

# Attitudes to Abortion in the Era of Reform: evidence from the Abortion Law Reform Association correspondence

Emma L. Jones

*This article examines letters sent by members of the general public to the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) in the decade immediately before the 1967 Abortion Act. It shows how a voluntary organisation, in their aim of supporting a specific cause of unclear legality, called forth correspondence from those in need. In detailing the personal predicaments of those facing an unwanted pregnancy, this body of correspondence was readily deployed by ALRA in their efforts to mobilise support for abortion law reform, thus exercising a political function. A close examination of the content of the letters and the epistolary strategies adopted by their writers reveals that as much as they were a lobbying tool for changes in abortion law, these letters were discursively shaped by debates surrounding that very reform.*

---

Emma Jones is a Wellcome Research Fellow at the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine at the University of Manchester. She received her Ph.D. from the University of London in 2007 for her thesis 'Abortion in England, 1861–1967'. Alongside forthcoming publications on the history of abortion and family planning, she is the author with John Pickstone of *The Quest for Public Health in Manchester: the industrial city, the NHS and the recent history* (Carnegie, 2008), and with Stephanie Snow of *Against the Odds: black and minority ethnic clinicians and Manchester 1948 to 2009* (Carnegie, 2010). She is currently working on a history of premenstrual syndrome in twentieth-century Britain. Work on this essay was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Award Reference: PTA-026-27-1810). Correspondence to: Emma Jones, Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Manchester, Simon Building, Brunswick Street, Manchester M13 9PL, UK. Email: emma.l.jones@manchester.ac.uk