

ATTITUDE TO ABORTION, ATTITUDE TO LIFE AND CONSERVATISM IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

After preliminary scale-construction studies, scales to measure general social conservatism, attitude to abortion and attitude to life (Biophilia) were given to a random cluster sample of 200 people in Sydney, Australia. Anti-abortionists were found to be highly likely to be conservative and slightly likely to be generally pro-life (after partialling out the effect of conservatism). They were also more likely to be frequent church attenders and of Roman Catholic convictions. Percentage approval of abortion varied with the question asked but approval for even completely unrestricted abortion was high — at 65%. On questions proposing qualified approval of abortion, anti-abortionists were as few as 7%. Only 16% of the sample both opposed unrestricted abortion and said that the matter would have an important bearing on their vote.

INTRODUCTION

Despite steadily liberalizing attitudes to abortion in much of the world in recent years, abortion still remains a potent political issue. Even in communities where abortion has been legalized to varying degrees, vigorous "rearguard" actions are being fought by anti-abortionists.

One of the central claims of anti-abortionists is that they are "pro-life." This claim has recently come under some fire — particularly in the work of Granberg. Granberg (1978) reprocessed United States poll data to show that attitude to abortion was essentially unrelated to the stances that people took on a variety of other life-related issues. The highest correlation he found was of .16 for the relationship between attitude to abortion and attitude towards increased military spending. Although the large size of Granberg's sample means that this is a real (statistically significant) relationship, it explains only 2.5% of the variance and is hence of very little substantive significance. Most of the relationships Granberg observed were, however, not even statistically significant.

Granberg's index of pro-life attitudes was however necessarily very *ad hoc* (he was limited by what the polls had data on) and was badly flawed in that it could as well be conceived as a measure of "conservatism" as of anything else. In fact, the questions on attitude to capital punishment, attitude to military spending and attitude to public health measures would presumably be normally seen as measuring conservatism rather than attitude to life. Granberg's work could, therefore, be seen as



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showing only that some types of "conservative" stances (such as support for military spending) do not relate to other types of "conservative" stances (such as opposition to abortion). Research using a better measure of pro-life attitudes does, therefore, seem called for. In a later paper, Granberg and Granberg (1981) appear implicitly to acknowledge this by shifting to the reader the judgment of which poll data in fact index positive or negative attitudes to life.

As it happens, there does already exist a scale designed to measure something very much like what Granberg and the anti-abortionists seem to be talking about. This is Maccoby's "biophilia" scale (Maccoby, 1972). Maccoby developed his scale to operationalize a concept originating with Fromm (1973). Fromm held that attitudes to life and death in fact underlay all political polarities with "conservatives" (and even more so "Fascists") being "necrophilic" and "liberals" being "biophilic." Since "necrophilia" normally refers to the rape of corpses, this labelling is something of a high-point of anti-conservative rhetoric. In Fromm's usage, however, "necrophilia" refers to any preoccupation with non-living things. Gutman (1972) points out that a similar theme was current among anti-war activists during the Vietnam conflict. The "Doves" claimed to be life-lovers and characterized their ideological opponents as "merchants of death." (The latter, however, is probably an ascription to which pro-war agitators are always susceptible.) The Fromm/Maccoby theory, therefore, also challenges the claim of the anti-abortionists to be life-lovers. According to the Fromm/Maccoby theory, it should be the "liberal" supporters of abortion who are the life-lovers.

The relationship between attitudes to abortion and scores on the Maccoby scale has in fact been examined — but only using student respondents. Ray and Lovejoy (1982) found that scores on the Maccoby scale were in fact not related either way to attitude to abortion. They were, however, related to political party preference. As the Fromm/Maccoby theory predicts, Leftist voters were found to be more biophilic. Such relationships cannot be generalized to the population at large, however.

In considering this confirmation of Granberg's (1978) findings, however, one must ask whether conservatism could be acting as a suppressor variable on the relationship between attitudes to life and attitudes to abortion. (A suppressor variable is a third variable that obscures a real relationship between two original variables by correlating with the two original variables in opposite directions.) In spite of the many grounds for regarding opponents of abortion as "conservative," the basic finding in Granberg's (1978) study was in fact that anti-abortionists were *not* conservative to any degree on most other issues. If two types of "conservative" items fail to correlate, then, what could be driving them apart? If we accept that Granberg's items in fact measure *both* "conservatism" and attitude to life, we could well have an answer. If "conservatism" tends to make anti-abortionists accept Granberg's item, their biophilia makes anti-abortionists tend to reject such items — resulting in an overall balance and lack of consistent tendency in either direction. Note, however, that this explanation requires that we accept precisely what Granberg was tending to refute: That anti-abortionists are in fact biophilic.

It is the aim of the present paper, therefore, to measure attitude to life, attitude to abortion and "conservatism" by means of properly developed scales rather than by *ad hoc* collections of items. The role of "conservatism" can thus be examined as



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a possible suppressor variable in the relationship between attitudes to abortion and attitudes to life. It is also desired to maximize the generalizability of the findings by using primarily general population rather than student samples.

STUDIO I

The reliability of the Maccoby Biophilia scale had been found to be only .58 (Ray and Lovejoy, 1982) so stood in some need of improvement. As the present author had from the beginning not been very sanguine about the possibility of measuring such an extremely general concept as attitude to life, the Ray and Lovejoy study did in fact include a large number of items additional to those devised by Granberg. These items provide data that will now be used for the first time.)

The additional items were written with a view to expressing concepts emanating from Fromm (1964 and 1973) without building in any consistent tendency to measure other variables as well. This did not mean that any particular item would have no political relevance — just that the items as a whole would not express any particular political “line.”

With the new items added, the reliability (Cronbach “alpha”) rose to .72. From the total set of 49 items a sub-set of 22 were chosen which correlated most highly with what the 49 items as a whole measured. This was done by use of an iterative program devised by Ray (1972). The reliability of the shortened scale was .77. Its items are given in the appendix together with brief indications where necessary to indicate why a particular item was felt to be biophilic or necrophilic. The new 22-item scale and the original Maccoby scale had only four items in common but did nonetheless correlate .54.

Further data on the new scale — including validity indications — can be obtained from the present author.

STUDY II

Now that a reasonably reliable attitude to life (biophilia) scale seemed to be ready for use, the next step was to examine the adequacy of available inventories for the measurement of conservatism.

The most widely-used Conservatism inventory in Australia was the Wilson and Patterson C-scale (Wilson and Patterson, 1968). This scale has, however, been severely criticised by Stacey (1978) and others and does contain such dated items as “pyjama parties” and “computer music.” A new scale designed explicitly for contemporary Australian conditions did, therefore, seem called-for. Again, an existing data base was used for the purpose — the survey reported as Study VII of Ray (1983).

In this study 67 items from various sources were initially categorized into proto-scales of economic conservatism, moral conservatism and general social conservatism. They were administered to two samples of people from the Australian states of Queensland and New South Wales. There were 219 of the former and 158 of the latter. Queensland was included because of its reputation as a particular conservative state. The sampling was from voter registration lists and the questionnaire was



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administered by mail. Both States showed a 31% response rate, which was considered adequate for scale-construction purposes.

By deleting items showing poor correlations with the total score on their respective scales, the proto-scales were reduced to three scales of 30 items (General Social), 15 items (Moral) and 12 items (Economic). The items can be found in Ray (1983). The reliabilities (Cronbach's "alpha", 1951) of the three reduced scales on the twostate combined sample were: Social Conservatism .83, Moral Conservatism .85 and Economic Conservatism .79. It was found, however, that Moral Conservatism correlated .56 with Social Conservatism and Economic Conservatism correlated .44 with Social Conservatism. This strongly suggested that the attempted differentiation into three types of conservatism had been unsuccessful and that there was a strong general conservatism factor centering on the Social Conservatism scale.

To check on this, a principal components factor analysis of the combined responses of all 377 subjects on the full original set of 67 items was carried out. The percentage of trace accounted for by the first four unrotated eigenvectors was 14.8%, 7.47%, 5.5% and 3.64%. The natural break clearly came after the first factor. This supported the appropriateness of a single-factor solution. A new General Conservatism scale was, therefore, constructed by selecting the ten items that had the highest positive loading on the first factor and combining them with the ten items having the highest negative loadings. The items of this scale are given in the Appendix. Contrary to expectation, it was items from the Moral Conservatism scale rather than the Social Conservatism scale which figured most prominently in the new scale. Given the relatively small numbers of moral conservatism items originally included in the battery, this is strong evidence of how central such items are to conservative ideology.

The reliability (alpha) of the new scale was .84 in Queensland and .89 in N.S.W. The respective means were 83.98 (S.D. 19.83) and 73.00 (S.D. 22.88). The difference is significant at the .01 level ($t = 4.91$). Given the generally accepted conservatism of Queenslanders, this difference represents some criterion groups validation for the new scale. With Australian political party choice scored from Right to Left, the new scale was also a good predictor of vote. The correlation was .50 in N.S.W. and .44 in Queensland.

On inspecting the items of the new scale, the reader might be inclined to object that there are too many items concerned with moral issues. This however is no mere oversight or artifact but an empirical finding. It bears repeating that there were in fact relatively few moral conservatism items in the full original item pool.

STUDY III

Now that suitable scales for measuring the more difficult constructs thought to be of relevance to attitudes to abortion were available, the way seemed clear to proceed to the main study. In this study, attitude to abortion was measured by a collection of twelve items from various sources which were designed to cover the full spectrum of possible opinions on the issue. These items are also given in an Appendix.



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As a potential control against dishonest responding, a short form (eight items) of the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale was also included in the survey (See Greenwald and Satow, 1970).

The sample was a random cluster sample gathered door-to-door in the Sydney metropolitan area of Australia. N was 200. With a population of three million, Sydney is Australia's largest city and accounts for 20% of the national population. It also accounts for a majority of the population of the State in which it is located (total New South Wales population being *circa* five million). Although the N for the present sample may seem small by comparison with some commercial surveys, it should be noted that the N is sufficient to show correlations explaining as little as 2% of the variance as significant statistically. Cluster sampling is held in some quarters to be rather suspect but it is nonetheless the method employed by most commercial polls.

The reliabilities observed for the various scales were .78 for Conservatism, .84 for Attitude to Abortion, .74 for Social Desirability, and .65 for Biophilia. That the reliability (alpha) for the Biophilia scale was so low would seem to reflect the difficulty in finding items to match as broad a concept as attitude to life in general. By deleting those items that correlated less than .1 with the total score on the Biophilia scale, however, (numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, 14, 17 and 18), a reduced scale with a reliability of .70 was produced. All items on this reduced scale showed significant corrected item-total correlations.

The correlation between the reduced Biophilia scale and the Attitude to Abortion scale was .038 – in apparent confirmation of Granberg's thesis. Anti-abortionists were also found to be highly likely to be conservative ($r = .507$). They were also more frequent church attenders ($r = .373$). Despite the fact that an attempt had been made to construct the Biophilia scale in a way that did not produce an artificial relationship with conservatism, a significant correlation between the reduced Biophilia and Conservatism scales was nonetheless found – .322. This tends, then, to support Fromm's thesis that conservatives are in fact "necrophilic." It also, however, tends to confirm the suspicion that conservatism could be a confounding variable in the relationship between attitude to abortion and attitude to life. A partial correlation to control for the influence of conservatism was, therefore, carried out. It was found that, with the influence of conservatism removed, the correlation between Biophilia and Attitude to Abortion rose from .038 to -.125. It was confirmed, then, that anti-abortionists do have some truth in their claims. They do show a just-significant ($p < .05$) tendency to be generally pro-life. For all that, however, the correlation is so low as to be of no practical importance.

There were two items in the Attitude to Abortion scale that were highly central to what the scale as a whole measured – numbers 3 and 7. They correlated respectively .723 and .764 with the scale total. The degree to which the respondents agreed or disagreed with each item in the scale did of course vary. It was felt, however, that their centrality to the concept made the degree of agreement with items 3 and 7 of particular interest. It was found that 65% of the sample agreed to at least some degree with item 3 and 54% with item 7. The "disagrees" with the same items were 30% and 36%. The balance, of course, were "Not sures." It may be worth noting that

a virtuously simultaneous commercial survey (Anonymous, 1982) covering 2,105



men and women throughout Australia showed 70% agreement with the proposition that abortion should be legal. The two surveys do, therefore, give rather similar results though using different questions. The rate of acceptance of abortion would, then, appear to be rather higher than the U.S. rate reported by Granberg. Granberg (1978) reported that "about half" of the American samples approved of abortion in ordinary circumstances and Granberg and Granberg (1981) confirmed this proportion as still current. As the exact questions asked in Australia and the U.S. differed, however, no exact comparisons are possible. If there is a cross-national difference, it is probably attributable to the more irreligious nature of the Australian population.

One question included in the present survey that should be of considerable political interest was: "Would a politician's attitude to abortion be an important factor to you when you are deciding whom to vote for? Of those who opposed abortion (as indexed by replies to Q.3 of the Attitude to Abortion scale) 32 out of 61 (or 16% of the total sample) said that it would be. Of those who favoured abortion, 39 out of 131 (or 19.5% of the sample) said that it would be. In general then, it would appear that an Australian politician would win more votes by favouring abortion.

Another interesting cross-tabulation with Q.3 was the tabulation with religion. Religion had been ascertained using two questions instead of the more usual single question. The two questions were: "What religion were you brought up in?" and "What religion would you subscribe to now?" The latter question gave the more significant result. With seven possible degrees of agreement with Q.3 and nine categories of religion, there were 48 degrees of freedom and a Chi-squared of 64.9. This is significant at the .05 level but there were a rather large number of small cell entries for Chi-squared to be strictly applicable. Some collapsing of categories was, therefore, called for. An inspection of the table revealed that people in all major religious categories other than Roman Catholics were predominantly in favour of abortion. For the Catholics, however, only 21 out of 48 respondents favoured abortion. It was decided to study the influence of religion, therefore, by dividing the sample simply into Catholics versus non-Catholics.

To study the influence of Catholicism, a dummy "religion" variable was created by scoring each respondent in the survey as either "Catholic" (scored "1") or "non-Catholic" (scored "0"). So scored, religion correlated .274 with conservatism, .109 with Biophilia, .206 with Church attendance and .302 with Attitude to Abortion. When religion so scored was entered into a multiple regression equation, the multiple *R* for predicting Attitude to Abortion score was .59 with beta weights as follows: Conservatism .477, Social Desirability -.094, Biophilia -.148, Church attendance .189 and religion .162. Only the beta weight for Social Desirability failed to reach significance at the .05 level. Conservatism, church attendance and religion were significant at the .01 level.

Qs. 3 and 7. of the Attitude to Abortion scale represent fairly sweeping support for abortion. On "weaker" pro-abortion items such as "I favour abortion to save the life of the mother, or if the child will be born deformed or retarded" the support among the sample was overwhelming — with only 7% disagreeing. Roman Catholic teachings would seem to require a negative answer to this question so a comparison



of the 7% overall disagreement with the 24% of the sample who were Roman Catholic clearly suggests that even the influence of the Roman Catholic Church is not all that strong.

The most pro-abortion religious category came from adherents of the Church of England (Episcopalians). Out of 49 Anglican respondents, 48 agreed that "Any woman should be entitled to an abortion if she wants one." The great tolerance of theological extremes within the Church of England would seem to generalize to tolerance of the rights of others in general.

The items of the Attitude to Abortion scale given in the Appendix are accompanied by the % agreement with each one.

The Attitude to Abortion scale was found to show no significant correlation with the Social Desirability scale. This indicates that responses to the items concerned with abortion were essentially honest or at least were not influenced by a desire to make a good impression. As such, social desirability could not have had a confounding influence on the correlations of the Attitude to Abortion scale with other variables.

For the record, the mean scores of the various scales were: Conservatism 78.24 (S.D. 16.98), Attitude to Abortion 42.10 (S.D. 13.97), Reduced Biophilia 31.01 (S.D. 5.53).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present results clearly confirm cross-nationally Granberg's conclusion that religion and conservatism in personal morality are the major determinants of opposition to abortion. They also confirm that this conclusion stands up when fully developed scales are used rather than scattered single items.

The major contribution of the present study, however, is probably the great care devoted to examining the contention that anti-abortionists are "pro-life." Even though the concept of "Biophilia" does at first seem impossibly general, it was confirmed that some generality does exist in items designed to measure it and a fully developed scale explicitly designed to measure it was used in the final survey. In spite of this care over measurement and in spite of the care taken to allow for the influence of conservatism as a suppressor variable, it was still found that Biophilia had essentially no relevance to Attitude to Abortion. There would, therefore, now seem to be very few methodological reasons why one would hesitate to accept the conclusion that the claim of anti-abortionists to be "pro-life" or motivated by love of life is essentially false.

Paradoxically, however, although Biophilia had little impact on attitude to abortion, it was nonetheless confirmed that Biophilia did have political relevance. Fromm's theory linking conservatism with Biophilia was given some support. As the label "necrophilic" seems impossibly pejorative, we might say that conservatives were shown to be "non-biophilic". It may be, therefore, that the present study has shown Fromm's theory to be deserving of more attention than it has so far received. There is even an element of apparent self-contradiction in the findings. Fromm equated love of the machine with necrophilia yet the machine is surely the symbol



and Leftist nature of the "Hippie" movement, it certainly seems possible but the corollary is that Leftists are more reactionary than conservatives — which is at least an unusual conclusion. Perhaps the safest thing to say may be that Leftists can be reactionary *in some respects*.

Another incidental finding of some interest was the centrality of moral issues to conservative ideology. Although devised as a measure of general conservative ideology, the Conservatism scale ended up with eight out of twenty items touching on issues of sexual morality. In the original item pool from which the scale was derived, there were only 16 out of 67 such items. By a purely empirical process, then, items concerning sexual morality were shown to be highly central to what items expressing conservatism on other issues were also measuring. The touchstone of whether a person is conservative or not would then appear to be his or her stand on moral issues. Knowing that, one can predict his/her stand on other issues with considerable accuracy. Ronald Reagan's courting of the Moral Majority movement may, therefore, be seen as an astute move to secure the core of a conservative power-base.

The correlation of the Attitude to Abortion scale with the Conservatism scale may then be taken to confirm that anti-abortion attitudes are only one part of a generally traditionalist outlook. Anti-abortionists tend to believe in such other causes as "Girls should remain virgins until they marry," "Marijuana smoking is bad for the youth and should remain banned" and "Hippies need something like the Army to straighten them out." They are anti-union, in favour of corporal punishment and dislike Pop music. Conservatism is also correlated (.338) with church attendance so religion and conservatism go together as mutually reinforcing influences leading to an anti-abortion stance. An anti-abortion stance is then far from accidental and incidental. It goes to the core of a person's ideology. As such Granberg and Granberg's (1981) finding of long-term stability in the proportion of people favouring abortion becomes well understandable.

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APPENDIX

THE BIOPHILIA ("PRO-LIFE") SCALE

The items of the scale are followed where necessary by a brief rationale for the claim that the item measures biophilia. Items 1 to 19 are responded to simply by "Yes", "?" or "No" (scored 3, 2 and 1 for items 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 14, 15 and 21 with the remainder scored 1, 2 and 3 for the same answers). For item 20, choices 1 to 6 earn a score of 1 each while choices 7 to 12 earn a score of 3 each. Failure to make a choice earns score of 2 for each choice omitted. For the remaining items, the score is the number, circled.

1. Are you in favour of capital punishment? (*Death penalty for certain crimes*)
2. Do you prefer plays to movies? (*Plays are "live." Movies are mechanical and non-living*)
3. Would you prefer to own a wooden occasional table rather than one of stainless steel and glass? (*Wood is as varied as life itself and is the product of a living organism. Metal is dead and uniform*)
4. Do you approve of hunting? (*Hunting is about killing things*)
5. Do you think that drinking and driving is irresponsible? (*Which comes first? Love of the machine or concern for the safety of one's fellows?*)
6. Do you try to be a vegetarian as far as you can? (*Thus avoiding the killing of fellow animals*)
7. Do you enjoy realistic police shows on T.V. ("*Blood and guts*" does of course tend to be associated with death)
8. Do you like Westerns on T.V.? (*As for 7*)
9. Do you enjoy war films? (*Also as for 7*)
10. Do you think that the slaughter of whales should be stopped as a matter of urgency?
11. Do you think Australia should have the atom bomb? (*The ultimate toy of the death merchants*)
12. Could you kill if you had to?
13. Have you ever owned a gun or other lethal weapon such as a hunting-knife?
14. Do you try to live by the golden rule (Love your neighbour as yourself?) (*The necrophilic would presumably be just as glad if his neighbour was dead. He loves things, not people*)
15. Do you think that bloodsports are barbaric? (*Bloodsports result in death*)
16. Do you spend a lot of time on your car or motorbike? (Polishing it, cleaning it, repairing it, etc.). (*A devotion to non-living things and mechanical perfection. This is adapted from Maccoby's item 11*)
17. Do you think that defective children should not be allowed to live?
18. Do you think that machinery can be beautiful? (*To the biophilic, beauty lies in life. The necrophilic admires artificial order and things non-living*)
19. Do you think that friends are more important than success? (*Friends are alive. Success is abstract*).
20. What are the three greatest virtues in the following list?

1. Obedience	7. Love
2. Defense of honor	8. Joy of life
3. Cleanliness	9. Consideration of others
4. Discipline	10. Charity
5. Patriotism	11. Honesty
6. Punctuality	12. Sincerity

(*This is Maccoby's item 4 - which see*).
21. How important do you think it is for people who break laws to pay for their crimes?
 1. Very important.
 2. Somewhat important.
 3. Not important.

(*This is Maccoby's item 9 - which see*)
22. Assume you saw a burglar running away from your house with some of your valuables and that you had access to a gun. Would you:
 1. Shoot him to wound him or kill him.
 2. Shot to scare him.
 3. Let him go and call the police.
 4. Do nothing.

(*This is Maccoby's item 10*)



THE NEW AUSTRALIAN GENERAL CONSERVATISM SCALE

In use, the items are preceded by the usual guarantees of anonymity, requests for frankness etc. Respondents circled a number from 1 to 7 to indicate degrees of agreement with each item. The answers were anchored as follows: 7 = Strongly Agree, 6 = Agree, 5 = Agree a little, 4 = Not sure, etc. Responses to items 1 to 5, 10, 11, 15, 16 and 20 were reverse-scored (e.g., a 7 became a 1) before addition to get the final total scale score.

1. Respect for parents is old-fashioned and is often overdone.
2. Any group should have the right to demonstrate in the streets if they want to.
3. We should have complete freedom of speech even for those who criticize everything about our society.
4. Homosexuality should be legally permitted.
5. The attitudes of the young today are an improvement on those of their elders.
6. Marijuana smoking is bad for the youth and should remain banned.
7. Modern pop music is often disgusting and degenerate.
8. Queen Elizabeth and her family do a good job and she should remain Queen of Australia.
9. Hippies need something like the Army to straighten them out.
10. Military training is unnatural and has a tendency to warp people.
11. Physical punishment in the schools should not be allowed.
12. There is a need for greater control of the unions by the government.
13. One of the chief things that is holding Australia back at the moment is the Union movement.
14. Girls should remain virgins until they marry.
15. Women who have a child without being married do not necessarily have anything to be ashamed of.
16. A couple has the right to find out if they are sexually suited before marriage (e.g., by trial marriage).
17. Sex relations except in marriage are always wrong.
18. Sexual practices can easily become dangerous or perverted if people are not very careful.
19. Divorce in Australia has now become too easy.
20. All children should be given sex education in their schools.

THE ATTITUDE TO ABORTION SCALE

	% Agreeing
1. Legalizing abortion means "open go" for everyone.	32.5
2.R An abortion is O.K. if the unborn baby is known to be deformed.	76.5
3.R Any woman should be entitled to an abortion if she wants one.	65.5
4. I oppose all abortions under all circumstances.	12.5
5.R I favour abortion to save the life of the mother, or if the child will be born deformed or retarded.	85.5
6.R Having an abortion is O.K. if you can afford to have one.	28
7.R Abortions should be made easily available to all women.	56
8. Abortion is child-murder.	39
9. Abortion is anti-life.	37
10.R Abortion is acceptable to avoid bringing unwanted children into an overpopulated world — particularly where economic reasons may not satisfactorily provide for their upbringing.	53
11.R I favour legal abortions under all circumstances.	46.5
12. I personally oppose abortion but I think it is a private matter between a woman and those closest to her.	61.5



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