



Human Reproduction Study Group Winter Event

Abortion: past, present, and future

Monday 5th December 2016, 1pm-5pm

De Montfort University, Leicester

Convenors: Dr Kylie Baldwin, Dr Cathy Herbrand

This half day event brings together three invited speakers from History, Sociology and Reproductive Health to examine the past, present and future of abortion in the UK and to illustrate the centrality of abortion to wider understandings of women's position in society.

Key Moments in the Life of the Abortion Act (1967)

Dr Clare Parker, University of Kent

On 27 April 2018, the British Abortion Act will have been in force for fifty years. At the vanguard of a wave of liberalising legislation across the Western world, its text has remained virtually unchanged since its introduction, except for minor amendments made in 1990. Looking beyond the formal letter of the statute, however, reveals significant evolution in the interpretation and implementation of the Act, and in the narratives woven around it.

This paper examines the most important events since 1967 that have altered the understanding and practice of abortion in the UK. These include attempts by parliamentarians to amend the law to make it more restrictive, evolving government and medical regulations, and the development of medical technologies including methods of abortion and pre-natal screening. But these 'official' spheres tell only part of the story. Equally crucial to the development of the Abortion Act in practice have been campaigns run by activists, and high-profile controversies that have been amplified by emotive and often partisan newspaper and media coverage. Identifying these key moments allows us to understand how the meaning of legal abortion has changed over the last five decades, and shows that the most consequential changes have not always come from parliament or the courts as might be expected when we speak of the history of a law.



Towards understanding internalised abortion stigma: listening to women's voices

Dr Lesley Hoggart, The Open University

This presentation will be located within current debates seeking to understand the generation of abortion stigma. Drawing on secondary analysis of young women's narratives from two qualitative empirical studies, it will focus on young women's experience of, and resistance to, abortion stigma in England and Wales. The analysis showed that whilst women felt stigmatised by their abortion[s] to varying degrees, many also resisted stigmatisation. This was achieved through the development of different stigma management strategies, depending on their own socio-economic situation, the circumstances in which they became pregnant, and their personal beliefs and values. The extent to which young women were able to feel morally confident about their abortion decision was an important element of stigma management. Individually held moral views thereby interact with socio-cultural norms and values on abortion, reproduction and motherhood; and also influence women's wishes to exercise reproductive control. Women were more likely to struggle with their decision-making and their emotional response to abortion when they felt their abortion decision clashed with their own moral framing of abortion, and this interaction affected their individually internalised abortion-related stigma. Women who have an abortion may experience internalised abortion stigma, but this is uneven and can be resisted.

Mothers and Others: Current trends in Anti-abortion mobilization in the UK

Dr Pam Lowe, Aston University

Over the last few years, anti-abortion activism around clinics has grown. New groups have emerged, who have strong links to the US and have adopted their models of activism such as 'prayerful witnessing' and 'pavement-counselling'. These new tactics seek to deter women from entering clinics in order to 'educate' and 'save' them from having a termination. Rooted in religious understandings, the largely Christian UK movement draws heavily on the US religious-right for its understandings, and assumes that women either do not understand what they are doing, or are 'abortion-hardened' in that they have already lost their true feminine selves.

This paper will explore the ways that motherhood is constructed within anti-abortion activism as a natural and sacred position. It will show how ideas of maternal sacrifice, that women should always put the needs of any actual or potential children, before their own are central to their understanding of the position of all women. It allows them to claim that they are the saviours of women from an 'abortion industry' which seeks to



exploit them. Yet despite the centrality of sacred motherhood in their discourse, women's bodies are often absent through the erosion of any distinction between a foetus and baby. The inherent contradictions in these positions is an outcome of the tension of between their religious beliefs and their need to appeal to a secular audience.

Whilst there is little evidence to date that the movement is having an impact on public opinion, they are increasingly able to mobilize those who were already against abortion. The paper will consider to what extent this growing public activism is a threat to access in abortion in the UK, and where the future attacks might emerge.

Booking now [open](#)

BSA member- £15

Non-member- £20

Concessionary member (full-time student, retired, unwaged)- £10

Full-time student non-member- £18

Refreshments and light snacks provided.

For more information about this event please email: kbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk.