that the conservative family ideal of sexual relationship between married people should be defended. This idea was built on three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that contraception encouraged irresponsible behaviour, the idea that contraception could help population control but should not be made free, and the idea that oral contraception forms a health risk.

3.1 Social change and the pill: The NHS Reorganisation Act 1973

On July 5th, 1973, the National Health Service Reorganisation Act was approved in the British parliament. It stated that the government was responsible for making arrangements regarding "*the giving of advice on contraception, the medical examination of persons seeking advice on contraception, [and] the treatment of such persons and the supply of*

contraceptive substances and appliances." [64] This presented a significant change compared to the previous situation. Before 1973, advice on contraception methods and the distribution of the pill was arranged by local authorities and fairly strict limitations were in place regarding who was allowed to use it. The 1973 law can be seen as a later chapter in the legal developments concerning family planning and contraceptives. A development that begins with the invention of the pill itself in the early Sixties.

The invention of the pill and the development of an effective and private oral contraceptive for women, marked a major change in how women could live their lives, experience relationships, and influence family planning. Claimed by some to be "*one of the seven wonders of the modern world"* [65], the pill was often described as one of the main instigators of the sexual revolution in the Sixties.[66] However, in the early years, the pill was not received with open arms and it took some fifteen years for it to become generally accepted. It was the public debate on how to solve the post-World War overpopulation that enabled public discussion on the pill. For, during the Fifties and Sixties, many people worried about food supply and overpopulation on the planet. According to H. Cook, "*by the late 1960s, birth control had been transformed from an issue concerning individuals and sexuality into the solution for an international problem."* [67] The public debate on oral contraceptives and birth control made the pill more acceptable in society.[68]

In February 1966, the Labour Minister of Health and long-time supporter of birth control, Kenneth Robinson, asked all local authorities to use their power and influence to support family planning and try and provide in free contraceptive treatment. This increased accessibility of oral contraceptives was legally protected in the NHS Amendment (Family Planning) Act 1967. The new law allowed the local authorities to not only provide the pill on medical grounds, but also on social grounds. In addition, age or martial restrictions were removed. Therefore, the pill became accessible for significantly more women and was made free. [69]

However, the pill remained a controversial topic and was heavily criticised from the conservative side, as will be shown in the next subchapter. Despite the resistance of the

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[64] National Health Service Reorganisation Act 1973, section 4, available at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1973/32/enacted (accessed at 14 July 2020).
[65] Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970* (Baltimore 1998) 1.
[66] Ibid., 1-3.
[67] Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 300-301.
[68] Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 300-304; Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 191-193; Newburn, *Permission and Regulation,* 358-362.
[69] National Health Service (Family Planning) Act 1967, Parliamentary Archives, available at https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/parliament-and-the-1960s/national-health-service-family-planning-act/ (accessed at 14 July 2020); Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 302-306; Watkins, *On the Pill,* 167-172; Mechen, *Everyday Sex in 1970s Britain,* 104-110.

conservatives, further relaxations were implemented in the law. In 1972, under pressure of local authority initiatives, a clause was included in the NHS Reorganisation Act. Sir Keith Joseph, the Conservative Secretary of State for Social Services, proposed a reorganisation of the NHS that would centralise and structure the family planning services. This was previously unequally arranged through the local authorities that functioned without any national framework. Joseph's intention was to have women without social or financial troubles to pay full price. However, the House of Lords passed an amendment which made oral contraception almost free of charge for all women. They only had to pay a twenty pence prescription fee and even this was made entirely free by the next Secretary of State, Labour MP Barbara Castle, after the general election in February 1974. Joseph's intended Bill had changed quite dramatically by the time it became law. The law's clause on family planning, clause four, was debated on many times over the course of eight months. The next subchapter looks at how the conservative attitude was represented in some of these debates. [70]

3.2 The conservative attitude towards the pill

As stated before, the idea that no sex was allowed before marriage played a central role in the notions regarding the perfect family and the perfect family life. Around the time of the NHS Reorganisation Act 1973, the concept of the nuclear family changed drastically and the increased permissiveness in society allowed for a broader view of allowed sexual relationships between people. Since this momentous change concerned a very central notion based on their morals and values, the conservatives in Britain reacted quite strongly to the new law. This subchapter focusses on this conservative attitude and elaborates on it by looking at two different sets of sources. The first set consists of sources produced by conservative publications such as *The Times, The Sunday Times, The Daily Mail,* and *The Spectator*. The second set consists of sources produced by conservative politicians and sources with regard to parliamentary debates.

The conservative attitude which is represented in these sources is characterised by their opposition towards the concept of contraception and their defending attitude towards the notion that sex should only take place between two people who were married to each other. This attitude can be characterised by three different recurring themes. The first theme is based on the idea that contraception threatened their family ideal by encouraging promiscuity and irresponsible behaviour. The second theme is based on the idea that contraception could help with population control, but it should not be paid for with tax

[70] Mechen, *Everyday Sex in 1970s Britain,* 104-107; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 306-310; Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 191-193; Newburn, *Permission and Regulation,* 358-362; Watkins, *On the Pill,* 167-172.

money. The third and final theme is based on the idea that contraception formed a health risk.

Firstly, the idea that contraception encouraged (young) people to behave irresponsibly played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. The conservative family ideal plays a fundamental role in understanding the conservative attitude and one way in which this ideal was threatened was through the increased accessibility and availability of (oral) contraceptives. The new NHS law embodied a compromise between "*those who wish to see contraceptive supplies made generally available without charge, either as an aid to population policy or as means of reducing the number of unwanted children, and those who would regard such a use of public money as an official incitement to promiscuity.*" [71] Most conservatives were supporters of the latter camp and most decidedly felt that increasing the accessibility of contraception would encourage irresponsible behaviour.[72] The conservatives were especially worried about the younger generation, because their more permissive upbringing from the Sixties had given them more liberal moral standards. This meant that, among the younger generation, it was more normal to have sexual relationships before marriage and to have sex at a younger age.

The debate among conservatives was built on the idea that making contraceptives available and free of charge would lead to the abandonment of important Christian values, such as chastity and taking responsibility. As mentioned in the previous subchapter, the House of Lords passed a far-reaching amendment on the new NHS law after it had gotten through the House of Commons. It shows that the subject was controversial and important enough to be subjected to major change higher up in the political ladder. The parliamentary debates were mostly focused on the issues surrounding morality and the involvement of the state.[73] For example, Lord Stamp asked the House of Lords to pass an amendment that would exclude girls under sixteen from the arrangement for free contraception. In his point of view, free contraception would increase premarital intercourse, which would increase promiscuity, which in turn would increase the number of sexual transmitted diseases. He stated that, especially, the educational professionals were "*fighting an up-hill battle against deteriorating moral standards among teenagers; and their position will be infinitely more difficult if schoolboy and schoolgirl sex are in effect condoned by the state.*" [74]

His point of view was shared by many other conservatives, who were worried about, firstly, the increased promiscuity among youths, and secondly, the notion that the state was actively promoting this behaviour by providing in free contraception. In their eyes, the state

[71] 'A perfectly sensible compromise', *The Times* (27 March 1973) 17.
[72] Shaun Usher, 'It's one Hull of a problem', *The Daily mail* (29 January 1973) 18.
[73] *Hansard* HL Deb. Vol. 338 Cols. 1330, 12 February 1973, available at https://bit.ly/3fyQlfx (accessed at 16/7/2020).
[74] Ibid., Cols 1331.

was promoting this behaviour not only through free contraception, but also through the increasingly permissive sexual education programme's that were being distributed in schools.[75] In addition to the fear of lowered moral standards, many conservatives felt like this was a topic which the state should stay clear of. For example, Conservative MP Mr. Stokes stated that the government should be more cautious in providing extensions to the permissive society and that "*this was a dangerous extension of state activity into the realms of private morals and was bound to strike a deadly blow at parents, teachers, clergy and youth workers who were trying to inculcate Christian moral standards."* [76]

In addition to endangering girls' chastity, the conservatives also feared that free oral contraception would encourage irresponsible behaviour, among the younger generation especially. Thatcher, in particular, was very keen on this point. In her capacity as Education Secretary from 1970 until 1974, she regularly expressed her concerns about how teenagers were increasingly tempted to take less responsibility in their lives. For example, in a radio interview for BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour,* she states that "*it is now possible for you to do whatever you wish and to escape consequences which you previously could not escape."* [77] This sentiment was shared in the *Daily Mail,* where reporter June Southworth dedicated a piece to young girls who were being helped by social worker Valerie. She described how an organisation called The Responsible Society represented people who felt that "*freedom and tolerance in sexual matters must be tempered by responsibility and restraint."* [78] Furthermore, she expressed her concern that teenagers consider everything to be disposable, that they treat sex as an escape from problems, and that they think that using contraception is the same as taking responsibility.[79]

Secondly, the idea that, even though it could help with population control, contraception should not be paid for with taxes, also played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. From the conservative point of view, increasing accessibility to oral contraception was imperilling the Christian moral standards of the country. Furthermore, it was the state that, firstly, interfered in these private issues, and secondly, condoned the assumption that premarital sex was more or less normal. The idea that the promiscuity committed by others was going to be paid for by the state did not sit well with many conservatives. The idea that, through taxes, this was indirectly going to be financed with their own money, even less so.

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[75] 'Sex education remain local responsibility', *The Times* (13 February 1973) 9; Ronald Butt, 'The family under pressure', *The Times* (16 March 1973) 16; 'Check sought on TV sex lessons', *The Times* (8 January 1973) 2; G.J.A. Stern, 'Contraceptive Politics', *The Spectator* (13 April 1974) 5.
[76] 'Move for free family planning under NHS rejected by 117 votes', *The Times* (13 June 1973) 9.
[77] 'Radio Interview for BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour* ("*Permissive or Civilised*"), 9 April 1970, MTFW 101845.
[78] June Southworth, 'The price of this permissive age', *The Daily Mail* (22 March 1973) 13.
[79] Ibid.

As mentioned in the previous subchapter, the ill was mostly introduced through a public debate on the issue of population control. Population had been growing since the Second World War and peak in 1964 saw an increase of over four hundred thousand.[80] Many felt that making contraception more freely accessible could help with reducing the number of children being born around the world. According to Cook, "*the popular press relayed the increasing knowledge of world population growth in the most graphic form"* [81] and, therefore, contributed to placing contraception at the front-line of this debate. This idea is supported by some of the articles in the conservative press. For example, the *Sunday Times* clearly fits in this image by publishing articles such as 'Population: Can anything stop the ticking of the urban time bomb?' [82] and 'People: The growing menace of the world' [83]. Both articles discuss the estimation that the world population would double in thirty-four years and that family planning services could help bring it down a few million. This particular debate focussed on the population of the whole world, but the issue was discussed within the scale of Britain as well. According to the *Times*, a National Opinion Poll published in January 1973, stated that "*voters from all political parties thought the government should do something to slow population growth; 73 percent of Conservatives voters, 72 percent of Labour and 74 percent of Liberals supported that view."* [84] This shows that many conservative voters agreed with the more progressive voters on the matter of using the pill to slow down population growth.

However, they disagreed with the more progressive voters on how these contraceptives should be financed. The Conservative State Secretary for Social Services, Keith Joseph did not intent for family planning services to become free of charge. Instead, he had to compromise on the costs due to the resistance in the House of Lords. Many conservatives disagreed with this amendment of 'clause 4' because it would encourage immoral and irresponsible behaviour. The general attitude was characterised by the opposition towards contraception being financed with taxes (rates). This was emphasised regularly in the parliamentary debates by commenting on the idea of 'sex on the rates'.[85] For example, Labour MP Baroness Summerskill called upon her peers "*to spend the rates"* [86] with great

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[80] Office for National Statistics, *Overview of the UK population*, available at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/overviewoftheukpopulation/august2019#the-uks-population-continues-to-grow-but-at-a-slower-rate-than-previously (accessed at 17 July 2020).

[81] Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 297.

[82] Harold Evans, 'Population: Can anything stop the ticking of the urban time bomb?', *The Sunday Times* (11 February 1973) 12.

[83] Peter Kellner, 'People: The growing menace of the world', *The Sunday Times* (15 July 1973) 16.

[84] 'Poll shows clear majority for free government birth control service', *The Times* (18 January 1973) 2.

[85] *Hansard* HL Deb. Vol. 337 Cols. 991, 19 December 1972, available at https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1972/dec/19/national-health-service-reorganisation-1 (accessed at 17 July 2020).

[86] *Hansard* HL Deb. Vol. 343 Cols. 1741, 25 June 1973, available at https://bit.ly/38WIVQK (accessed at 17 July 2020).

consideration and without hurry. This sentiment was shared in several conservative publications too. The *Daily Mail,* for example, published an article that voters supported a "*free for all"* [87] family planning service and the *Spectator* called the planned Act "*a ridiculous waste of national resources"* [88].

Among some conservatives, another aspect was mentioned in their consideration of the population growth debate. Namely, the idea that contraception would be particularly interesting in lessening the number of teen pregnancies and abortions, especially among working class girls. H. Cook asserts in her work that right-wing fears of population growth and support for eugenics did play a role the conservative support for increased accessibility of the pill.[89] However, there is no academic consensus on how big a role these ideas played. However, these more right-wing notions were hinted on by Sir Keith Joseph himself, in a speech that would forever influence his career. He stated that "*our human stock is threatened"* and that "*the nation moves towards degeneration".*[90] Moreover, he speaks of young working-class mothers who, according to him, are producers of the future "*problem children, the future unmarried mothers, [and] delinquents"* [91]. He finished the speech with the following question: *"But which is the lesser evil, until we are able to remoralise whole groups and classes of people, undoing the harm done when already weak restraints on strong instincts are further weakened by permissiveness in television, in films, on bookstalls?"* [92] The speech provides a valuable look into some of the debates that took place within conservative circles. However, it must be stated that this speech should be placed in one of the far corners of the debate. It received a lot of criticism from among the conservative ranks and it made him rather unpopular with many of his own party members. It sabotaged his campaign to become the new Conservative Party leader.[93]

Thirdly, the idea that contraception formed a health risk played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. As with many new medical developments, the physical or medical risks of taking the pill had come under great scrutiny since its invention in the early Sixties. For the conservatives, these risks supported their reasons to be more reserved about the increased accessibility. According to Cook, the "*resistance to free contraception did arise in part on the moral issues of chastity and the unmarried"*, as argued in the first theme of this subchapter, but "*they often argued on the*

[87] John Stevenson, 'Voters support 'free for all' family planning', *The Daily Mail* (18 January 1973) 9.
[88] J.D. Linklater, 'Non-medical matter', *The Spectator* (16 June 1973) 27.
[89] Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 296.
[90] 'Speech at Edgebaston ("our human stock is threatened"), 19 October 1974, MTFW 101830.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] 'Sir Keith Joseph denies bid for Tory leadership as critics mount attack', *The Times* (21 October 1974) 1; Christopher Walker, 'Joseph view of birth control provokes angry denunciations', *The Times* (21 October 1974) 3; 'Sir Keith calls for 'remoralization' and reassertion of civilized values', *The Times* (21 October 1974) 3.

basis of other factors".[94] These other factors included the possible increased spread of sexually transmitted diseases (in the Seventies usually referred to as venereal diseases or V.D.) and the medical side effects of using the pill.

This more 'medical' and less moralistic approach to the debate was regularly used as a strategy among the social conservatives. It formed one of their arguments to not increase the accessibility of contraceptives and it remained present during the public discussion on clause 4. For example, the proposition that the pill should come with a clear health warning was widely supported among the social conservatives. They asked for a package with a clear health warning that would inform the women of the risks of use the pill. According to Labour MP Baroness Summerskill, this health warning should include information on "*the risk of infertility, thrombosis, cancer, and depression",* as well as "*the risk of contracting venereal disease."* [95] The spread of venereal diseases, especially, was dominant topic in the conservative debate. Previously popular contraceptives, such as condoms, were effective in slowing down the spread in V.D. Since the pill did not prevent the spread of V.D., people were worried that it would pick up again with the rise in popularity. In addition to information of the side effects, information should be added about the failure rate and the chances of an unwanted pregnancy.[96]

In conclusion, the conservative attitude which is represented in the political and published sources are characterised by their opposition toward the concept of increased accessibility of oral contraceptives and their defending attitude towards the conservative family ideal. This attitude was characterised by three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that contraception encouraged irresponsible behaviour, the idea that contraception could help population control but should not be made free, and the idea that oral contraception forms a health risk. As mentioned previously, with the family unit being fundamental to the conservative's view of a successful and virtuous life, they took it upon themselves to protect the interest of the conservatives in Britain with regard to the issue of the increased accessibility of oral contraceptives. However, the conservative attitude cannot justly be characterised as a strongly united front defending the family ideal. Many conservatives saw merit in being able to slow population growth with the pill. They knew legislation had to be modernised and it was the conservative Tory Secretary Keith Joseph who initiated the Bill. However, when the Bill was amended in the House of Lords, the conservative's conscience vocalised their worries regarding irresponsible behaviour, misspending taxes, and medical risks.

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[94] Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 308.
[95] 'Contraceptive Safeguard proposed', *The Times* (6 February 1973) 3.
[96] 'Contraceptive Safeguard proposed', *The Times* (6 February 1973) 3; 'Sex education remain local responsibility', *The Times* (13 February 1973) 9; *Hansard* HL Deb. Vol. 338 Cols. 1358-1360, 12 February 1973, available at https://bit.ly/3fyQlfx (accessed at 18 July 2020).

4. The conservative attitude and the Abortion Act 1967

Britain after the Second World War was largely shaped by the tumultuous search for a new role in the rapidly changing world. The country had to come to terms with the consequences of the war and in the two-and-a-halve decades that followed, Britain developed itself into a modernised country with a considerable role to play in the world. By many Brits seen as the gloomiest period since the Second World War, the Seventies, however, were dominated by the feeling of nationwide crises.

This image of Seventies gloominess stands in stark contrast with that of the colourful 'Swinging Sixties'. However, not everyone saw the youth-driven cultural revolution as an asset to British society. Opposition was voiced before the decade was out and stayed present until well into the Nineties. Several politicians and civilians took it upon themselves to cleanse Britain of the 'moral pollution' from the Sixties and to go back to a respectable Britain. The movement's convictions were born out of conservative, traditional, and Christian rhetoric and focused on the idea that the British society had become too 'permissive'.

In order to understand the conservative movement in the Seventies as best as possible, this chapter elaborates on the case study of the Abortion Act in 1967 and the amendment debates in 1975, 1976, and 1977. The first subchapter elaborates on the Sixties roots of the debate on the relaxation of the abortion law and places the case study in the wider development of the conservative movement in the Seventies, whereas the second subchapter elaborates on this conservative attitude by looking at the speeches, interviews, and parliamentary debates of conservative politicians and by looking at the articles and letters published by conservative periodicals and newspapers.

This chapter argues that the conservative attitude towards the permissive society of the Seventies was characterised by their opposition towards the concept of abortion and their defending attitude towards their family ideals. This attitude was built on three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that all life is sacred and should be protected, the idea that the abortion law was implemented in an immoral way, and the idea that medical practitioners carrying out abortions worked unethically.

4.1 Social change and abortion: The Abortion Act 1967

On October 27th, 1967, the Abortion Act was approved in the British parliament. The law was meant to "*amend and clarify the law relating to termination of pregnancy by registered medical practitioners.*" [97] It stated that the Minister of Health was responsible for all the

[97] Abortion Act 1967, introduction, available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/contents/enacted (accessed at (18 July 2020).

facilities required by medical practitioners to carry out the treatment and the services regarding information and privacy. Pregnancies could be terminated if having the baby would involve physical or mental health risks for the pregnant woman or existing children. Or if having the baby would risk possible physical or mental abnormalities regarding the unborn child. A new aspect to the law was the inclusion of "*the pregnant woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment"* [98] as an influence on the woman's health. Furthermore, the term on which a pregnancy could be terminated was extended from twenty-four weeks to twenty-eight weeks. However, treatment was only possible with the agreement of two medical practitioners. This presented a significant change compared to the previous situation. Before 1967, abortion treatment was not regulated by the state and was therefore arranged by local authorities. Similarly to the oral contraceptive services, this caused an unequal distribution of services throughout the country.

Together with free contraception, abortion on demand had been central to the feminist cause on the Sixties. Together with humanists, atheists, and medics, they formed the key-players in the pro-choice movement that put pressure on parliament to relax abortion law. Several attempts to passing Bills were made in the early Sixties, but it was not until Liberal MP David Steel put his Bill before parliament in 1967 that it got a majority. Debates were intense and numerous and provided insight in the extent of the controversy regarding abortions. Opposition responded quickly and undertook action to bring back the number of abortions carried out in Britain. New organisations such as 'Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child', started in January 1967, played a central role in the coordinated opposition towards the relaxation of abortion laws. One of the other main powers within the opposition was the Catholic Church. On July 25th, 1968, the Papal Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* was issued and stated that the Catholic Church was against the use of oral contraceptives, except for medical use, and absolutely against abortion.[99]

Another look into the controversy is provided by the different proposed amendments on The Abortion Act 1967. The ideological conflict between the pro-life and the pro-choice movements did not pick up speed until after the 1967 law and reached its peak in the middle of the Seventies. According to Brown, it was not until the 1970s that "*the real struggle with religious reactionaries was about to start."* [100] Under pressure of Conservative backbenchers and Catholic Labour MP's, a review committee tasked with reviewing the functioning of the 1967 law was established in 1971. However, to great disappointment of the conservatives in parliament, this review did not look at social or moral consequences of the law. The

[98] Ibid., section 1.
[99] Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 217-235; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 223-236, 302-306; Harrison, *Finding a Role,* 210-215; Coote & Campbell, *Sweet Freedom,* 32-37, Alana Harris eds., *The Schism of '68: Catholicism, Contraception, and 'Humanae Vitae' in Europe, 1945-1975* (London 2018) 1-23.
[100] Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 230.

committee's report was published in 1974 and informed the public that the law was working well. Its release led to Labour MP James White to introduce a new bill that would restrict the abortion law. This proposed bill was intensely debated on throughout 1975 and 1976, but it did not make it through parliament. The legal steps taken by the conservatives in parliament evoked strong responses from the pro-choice movement and caused the feminist movement to actively coordinate campaigns against abortion law restrictions. Another restrictive abortion bill was introduced by Conservative MP John Corrie in 1979, but this bill, too, did not receive a majority.[101] According to Harrison, the pro-life movement was largely unsuccessful in restricting abortion laws because they encountered that "*such change would involve infringing the doctor's clinical discretion [...] and feminism had become strong enough in Britain to uphold the 'woman's right to choose'.*" [102]

4.2 The conservative attitude towards abortion

The Sixties gave way to drastic changes in what was acceptable in society. The concept of 'the family unit' did not escape the increased permissiveness among people and it influenced the way society looked at divorce and oral contraception. Another major change occurred in this time, namely the relaxation of abortion law through the Abortion Act 1967. Since this momentous change concerned a very central notion based on their morals and values, the conservatives in Britain reacted quite strongly to the new law. This subchapter focusses on this conservative attitude and elaborates on it by looking at two different sets of sources. The first set consists of sources produced by conservative publications such as *The Times, The Sunday Times, The Daily Mail,* and *The Spectator*. The second set consists of sources produced by conservative politicians and sources with regard to parliamentary debates.

The conservative attitude which is represented in these sources is characterised by their opposition towards the concept of abortion and their defending attitude towards their family ideals. This attitude can be characterised by three different recurring themes. The first theme is based on the idea that all life, including that of unborn babies and their mothers, was sacred and had to be protected. The second theme is based on the idea that the abortion law was implemented in an immoral way. The third and final theme is based on the idea that medical practitioners carrying out abortion treatments worked unethically.

This third case-study differs slightly from the previous two in that it is by far the most controversial topic of them all. Besides providing a legal framework for the treatment, the Abortion Act 1967 was meant to be a step forward in the ongoing debate on abortion regulation. However, in the Seventies, the new Act became the focal point of the intense

[101] Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain,* 232-267; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution,* 223-236; Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning, and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day* (Oxford 2011) 185-219.
[102] Harrison, *Finding a Role,* 213.

debate that gave rise to several amendment bills, committees, and (inter)national social movements. Several conservatives in parliament that had backed the 1967 Act had been dissatisfied with the way the law had turned out in society and thus the debate continued.[103] The MP John Corrie even goes as far as saying that "*any legislation that has attracted so much attention since it went on the statute book cannot be right in the eyes of the House or in those of the public.*" [104] Whereas the debates on oral contraception and divorce were directly related to the family ideal that the conservatives were defending, abortion was somewhat more indirectly related to this. As stated in chapter one, conservatives had very clear ideas of what was acceptable in terms of marriage, having children, and having sexual relations. The debate on the accessibility of oral contraception was, among other things, characterised by the idea that it would encourage irresponsible and immoral sexual behaviour among people. This notion is echoed in the debate on abortion, but there is another dimension to it. As put by Conservative MP Bernard Braine: "*that abortion is unlike any other medical procedure in that it involves two lives, one of which must of necessity be sacrificed.*" [105] This does not directly link to the ideal of what the perfect family should look like, but it is directly linked to ideal of where a family should stand for and what moral and values they should defend.

Firstly, the idea that the life of unborn babies should be protected played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. The conservative family ideal plays a fundamental role in understanding the conservative attitude and one way in which this ideal was threatened was through the increased availability of abortions. The conservative debate on abortions was, as mentioned above, not only dominated by the idea of abortion as a contraception, but also the fact that it was a medical treatment that terminated a life. One of the discussions that took place on a national level focussed on whether unborn babies should be considered to be fully fledged human beings. In general, the conservatives supported the idea that a foetus formed a life in its own right and should therefore be protected. However, as explained later on in this chapter, this does not mean that the conservatives were unanimously against all forms of abortion.

One of the most prominent organisations campaigning for restricting abortion laws was the Catholic Church. As mentioned in the previous subchapter, in 1968, the pope issued a Papal Encyclical which placed the Catholic Church firmly in the anti-abortion corner of the debate. It stated that "*all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely*

[103] 'Liberal thinking on abortion: not a solution in itself', *The Times* (2 May 1973) 13; Tony Smith, 'Is any change in the abortion law really needed?', *The Times* (31 January 1975) 11; Oliver Gillie, 'Showdown looms on bid to change abortion rules', *The Sunday Times* (27 February 1977) 3; 'Interview for the *Catholic Herald*', 5 December 1978, MTFW 103793.
[104] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 970 Cols. 891, 13 July 1979, available at https://bit.ly/2Ed31ed (accessed at 24 July 2020).
[105] 'Abortion: The great debate', *The Times* (12 July 1977) 12.

excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children" [106] and that it is forbidden to undertake "*any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation".* [107] Since all life was considered sacred and unborn babies being children of god, the Catholics did not allow abortion. This created an almost unanimous opposition against the use of abortion or contraceptives. For many conservative's religion played a fundamental role in shaping their moral framework and thus this influenced a lot of people's attitudes.[108]

The Church of England was not so unified on the matter. For example, the Anglican and Methodist Churches wrote a joint report on how the Abortion Act should influence the lives of Christians, but it was eventually stopped by leading figures in the Church of England for it being too liberal. In contrast to the Catholic Church, the Anglican-Methodist report suggests that giving all unborn babies the 'absolute right to live' would ignore the rights of the mother.[109] One of these leading figures was Archbishop of Canterbury Donald Coggan, who, according to the *Daily Mail*, "*called on man of goodwill to clear away Britain's moral rubble"* and to 'fight' a "*far too high an abortion rate".*[110]

Secondly, the idea that the abortion law was implemented in an immoral way played a central role in the conservative attitude towards the permissive society. It is important to state that a majority of the social conservatives were not against the use of abortion as a life-saving medical treatment. Even hard-line anti-abortion organisations allowed abortions on medical grounds, as, for example, stated by the president of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child.[111] However, with the relaxation of abortion laws, it became possible for women to receive treatment for other, less medical, reasons as well. The conservatives opposed the idea that, firstly, abortion should not be available for anything but medical reasons, and secondly, that the implementation of the 1967 Act created unethical situations in the clinics.

From their point of view, similar to the increased accessibility of oral contraception, easier access to abortions could encourage irresponsible and immoral behaviour. One of the reasons why the conservatives did not want the abortion law to become less restrictive was to prevent abortions from becoming 'just' another form of contraception. For example, Thatcher stated that she voted for the 1967 Act because bringing an unwanted child into the world was

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[106] Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, section 14, (Encyclical Letter, 1968), available at http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html (accessed at 25 July 2020).
[107] Ibid.
[108] 'RCs almost unanimous in opposition to abortion', *The Times* (25 March 1977) 3.
[109] Clifford Longley, 'Anglican veto on joint abortion report with the Methodists threatens further cooperation', *The Times* (26 June 1975) 5.
[110] 'Shift this evil rubble', *The Daily Mail* (19 April 1976) 13.
[111] 'Abortion: The great debate', *The Times* (12 July 1977) 12.

one of the worst things anyone could do.[112] However, several years later in an interview for the *Catholic Herald* she emphasised that: "*the idea that it should be used as a method of birth control I find totally abhorrent.*" [113] In line with the strongly opposed conservative attitude towards abortions as contraceptive, is the role that abortions played in the debate of the population issue. Namely, that abortion was considered to be an utterly unsuitable solution due to the immoral nature of the treatment when applied as a contraceptive. Therefore, abortion as a possible solution was mostly side lined from that debate.[114] According to the conservatives, another way in which abortions were used too liberally was through the heavy usage of the so called 'social clause'. The 1967 Act allowed women to receive abortion treatments for social reasons as well as medical reasons. This could include anything from the young age of the mother to the poor financial situation in which the child would grow up in. Most of the abortions were carried out under the social clause and this worried the conservatives.[115] Similar to the increased permissiveness regarding divorce and contraception laws, less restrictive abortion laws were seen threats to the conservative moral values because people would become more irresponsible.

The way in which this more permissive law was carried out in the clinics was another reason for concern amongst the conservatives. This concern was serious enough for several MP's to introduce several law amendments that included changes in the way in which the law was implemented on a daily level. The most frequent request was to provide more attention to the aftercare for the women and the lack of good counselling before the treatment. Women seeking treatment could obtain information and advice at official NHS family planning clinics or at charity organisation. It was these organisations that were charged with not providing sound advice to women, but just arranging referrals without providing alternatives besides abortion. For example, Conservative MP John Corrie states that "*the Pregnancy Advisory Service and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service seem to have abandoned all pretence acting as counselling agencies where advice can be given. […] It seems to me that pregnancy advice has gone out of the window and that these agencies have now simply become referral agencies for those who want abortions.*" [116] This conservative view was strengthened by the shortening of the treatment's aftercare, which was soon after dubbed the 'quickie' abortion.[117]

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[112] 'Radio Interview for BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour* ("*Permissive or Civilised*"), 9 April 1970, MTFW 101845.
[113] 'Interview for the *Catholic Herald*', 5 December 1978, MTFW 103793.
[114] 'Liberal thinking on abortion: not a solution in itself', *The Times* (2 May 1973) 13; 'World Population Control', *The Sunday Times* (28 May 1978) 42; Ann Kent, 'The last baby for me', *The Daily Mail* (13 February 1975) 6; 'Why the doctor must still sign', *The Daily Mail* (17 August 19676) 6.
[115] Tony Smith, 'Is any change in the abortion law really needed?', *The Times* (31 January 1975) 11.
[116] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 970 Cols. 898, 13 July 1979, available at https://bit.ly/2Ed31ed (26 July 2020).
[117] Jane Hanning, 'The 'quickie' abortion', *The Daily Mail* (29 January 1976) 12; Hugh C.M.L. Tait, 'Liberating Women?', *The Spectator* (17 June 1978) 16.

Thirdly, the idea that the medical practitioners who carried out abortion treatments worked unethically played a central role in the conservative attitude towards permissive society. As seen in the law text and in the daily implementation of it, these 'certified medical practitioners' carried a lot of responsibility and power in the treatment of abortions. With the addition of the social clause to the 1967 law, doctors became responsible for the assessment of a woman's situation and whether it was dire enough to qualify for treatment. With this powerful position came the scrutiny of many critical conservatives. They vocalised their concern about conflicts of interest among doctors and unethical practices in clinics in the parliament and in the press. According to them, some doctors were being pressured into interpreting the social clause too liberally, other doctors abused their power and treated their patients unfairly, and flaws in the system led to financial and ethical conflicts of interest.

Conservative *Times* journalist Ronald Butt wrote quite extensively on how he felt that the medical practitioners were being pressured by society into being okay with carrying out abortions. He mentions a case in which a MP was approached by a London gynaecologist who claimed that the willingness to carry out abortions was made a prerequisite in vacancies.[118] If true, this practice would go against the law's clause on conscientious objection which stated that "*no person shall be under any duty [...] to participate in any treatment authorised by this Act to which he has a conscientious objection.*" [119] This clause was part of a compromise that would satisfy worried MP's who wanted the right for doctors to refuse carrying out an abortion on the base of religious or moral objections.[120]

However, there were also concerns about doctors abusing this power and not treating their patients correctly. In 1974, the book *Babies for Burning* was released by the *News of the World* journalists Michael Litchfield and Susan Kentish and it evoked a lot of response.[121] The book claimed to have uncovered unprecedented scandals in the world of abortion treatments. Among the most extreme claims were: doctors selling foetal remains to soap factories, doctors not recognising whether a woman was pregnant or not, and doctors advising women to have their babies and letting it be adopted for a financial fee.[122] It did not take long for all the accused doctors to be cleared from all charges and for the book to be labelled as a complete fantasy.[123] Even though it was proven to be false, many conservatives believed that there were substantial malpractices going on in the world of abortion treatments and this

[118] Ronald Butt, 'Abortion: The dangerous pressure on doctors', *The Times* (31 January 1975) 16.
[119] Abortion Act 1967, Section 4, available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/contents/enacted (accessed at (26 July 2020).
[120] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 926 Cols. 1783-1788, 25 February 1977, available at https://bit.ly/2WQpSTf (accessed at 26 July 2020).
[121] Michael Litchfield & Susan Kentish, *Babies for Burning* (London 1974).
[122] Ronald Butt, 'This awful silence hanging over abortion on demand', *The Times* (23 January 1974) 16.
[123] Oliver Gillie, Marjorie Wallace and Patricia Ashdown-Sharp, 'Abortion horror tales revealed as fantasies', *The Sunday Times* (30 March 1975) 2; 'Doctors named in anti-abortion book cleared', *The Times* (18 July 1975) 2.

book gave them the opportunity to demand thorough investigations. The book even made it to the House of Common where several MP's asked the minister to look into the allegations that doctors were demanding money for consultations and treatments.[124] Even four years after the book had been published, it was still being referenced to in parliamentary amendment debates.[125] This gives an indication of how significant the conservatives' distrust in the implementation of the law was.

The financial aspect to the abortion treatments were also heavily criticised by the conservatives. Abortion treatment was possible in an NHS clinic or a private clinic and, according to the conservatives, most of the malpractices took place in the private clinics. The biggest issue was that "*counsellors who give the initial advice and the two doctors who give formal permission should have no mercenary interest in encouraging a girl to choose abortion rather than one of the alternatives.*" [126] It was arranged in the 1967 Act that private clinics would receive funds for every abortion that they carried out, which meant that it could be in the financial interest of the doctor to perform as many abortions as possible. As stated by Conservative MP Corrie, the advisory 'referral agencies' "*are financially linked with the clinics, doctors in these clinics are sailing pretty close to the wind with advertising*".[127] Many social conservatives found it inconceivable that there were "*profit-making private clinics*" [128] who were advertising with a hundred percent 'success rate' and who slipped through the defences of the carefully formulated law. Making money of something as immoral as abortion was one of the main reasons for conservatives to want to change the 1967 Act. This commercial attitude among some clinics brought serval problems with it, among them abortion tourism. As stated by Labour MP White "*the base of commercial operators is the growing number of foreign women who are lured into Britain in the knowledge that for cash a group of doctors will perform illegal abortions on request, totally ignoring the criteria of the Act.*" [129] This kind of business had to be prevented at all costs.

In conclusion, the conservative attitude which is represented in the political and published sources are characterised by their opposition toward the concept of increased accessibility of abortion and their defending attitude towards their family ideals. This attitude was built on three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that all life is sacred and should be protected, the idea that the abortion law was implemented in an immoral way, and the idea that medical practitioners carrying out abortion treatments worked unethically. As

[124] 'Abortions for cash complaint', *The Times* (29 March 1975) 20.
[125] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 948 Cols. 628-636, 19 April 1978, available at https://bit.ly/39kBKSu (26 July 2020).
[126] George Hill, 'Abortion: Are there too many advantages already for wealthy woman?', *The Times* (25 February 1977) 16.
[127] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 970 Cols. 898, 13 July 1979, available at https://bit.ly/2Ed31ed (26 July 2020).
[128] Hill, 'Abortion', 16.
[129] *Hansard* HC Deb. Vol. 885 Cols. 1758, 7 February 1975, available at https://bit.ly/30E0127 (accessed at 26 July 2020).

mentioned previously, with the family unit being fundamental to the conservative's view of a successful and virtuous life, they took it upon themselves to protect the interest of the conservatives in Britain with regard to the issue of the increased accessibility of abortions. However, the conservative attitude cannot justly be characterised as a strongly united front defending the family ideal. Many conservatives saw the necessity of regulating abortions on medical grounds and agreed that abortions could save lives. However, the majority strongly opposed the liberal use of the Act's social clause and the inadequate protection of the conscientious objection clause.

Conclusion

The Sixties and Seventies saw some of the most far reaching and radical social changes in Britain since the Second World War. People's views of work, family, sexuality, and welfare were all altered and came to expression in a new British society which was dominated by an increasing sense of permissiveness. It formed the next chapter for a new modernised Britain. However, not everyone saw this youth-driven cultural revolution as an asset to their society. Many conservative people considered these social changes to be a bad influence on the moral values and respectability of the country and saw the Seventies as a gloomy chapter of British history. It was Margaret Thatcher who rose to power before the Eighties begun and her aim to bring back 'Victorian values' was well received by the British people who felt that Britain would become a better place with more traditional moral guidance. Her aim to bring back the 'Victorian values' was part of a larger movement with the aim of restricting the social and cultural revolution of the progressive Sixties.

This countermovement became very prominent in the Seventies by claiming that the country was not only deteriorating on, for example, an economic level but also on a moral one. Several politicians and civilians took it upon themselves to cleanse Britain of the 'moral pollution' from the Sixties and to go back to a respectable Britain. This thesis has aimed to provide a contribution to the existing historiography concerning British post-war conservatism and social-cultural developments in Britain from the Sixties onwards by combining these discourses. Therefore, at the core of this thesis will be the following research question: *What was the British conservative attitude towards the permissive society of 1970s Britain?*

The first chapter was able to provide a superficial first answer to this question. Namely, that the conservative attitude was characterised by opposition and especially opposition towards social changes regarding family and welfare. With the conservatives' life built on the idea of the nuclear family, the increased permissiveness in society threatened a fundamental part of their being. Social change regarding divorce, contraception, and abortion triggered the response that their aspired way of living had to be defended. The social changes were controversial enough to cause significant conservative opposition towards relaxations of laws. However, to provide a more in-depth answer, this thesis has looked at three case studies to provide a look into why the conservative attitude was so dominated by opposition and whether this opposition was unanimous.

Firstly, in the chapter on the 1971 divorce peak, it is stated that the conservative attitude was characterised by their opposition toward the concept of divorce and their defending attitude towards the institution of marriage. This attitude was characterised by three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that, as a sacred institution, marriage

should be protected, the idea that the institution of marriage protected good Christian morals and encouraged good behaviour, and the idea that the government and the older generation had to set a good example for the rebellious and permissive youths. With the family unit at the centre of their lives, they took it upon themselves to protect the interests of the conservatives in Britain with regard to the issue of divorce. However, the conservative attitude cannot justly be characterised as a strongly united front defending the institution of marriage and solely opposing the concept of divorce. Even though the vast majority of the conservatives where very much against divorce and saw it as threat to their family ideal, there was room for debate on how realistic a world without divorce truly was.

In addition, in the chapter on the NHS Reorganisation Act 1973, it is stated that the conservative attitude was characterised by their opposition towards the concept of increased accessibility of oral contraceptives and their defending attitude towards the conservative family ideal. This attitude was characterised by three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that contraception encouraged irresponsible behaviour, the idea that contraception could help population control but should not be made free, and the idea that oral contraception formed a health risk. With the family unit at the centre of their lives, they took it upon themselves to protect the interests of the conservatives in Britain with regard to the issue of the increased accessibility of oral contraceptives. However, the conservative attitude cannot justly be characterised as a strongly united front defending the family ideal. Many conservatives saw merit in being able to slow population growth with the pill. They knew legislation had to be modernised and it was the Conservative Secretary Keith Joseph who initiated the Bill. However, when the Bill was amended in the House of Lords, the conservative's conscience vocalised their worries regarding irresponsible behaviour, misspending taxes, and medical risks.

Lastly, is the chapter in the Abortion Act 1967, it is stated that the conservative attitude was characterised by the opposition towards the concept of increased accessibility of abortion and their defending attitude towards their family ideals. This attitude was built on three different recurring themes, namely, the idea that all life is sacred and should be protected, the idea that the abortion law was implemented in an immoral way, and the idea that medical practitioners carrying out abortion treatments worked unethically. With the family unit at the centre of their lives, they took it upon themselves to protect the interests of the conservatives in Britain with regard to the issue of the increased accessibility of abortions. However, the conservative attitude cannot justly be characterised as a strongly united front defending the family ideal. Many conservatives saw the necessity of regulating abortions on medical grounds and agreed that abortions could save lives. However, the majority strongly opposed the liberal use of the Act's social clause and the inadequate protection of the conscientious objection clause.

The characteristics of the conservative attitude towards the different case studies contain significant overlaps and interesting common themes. One of the most important themes is that of protecting moral values such as responsibility, chastity, and respectability. From the conservative point of view, the relaxation of divorce, contraception, and abortion laws created a society in which it was normal to divorce your partner, have sexual relations with many people, and terminate pregnancies all just because you felt like it. Therefore, it threatened these core family values by encouraging people to behave more irresponsibly and promiscuous. Moreover, much of this moral framework had been shaped and maintained by many years of religious influence. The Church of England and the Catholic Church were key players in the opposition to the increased permissiveness of society. Both the Catholic and Anglican clergy were representing well-established institutes which had been guiding members of their community with the holy sacraments of marriage and birth for many centuries. Relaxation of the laws formed a direct threat to their way of life. This triggered a very committed response among the British Christians, especially among the Catholic minority that was very rigid and unified in the opposition towards contraception and abortion.

Another important common theme is that of setting a good example. From the conservative point of view, many of the progressive people needed guidance in developing a good moral framework and this guidance could be provided by different institutions. For example, both the Church and the Houses of Parliament had important exemplary functions and could help people get back on the right track. However, there was no consensus among the conservatives as to how far the government should go with its interference in people's private lives. The generation gap played a key role in this issue, because many conservatives considered the youths to be the biggest source of trouble. Therefore, they needed most guidance.

It is important to state that the conservative attitude was by no means a unified front. Even within this conservative side of the spectrum, there were more traditionalist and more liberal sides to the debate. More research would be necessary to provide a representative look into how the interaction between both sides was shaped and distributed. Furthermore, this research is limited in its use of (mostly) political sources and the timeframe of a single decade. This opens up possibilities of further research into the conservative attitude based on, for example, more social and cultural sources, a wider timeframe, or a more international perspective. Many of these debates, such as abortion, are still prominent today and provide much material to research. Lastly, it could be interesting to expand this research by looking at the conservative attitude and the interaction with more progressive historical narratives, such as second-wave feminism, LGBTQ+ emancipation, and further secularisation of society.

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