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# According to Plan: Strategic Film Production at the London Rubber Company in the 1960s

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Résumé

De 1964 à 1976, le département du film éducatif de la London Rubber Company a réalisé sept films sur la contraception. Ces films ont été diffusés dans tout le pays, dans des églises, des centres de protection maternelle et infantile, des clubs des mères, des centres médicaux, ainsi que dans des prisons pour hommes et pour femmes. Ils ont comblé d'importantes lacunes dans la formation des infirmières, du personnel médical et soignant. Ces films ont également contribué à éduquer plus généralement les adultes et les enfants à la contraception, en ce qui concerne aussi bien les aspects théoriques de la reproduction et de la contraception que les questions plus pratiques. Cependant, sur un marché de la contraception en forte croissance, ces films ont aussi été un outil pour détourner le consommateur des méthodes de contraception concurrentes.

**Mots-clés :** contraception ; film industriel ; relations publiques ; publicité ; marketing médical.

Abstract

Between 1964 and 1976, the London Rubber Company's Education Film Unit commissioned seven films about contraception, which were toured across the country. Films were screened in churches, welfare clinics, mother's clubs, health centres, and even men's and women's prisons. They filled an important gap in the training of nurses, medics and ancillary medical services as well as educating ordinary adults and children in contraceptive theory and use. However, the films were also useful for directing the ever-increasing market of contraceptive consumers away from rival contraceptive techniques.

**Keywords:** contraception; industrial film; public relations; promotion; medical marketing.

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In the summer of 1962 the British Family Planning Association (FPA), wishing to produce a sequel to their 1958 film about contraceptive theory, approached the London Rubber Company (LRC), makers of Durex condoms, for sponsorship. The sequel to *Birthright*<sup>2</sup> was intended to update audiences on the latest birth control technology: the oral contraceptive pill<sup>3</sup>. However, whereas LRC was willing to support films discussing contraception in the abstract, the idea of funding one that advertised the “pill” – a potential marketplace rival – seemed absurd. The FPA and LRC had an awkward, co-dependent relationship chiefly because the FPA supported female contraceptive techniques over male, even though it often depended on financial aid from LRC (Borge, 2020; Borge, 2017b, pp. 185-221). The FPA oversaw the only testing body for oral contraceptives in Britain (Junod & Marks, 2002, pp. 136-7), so advertisement for the pill might also serve as promotion for the FPA. The FPA’s intention to use film to promote the pill nevertheless motivated LRC to action. Market research showed that average consumers saw the pill as a modern scientific development but were wholly unaware of technologi-

cal advances in condoms<sup>4</sup>. More so, the FPA’s eagerness to produce a follow-up to *Birthright* suggested that audiences were receptive to learning about contraception – or at least the work of the FPA – through the moving image. In August 1962, LRC’s Managing Director, Angus Reid, wrote to the FPA with a decision on the question of sponsorship for the *Birthright* sequel: the company would prefer to make its own films<sup>5</sup>.

Between 1964 and 1976, LRC’s Education Film Unit made seven films about contraception, namely: *According to Plan* (1964); *Learning to Live* (1964); *Sex Instruction: Man and Woman* (1964); *Family Planning – A Medical Approach* (1964); *London Image* (1965); *Every Baby a Wanted Baby* (1968); and *Responsibility. A Film About Contraception* (1976). These films were ostensibly exhibited for the purposes of sex education (Head, 1977, pp. 298-299; Daines, 1970) but they also functioned beyond this remit. The LRC corpus catered to, was shaped by, and sought to intercede in changes sweeping through the British birth control marketplace in the 1960s, namely, a widening public discussion, and the development of new technologies. Both the FPA and LRC had clear PR ambitions for their films. The FPA,

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2 The FPA’s *Birthright* is not to be confused with Oscar Micheaux’s 1938 film *Birthright* (see [URL: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-birthright-1938-online>] or the American VD film of the same name (*Birthright*, Southern Educational Film Production Service, 1951), which is set on a chicken farm in Georgia (Eberwein, 1999, pp. 160-161).

3 FPA archives, Wellcome Library, London, FPA/A17/38.

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4 Ernest Dichter Associates (henceforth EDA), 1380c: *A Motivational Research Study on Rubber Contraceptives*, London, EDA, 1961, pp. 9, 14, 15, 160, 164. Ernest Dichter papers and research reports. Hagley Museum and Archive, Delaware.

5 Angus Reid to Mrs Clifford-Smith, September 4<sup>th</sup> 1958. FPA/A7/78.

which had established a publicity Sub-Committee in 1950<sup>6</sup>, wanted to make the topic of contraception acceptable, to push for improved access through the National Health Service, and to promote its own organisation as the public face of this subject. In 1954, it was agreed that “*the fundamental object was prestige and to create an informed opinion in influential circles*”<sup>7</sup>. LRC’s films were a direct response to this activity, inasmuch as they worked to convince audiences that a reliable, consumer-friendly alternative to clinic-based contraception was already available. LRC’s films also overcame restrictions on advertising, particularly on screen (Borge, 2017a, 2017b, pp. 206–396). The creation of films by both organisations was driven by a reputational imperative, with LRC’s films especially serving to undermine rival contraceptives in the women’s sphere, which they achieved by mirroring the successful style of the FPA film.

## Approaching the LRC film: notes on sources

In recent years, scholars have paid attention to films at the intersection of education, science, and industry (Bonah & al., 2020; Bonah & al., 2018; Olszynko-Gryn & al., 2017; Mitman & al.,

2016; Bonah & al., 2015; Curtis, 2015; Gaycken, 2015; Ostherr, 2013; Oregon & Streible, 2012; Hediger & Vonderau, 2009; Boon, 2008; de Pastre-Robert & al., 2004). Faye Riley, for example, has applied the micro-history approach to her examination of the Centron company, which made both industrial and educational films, reading the inner dynamics of the organisation as key to its overall success (Riley, 2009, p. 222). This article takes a similar micro-history approach to the production activities of both the FPA and the LRC, in order to understand the purpose and function of LRC films as the contraceptive market changed in the 1960s. By plotting the company’s output against motivations for commissioning, I argue that LRC films were produced to counter-balance FPA activity, and as part of a strategic plan to turn women against the pill. Close reference is made to the FPA film *Birthright* (1958), its never-made sequel *Happy Families*, and the two LRC films currently available for home viewing, namely: *According to Plan* and *Learning to Live* (both 1964)<sup>8</sup>, but representational analysis is otherwise kept to a minimum in order that a fuller assessment of how LRC films were devised and

<sup>6</sup> Parliamentary and Public Policy Sub-Committee, minutes, 22 March 1950. FPA/A5/45.

<sup>7</sup> Interview on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1954, with Mrs Smith of Messers Campbell-Johnson. FPA/A17/2.

<sup>8</sup> *According to Plan* can be viewed via the website of the Wellcome Library, London [URL: <https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b2847868x>]. *Learning to Live* and *Birthright* are available on the British Film Institute DVD box set of sex education films, “The Birds and the Bees”. *Learning to Live* can also be seen via the Internet Archive [URL: <https://archive.org/details/LearningToLive>]. *Responsibility*, which is mentioned briefly at the end of this paper, can be seen by appointment at the Wellcome Library.

exhibited might be presented (Prelinger, 2009, p. 213).

Unfortunately, most LRC films are lost and there is no centralised archive for the company. Written documentary evidence is therefore drawn from several sources including the internal staff magazine, *London Image*, which has kindly been loaned to the author from the private collection of Angela Wagstaff, a former LRC staff member. Additional information has been gathered from Annual Reports publicly available from the City Business Library, Guildhall, London, and the 1974 Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) report on LRC, *Contraceptive Sheaths. A Report on the Supply of Contraceptive Sheaths in the United Kingdom*. Market research has proved a fruitful resource, and I use those produced for LRC by Ernest Dichter Associates (EDA), an American “motivational research” outfit that opened a London office in the early 1960s. These were obtained from the Hagley Museum and Archive, Delaware. Additional extracts from audience surveys have been taken from *London Image*, and one other market research report by The Pulse London was found in the FPA archive, which is held at the Wellcome Library. The FPA archive has been especially useful for researching both the FPA itself and for LRC, about whom the FPA kept a set of “manufacturer’s files” detailing select correspondence. The file on *Birthright*, and the treatment for the never-made sequel, *Happy Families*, are also taken from the FPA archive. An interview conducted

with the filmmaker Sarah Erulkar by the British Entertainment History Project has also been used. The overall shape of this article is drawn from a recent screening and discussion of *According to Plan*, presented by the author at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2018, and constitutes the extension of a short blog post written for the Wellcome Library, London, to mark that particular film’s digitisation in 2016<sup>9</sup>.

## The LRC film unit

The creation of LRC’s Film Unit in the 1960s stemmed from its strained relationship with FPA. As the main social provider of cut-price contraceptives (and advice on birth control, sexual health, and the psychological aspects of sexual and family life), the FPA was formed in 1930 by amalgamating pre-existing birth control societies from around the country<sup>10</sup>. A female-run organisation with a feminist agenda, the FPA’s early focus was the provision of birth control for poor wives (Cook, 2004, pp. 275-277). So far as the actual organisation was concerned, the majority of the FPA’s medical officers, staffers, and committee members were

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<sup>9</sup> [URL: <https://history.lshtm.ac.uk/2018/09/04/film-according-to-plan-1964/>] and [URL: <http://blog.wellcomelibrary.org/2016/10/making-and-marketing-condoms/>].

<sup>10</sup> The FPA was initially named the National Birth Control Council (NBCC), which federated pre-existing clinic organisations in 1930, becoming the “FPA” in 1939. The Association was liquidated in June 2019.

middle class women. A focus on female methods meant that condoms were simply less valued than women's contraceptive methods at the FPA. This was in spite of the fact that the majority of British couples left contraception to men (Peel & Potts, 1969, p. 59; Lafitte, 1962, p. 16). Generally speaking, FPA clinics would supply condoms on request, but the use of female methods was preferred. For example, a survey undertaken by an FPA working party in 1959 found that clinics recommended diaphragms to over 97.5 per cent of clients (Cook, 2004, p. 276, n. 21). Aside from diaphragms, FPA-approved methods of birth control included caps and spermicides during the 1930s-1950s, oral contraceptives from early 1962, and the Intra Uterine Device, or "IUD", from 1965. As well as being the main social provider, the FPA operated as a pressure group in order to advocate for contraception (Wootton, 1975, p. 98). To this end, it shrewdly engineered its public image, becoming the go-to media consultancy in all matters reproductive, for family well-being, and for sexual health over the 1950s and 1960s<sup>11</sup>.

LRC, on the other hand, was a purely commercial outfit that sold condoms for profit. Having started as a wholesaler of imported rubber goods in 1915, LRC pioneered the British production of dipped latex condoms in 1932 (in association with Lucian Landau and British Latex Products), becoming the UK's biggest

maker by the post-war period (Borge, 2020). As the monopoly manufacturer of Durex and other condoms, LRC distributed to all segments of the marketplace, although most of its condoms were sold in barbershops, hygiene or "rubber" shops, and chemist's shops<sup>12</sup>. That LRC's product catered to single persons was well known, but it did not make commercial sense to discourage the extra-marital trade. However, the association of free availability of condoms with the free availability of sex meant that the condom's reputation – which had long been linked to extra-marital intercourse, vice, and disease – did not improve. Condom perception was especially poor among married women, with some feeling that "*the use of a condom may symbolise their degradation to the status of prostitute*" (Draper, 1965, pp. 124-125). Market research corroborated this idea. Using birth control in the pursuit of pleasure, market researchers said, "*symbolise[d] a permissiveness towards sexuality which arouses guilt*"<sup>13</sup>. Respondents to the market research revealed either directly or indirectly that they thought contraceptives indecent, "*that these have a cheapening effect on one, or make one feel like a prostitute, in the case of women*"<sup>14</sup>.

LRC had been aware of the reputational issues surrounding male and female contraceptives since the 1930s, when it began courting the FPA, supplying them

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<sup>11</sup> Services excluded venereal disease treatment or advice, which was dealt with by public health authorities.

<sup>12</sup> MMC, Contraceptive pills, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> EDA, 1380c, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

with cheap diaphragms and caps, even though these items never made a profit because the sale of 1 diaphragm equated to 100 condoms<sup>15</sup>. Understandably, LRC pursued condoms over diaphragms as they sold more, but the FPA pushed contraceptive-seeking couples towards the long-lasting diaphragm<sup>16</sup>. The problem, then, was to make condoms acceptable to couples, and especially to women consumers as this sector of the market grew. It was really in respect of the FPA's capacity for arousing public sympathy (rather than as a financial motivation, as suggested in Szuhan, 2018, p. 500) that LRC pursued a business relationship with them. Contraception was not widely discussed in the 1950s, and the condom was thought of as especially "unmentionable" (Wilson & West, 1981, p. 99). Commercial brand advertising via mainstream channels was virtually impossible because, as the market research showed, consumers were opposed to it<sup>17</sup>. The FPA, on the other hand, was able to give public voice to the broad idea of planning one's family, precisely because it was perceived as non-profit and was accepted by consumers<sup>18</sup>. From 1955, the FPA had been running a public relations

image programme designed to achieve positive public exposure in mass media (Borge, 2019; Borge, 2017b, pp. 185-221). It therefore served LRC to attach itself to the FPA because, as Angus Reid said: "*What is good for birth control is good for London Rubber.*" (Peel, 1963, p. 124)

News media interest in the FPA was slow at first, but it gradually became media savvy and set about learning the art of public relations (Bingham, 2009, p. 83). In November 1955, the FPA staged a successful publicity event at its flagship branch clinic in North Kensington, wherein the Minister of Health, Ian MacLeod, paid a well-publicised visit (Bingham, 2009, pp. 83-84; Evans, 1984, p. 163). The event generated unprecedented attention from print media and broadcasters (Leathard, 1980, p. 94). Thereafter, the FPA featured on at least one BBC television or radio broadcast per year between 1955 and 1960<sup>19</sup>. Finances were nonetheless tight so LRC stepped in to fund select aspects of the FPA's publicity campaigns, aiming to capitalise on public receptivity to positive family planning messages.

Scholars sometimes balk when they discover that educational or PR materials (such as films), for what are commonly perceived to be social causes, have been

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<sup>15</sup> EDA, 1739e: *Some Remarks on the Questions Raised on the Contraceptive Research*, London, EDA, 1961. Ernest Dichter papers and research reports, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Diaphragms were hand tested and finished, which was labour intensive. They came in different sizes, each of which required the fabrication of individual steel moulds. FPA and LRC, correspondence, 1948-1952, FPA/A7/74].

<sup>17</sup> EDA, 1739e, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> EDA, 1380c, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

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<sup>19</sup> Author's survey of broadcasts, ongoing work undertaken as part of the Body Capital project, Département d'Histoire des Sciences de la Vie et de la Santé, Université de Strasbourg [URL: <http://bodycapital.unistra.fr/en/>].

sponsored by corporations (Taylor, 2009, p. 27; Eberwein, 1999, pp. 175-180). But the corporate funding of well-established family planning organisations was not only commonplace, but also necessary for their survival (Holz, 2012). Between 1959 and 1961, LRC contracted a PR officer, Dai Hayward, and supplied him free of charge to the FPA for their own use. Initially working at the flagship North Kensington branch<sup>20</sup>, Hayward was then taken in-house at LRC and loaned out to FPA clinics as required<sup>21</sup>. LRC also paid for items of FPA propaganda, including a double page spread in the tenth anniversary issue of *Family Doctor* magazine in 1961, which listed all 300 FPA clinics<sup>22</sup>. LRC funded a prestigious International Planned Parenthood Federation meeting at the Hyde Park Hotel via the FPA<sup>23</sup>, and provided £350 for the FPA to advertise on the London Underground<sup>24</sup>. The FPA undoubtedly benefitted from the publicity boost; by the end of the 1950s, 59 per cent of respondents questioned for a Gallup poll were aware of what the FPA did, and over half approved of contraception<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Pyke to Mrs Nicholls, November 16<sup>th</sup> 1959. FPA/A7/79.

<sup>21</sup> Mrs Parker to all Area Organisers, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1960. FPA/A7/76.

<sup>22</sup> Brigadier Elstone to A. R. Reid, January 9<sup>th</sup> 1961; Reid to Elstone, 17 January 1961. FPA/A7/80.

<sup>23</sup> Reid to Russell Brain, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1961. FPA/A7/78.

<sup>24</sup> Reid to Clifford-Smith, February 9<sup>th</sup> 1960. FPA/A7/78.

<sup>25</sup> 13 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women disapproved. 30/35 per cent “*didn’t know*”. Gallup, cited in EDA, 1380c, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

## A necessary relationship: LRC, the FPA, and the intervention of film

### The FPA propaganda film, *Birthright*

LRC’s biggest one-off contribution was a gift of £1000 for the FPA’s prestige propaganda film, *Birthright* (Basic Films & Samaritan Films, 1958)<sup>26</sup>. The idea for a film came at the beginning of the FPA’s publicity drive in the mid-1950s<sup>27</sup>. Production began in summer 1957, under ex-Shell Film Unit director Sarah Erulkar (1923-2015), who also penned the script<sup>28</sup>. At 25 minutes, *Birthright* was the first British short on birth control theory, the first full-length feature having been the Marie Stopes publicity

<sup>26</sup> The projected cost was £4,300. The FPA also received donations from other contraceptive companies, namely Ortho, British Drug Houses, Rendell and Coates and Cooper. See Elstone to Reid, 2 April 1958 FPA/A7/78.] Basic Films was a British production house founded in the 1940s. Samaritan was “*an independent production company whose specialisms included charities and government*”, see [URL: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-something-to-offer-1969-online>] and [URL: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-near-home-1949-online>].

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Raphael, “A New Film for the F.P.A: Memorandum to National Executive Committee Meeting 19/7/62”. FPA/A17/38.

<sup>28</sup> Erulkar is an interesting if under-researched figure, who contributed to over 80 films in a career that spanned 40 years. Erulkar began in the Shell Film Unit, going on to take commissions from, among others, the Central Office of Information, the National Coal Board Film Unit, the Gas Council, the General Post Office (GPO). Her film *The History of the Helicopter* (1953) won best short film at the Venice festival, and *Picture to Post* won a Bafta in 1970 (“Sarah Erulkar obituary”, *The Guardian*, Monday June 15<sup>th</sup> 2015).



vehicle *Maisie's Marriage* (1923), which was produced to promote her 1918 book, *Married Love*. But despite the 35-year gap between films, *Birthright's* message was essentially the same as *Maisie's Marriage*: large, poor families cause misery, and this was a just rationale for spacing children (Cranston & McGahan, 2010, pp. 239-240). In *Birthright*, this sentiment is expressed through the contrasting presentation of spacious vs. overcrowded homes and happy vs. crying children, comparing the wanted baby with the unwanted, "Every Child a Wanted Child" being the FPA's slogan<sup>29</sup>. "After a shot of a large, and happy, family we see a dreary view of a dismal room, many ill-kept children and their mother – pregnant again", the description reads. Other FPA services, such as sex counselling, were featured in the film. "A view of a marriage welfare centre where the patient talks to the doctor about sex troubles", says the description, "shows how naturally these are brought to light during family planning work."<sup>30</sup> Beautifully produced to high technical standards under Erulkar's thoughtful and experienced hand, *Birthright* was a prestigious picture designed to cement the public image of the FPA as a rational, sensitive, and above all humane organisation. LRC was ready

to benefit from this prestige and helped with promotion. In 1960, for example, it assisted the Darlington branch with a screening when Hayward arranged a press conference with refreshments, sent stories to newspapers in Teesside, and partially covered the cost of invitations<sup>31</sup>. LRC also paid for the tea reception at a prestigious House of Commons screening, which over 50 MPs attended<sup>32</sup>. "It was quite clear from this event that we have very much powerful and influential support in Parliament among all political parties", said the FPA's 1960-1961 Annual Report. "The film continues to be very popular among sophisticated and discerning audiences."<sup>33</sup>

Political support of the FPA's activities was one of the key aims of the film in order to fulfil the FPA's lobbyist ambitions, though popular acceptance of the concept of family planning was just as important. To this end, *Birthright* was distributed through the Central Office of Information, which had 21,000 registered borrowers and took 4,000 film bookings each month<sup>34</sup>. A copy was also placed in the permanent archives of the British Film Society, "an honour reserved only for British films of exceptional merit and

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<sup>29</sup> One of the unhappy, crying slum children in *Birthright* was, in fact, Erulkar's own eighteen-month-old daughter. Erulkar tore off her ballerina tutu, making the child cry, to get the shot. Interview No. 187, Sarah Erulkar (de Normanville). British Entertainment History Project [URL: <https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/sarah-erulkar-de-normanville-0>].

<sup>30</sup> *Family Planning* 8(1), April 1959, p. 17.

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<sup>31</sup> Hayward to Mrs Parker, February 15<sup>th</sup> 1960. FPA/A7/79.

<sup>32</sup> Elstone to Reid, March 9<sup>th</sup> 1961. FPA/A7/80.

<sup>33</sup> "The FPA Film", 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 1960-1961, 1<sup>st</sup> Draft. FPA/A5/9.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, Honorary Officers Sub-Committee, January 7<sup>th</sup> 1960. FPA/A5/9.

interest”<sup>35</sup>. By 1962, 145 FPA branches had held screenings, and over 138 individual organisations such as hospitals, colleges, temperance societies, health conferences and film festivals had showed it. Copies were circulated as far afield as Australia, Barbados, Sri Lanka, Germany, Holland, Jamaica, South Korea, Malaysia, Norway, Scotland, Singapore, and Yugoslavia<sup>36</sup>. Finally, although *Birthright* was not shown on television, the FPA sold 35ft of live sperm footage to Granada TV for £8.15, the sperm having been provided by cameraman Wolfgang Suschitzky (Cranston & McGahan, 2010, p. 240)<sup>37</sup>.

In return for sponsorship, LRC expected concessions in its supply relationship with the FPA, such as an extra effort by clinics to sell condoms, but this reciprocal “push” of LRC products never materialised<sup>38</sup>. Nor did the FPA make any special allowance for the use of its good name in LRC’s own advertising, even after funding FPA publicity. Resistance to for-profit commerce had been ingrained at the FPA since the 1930s (Löwy, 2011, p. 255; Evans, 1984, p. 146). LRC continued to support projects such as *Birthright*, but the winds of change finally came with the pill. Searle’s Conovid, the first oral contraceptive sold in England, became available on private prescription in January 1961, through the National

Health Service in December, and at FPA clinics from January 1962. Whilst the pill itself made a gradual impact on the British contraceptive market, the concept of oral contraception captured the public imagination and created a thirst for information. The British press certainly clamoured to cover it (Bingham, 2004, p. 82), and those who had been leasing *Birthright* demanded a more up-to-date film<sup>39</sup>.

### ***Happy Families: Birthright's never made sequel***

Once the FPA had accrued six months of hands-on experience with the new pill in clinics, it elected to produce a colour sequel to *Birthright*, provisionally titled *Happy Families*. Erulkar was commissioned to devise the treatment. Brigadier Elstone, who was at that time in charge of FPA propaganda, made overtures to manufacturers to help fund it<sup>40</sup>. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of traditional contraceptive companies – among them decades-old makers of condoms, caps, jellies, and vaginal pessaries – had waned. The new pharmaceutical pill might conceivably wipe traditional contraceptives off the market, and yet Erulkar’s treatment for *Happy Families* specifically foregrounded it. In one sequence, the audience is introduced to Mrs James, who lives in a caravan. Erulkar’s treatment says:

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35 “The FPA Film”, *loc. cit.*

36 Raphael, “A New Film”, *loc. cit.*

37 Granada TV and FPA, correspondence, April-July 1961, FPA/A17/44.

38 Reid to FPA, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1951. FPA/A7/74.

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39 Raphael, “A New Film”, *loc. cit.*

40 *Ibid.*

She has a devoted husband and two very small children [...]. The family is saving up for a house, which they hope to achieve before they embark on any more children. The normal forms of birth control are an embarrassment to them in the restricted lives they lead in the caravan community. With a great deal of hesitation, and much reluctance, she visits a clinic. Through an interview which we listen to and with flashbacks to her life in the caravan, we learn about the pill and conclude that it is the answer to Mrs James' problems.<sup>41</sup>

Erulkar was clearly following a remit to showcase the FPA's unique relationship with the pill.

However, it stood contrary to common sense for Britain's monopoly condom manufacturer to sponsor such a film, where traditional contraceptives were described as "*an embarrassment*". That market research actually corroborated consumer's sense of discomfiture was beside the point: condoms sold well whether they were embarrassing or not: posing them as a problem for which oral contraceptives were the solution was something else entirely. LRC forwent the opportunity to sponsor *Happy Families* in the first instance, announcing that it was going to make its own films instead<sup>42</sup>. The company did, however, briefly reconsider its position, dangling the possibility of funding before the FPA under the

proviso that *Happy Families*, if made, would make a "*balanced presentation*" of contraceptive options<sup>43</sup>. It was under this promise that the FPA released Erulkar's confidential script to the company<sup>44</sup>. In the event, *Happy Families* was never produced due to a misunderstanding over the cost. By February 1963, Elstone had raised £3,700 of the £4,000 required, but Samaritan Films thought this "*quite insufficient for a film which would in any way compare with the standard set by 'Birthright', and thought that the true figure required would be something of the order of £7000*"<sup>45</sup>. Evidently, Erulkar had taken the agreed £4k figure to be but a starting point, whilst the FPA had grossly underestimated the cost of making a high-quality film in colour<sup>46</sup>.

### All change at LRC

Meanwhile, LRC headquarters in Chingford, North London, had been a hive of activity. Careful investment in financial and material infrastructure in the 1950s came to fruition in 1960s, coinciding with changes in the marketplace. For LRC, the 1960s was characterised "*by diversification, the levelling out of profits, and the end of reliance on the condom as*

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41 "An idea for a film for the Family Planning Association by Sarah Erulkar". February 1962. FPA/A17/38.

42 Elstone to Reid, August 21<sup>st</sup> 1962. FPA/A7/82.

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43 Elstone and Reid, correspondence, May-September 1962, FPA/A7/82.

44 Elstone to Reid, September 25<sup>th</sup> 1962. FPA/A7/82.

45 "Notes of meeting between FPA and Samaritan Films, 2nd Feb 1963". FPA/A17/38.

46 *Ibid.*

*the company's main form of income*"<sup>47</sup>. LRC's trading areas were diversified as company structure was reorganised, and it branched out by creating or acquiring new business interests, forming subsidiaries abroad, and intensifying British marketing<sup>48</sup>. LRC had absorbed many diverse interests by the end of the 1960s including tooth powder, photographic sundries, and disposable underpants. But although the aim was to decrease dependency on the condom, the building up of LRC's additional businesses took time and new business did not contribute to profits immediately. In fact, condoms funded these ventures, and for all intents and purposes LRC still depended on them<sup>49</sup>. From 1955, the company "*became increasingly aware of the threat posed by the contraceptive pill to the sheath business*", but at this stage the real-world impact of the pill could only be guessed at<sup>50</sup>. To this end, the company anticipated both positive and negative ramifications. On the positive side was the wider, global acceptance of contraceptive practice linked to population worries, which LRC set out to exploit. The negative implication lay in the not knowing. "*We live in a changing world*", LRC Chair Elkan Jackson stated cautiously in 1959, "*and one hesitates to forecast*"<sup>51</sup>.

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47 "Well Protected", *The Economist*, Saturday August 27<sup>th</sup> 1966.

48 LRC Limited, *Report and Accounts*, 1959, p. 4.

49 "Take a new look at LRC International Limited," share prospectus, February 1975. FPA/C/F/7/1/5.

50 MMC, *Contraceptive pills*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

51 LRC Limited, *Report and Accounts*, 1959, p. 5.

## LRC's lost "Filmlets"

So far as films were concerned, LRC was not without experience. Such was the company's intention to exploit the FPA publicity it had partially created in the 1950s, that it had been concurrently working on a suite of four 30-second "filmlets" promoting its booklet, "Planned Families", as *Birthright* was being made<sup>52</sup>. The "filmlet" was a form of advertising used exclusively in cinemas by the likes of Cadbury's chocolate and Surf washing powder, which emerged between the end of World War II and the beginning of commercial television advertising, which started in Britain in 1955. According to Alison Payne, filmlets were "*a low status of cinema film*" forming the "*dregs*" of Britain's film production industry. On the whole, the filmlet was a way for large advertising agencies to soak up remaining budgets for their biggest clients, which could not otherwise be expended on the printed press advertising. Cadbury and Surf were big enough to have surplus budget, but few brands used the filmlet in this way (Payne, 2016, pp. 63, 75, 194). For LRC, however, advertising in the printed press was already restricted (Wilson & West, 1981, pp. 99-100; Peel, 1963, p. 124). The company was not short of money<sup>53</sup>, and filmlets therefore offered a test bed for trying the moving image as a means

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52 "List of screenings". FPA/A7/78.

53 John Harvey, former LRC Sales Manager, in conversation with author, Chingford, London, December 8<sup>th</sup> 2016.

of promotion and “disarming” future criticism in the process<sup>54</sup>.

Unfortunately, LRC’s early “Planned Families” filmlets are not currently available, the cinema advert being an inherently ephemeral form. It is therefore impossible to comment on their content, except to say that, rather than explicitly advertising condoms, the filmlets were intended to alert audiences to the availability of LRC’s “Planned Families” booklet, which could be obtained via mail order, or in chemist’s shops<sup>55</sup>. LRC managed to overcome some initial objection to its four filmlets, which were screened in sequence across London between May and July 1958, prior to the premiere of *Birthright*<sup>56</sup>. This meant that they were being seen in conjunction with such mainstream hit features as *South Pacific*, *A Night to Remember*, *Dracula*, and *Ice Cold in Alex*, which were being shown in British cinemas at this time<sup>57</sup>. The advertising of “Planned Families” thus achieved, the secondary function of LRC’s filmlets was to induce the FPA to collaborate on a joint filmlet and booklet, intended for national distribution. As ever, the idea was that LRC might piggy-back FPA’s reputation to advertise its own

products. Angus Reid wrote: “*It would be based, maybe, on Family Planning Association activities, perhaps something to the effect that the Family Planning Association exists to give advice to those who wish to plan their families [...] If the Family Planning Association does seek additional publicity, I can think of no better way of attaining it than by means of the film presentation I suggest.*”<sup>58</sup> LRC had high hopes for the potential collaboration, promising that, “*On a national basis it would be shown in something like 3,000 cinemas and reach 30 millions of people*”<sup>59</sup>. Reid was also sure to state the cost of such an enterprise, being in the region of £15,000-£20,000, a staggering amount that LRC could well afford, but that the FPA could not dream of<sup>60</sup>. But although collaboration would have allowed the FPA to maximise exposure for *Birthright*, it drew the line at being exhibited alongside commercial manufacturers, and no such collaboration materialised. This toing and froing over joint publicity, which had begun in the 1950s when LRC started paying for FPA publicity, came to an end when *Happy Families* was dropped. By this time, LRC had realised its initial filmlet project and watched *Birthright*’s ascent. In lieu of uptake in popular mass media, market research had recommended the use of films for condom promotion<sup>61</sup>. Thus equipped,

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<sup>54</sup> Reid to Clifford-Smith, September 4<sup>th</sup> 1958. FPA/A7/78.

<sup>55</sup> The booklet itself came in a sealed envelope and dealt with the idea of family planning in a broad sense that linked to world population worries but offering Durex coupons at the very end.

<sup>56</sup> *Birthright* was first screened on December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1958. Distribution began in April 1959.

<sup>57</sup> [URL: <https://www.filmdates.co.uk/films/year/1958/>].

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<sup>58</sup> Reid to Clifford-Smith, September 4<sup>th</sup> 1958. FPA/A7/78.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> EDA, 1739e, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

LRC parted ways with the FPA to begin production for itself.

### Strategic production at LRC

In 1962, LRC set up the London Foundation for Marriage Education trust (LFME), which was plainly a front organisation (Borge, 2020; Borge 2017b, pp. 352-353; Taylor, 2009, p. 27). At the FPA, Elstone claimed it was “*clearly a tax dodging operation*”<sup>62</sup>. The LFME was nonetheless a tax efficient means for LRC to fund outside activities, such as filmmaking<sup>63</sup>. According to LRC, the LFME’s purpose was “*to disseminate information on family planning*”<sup>64</sup>. As such, the LFME became LRC’s film production arm, operating on an initial budget of £10,000, with a remit to promote the use of “*mechanical*” contraceptives<sup>65</sup>. Production was outsourced to Eothen films, which was headed by Guy Fergusson and Dr. Philip Sattin<sup>66</sup>. Sattin (1923-1973), a

practicing doctor with a General Practice surgery in North London, began making films after being given a movie camera for a wedding gift<sup>67</sup>. A few years later, he gave up his medical practice to concentrate on film<sup>68</sup>. By the time the LFME was begun, Eothen had established a trademark style of filming in and around north London, using non-actors and real locations, which was replicated in the LRC films<sup>69</sup>.

Current availability of *Learning to Live* and *According to Plan* is due to the fact that both won Silver Awards in the British Medical Association (BMA) annual film competition in 1964<sup>70</sup>. Qualification for BMA film prizes was an important motivation for LRC’s venture into expensive colour film production. As well as being ignored by mass media, condoms had never been accepted by medical authorities (Peel, 1964, p. 133). The pill, on the other hand, required the cooperation of doctors as it was only available via prescription, meaning that oral contraceptives had the attention of two

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<sup>62</sup> Elstone to Lady Burrell, September 25<sup>th</sup> 1962. FPA/A13/40.

<sup>63</sup> LRC was forced to learn about foundations when it was obliged to set one up as a conduit for channelling payments to Queen Elizabeth College (for research into a non-hormonal pill) in February 1961, under section 355 of the Income Tax Act (Queen Elizabeth College Archive, King’s College London Archives, QAS/GPF3/1).

<sup>64</sup> MMC, Contraceptive pills, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> “The Rise and Fall of an Undercover Pressure Group”, *Sunday Times Insight*, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1965.

<sup>66</sup> Eothen’s General Anesthesia in a Caesarean Section won Gold at the British Medical Association’s 1963 Film Awards. See “Medical News”, *British Medical Journal*, vol. 1, issue 5347, 1963, p. 1748.

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<sup>67</sup> Interview No. 398, Vivienne Collins, British Entertainment History Project [URL: <https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/vivienne-collins>].

<sup>68</sup> John Marks, *The NHS – Beginning, Middle and End? The Autobiography of Dr John Marks*, London, CRC Press, 2017, p. 50. My thanks to Angela Saward, Wellcome, for directing me towards these information sources for Eothen.

<sup>69</sup> For a comparable film, see *To Janet a Son?* (Eothen, 1962), which was made for The Royal College of Midwives and sponsored by Farley’s, makers of baby foods [URL: <https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b28641735>].

<sup>70</sup> *British Medical Journal Supplement*, London, Saturday February 29<sup>th</sup> 1964, p. 56.

target markets to which condoms, historically, had limited access: women and prescribing doctors. Pharmaceutical companies had been making films to advertise their products since the 1930s (Essex-Lopresti, 1998a, p. 9). In the 1960s, it was natural to use this established medium to promote the pill. For example, Searle's colour short *Peace of Mind* was vigorously promoted around the country in March 1965 using placed press releases in regional newspapers such as the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* and the *Birmingham Sunday Mirror*<sup>71</sup>. That October, *Peace of Mind* was looped at the London Nursing Exhibition, in conjunction with demonstrations of Searle's new 21-day pill, Ovulen<sup>72</sup>. As such, the LFME was also begun as an extension of LRC's new Medical Division, which was formed to address the problem of doctor's resistance to the condom, and to train and deploy medical sales reps to convert them. LFME/LRC films were thereby pitched as direct competition for oral contraceptive trade shorts, in addition to trying to educate<sup>73</sup>.

So far as competitions were concerned, LRC's decision to go into film production via the LFME coincided with the BMA's drive to widen participation in its annual awards from 1963 (Last & Robertson, 1998, p. 57). According to Zimmer-

mann, it was often the case that industrial films "were designed as prestige objects of the commissioning corporation, which strove to represent its economic power through innovative film form and technique" (Zimmermann, 2009, p. 113). This certainly seems to have been the case here, in that winning BMA prizes benefitted the LFME's overall aim by giving the films – and, by extension, LRC – official recognition by the medical establishment. Award-winning entrants won the right to display a certificate of achievement on prints of the films, proving their medical legitimacy. BMA prizes also won films a spot in the BMA lending library. Not only would they be loaned out to doctors, but they would also be recommended for programming at international medical conferences by the BMA's Film Committee (Last & Robertson, 1998, p. 56). A reason for instigating medical film competitions, which had begun in Paris in 1953, was to encourage the production of good films (Essex-Lopresti, 1998b, p. 54; Last & Robertson, 1998, p. 56)<sup>74</sup>. For the BMA, the annual prize offered a direct means of expanding its lending library (Last & Robertson, 1998, p. 56). In 1964, LRC's *Learning to Live* and *According to Plan* were added, alongside shorts made by such established "pharma" firms as Glaxo Laboratories Ltd., Parke, Davis and Co. Ltd and Sandoz Product Ltd, but of those added that year, only the LFME's films

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<sup>71</sup> Press Clippings, FPA/A17/99.

<sup>72</sup> "You'll find 'Peace of Mind' at stand D2", *Nursing Mirror*, October 15<sup>th</sup> 1965, p. 67.

<sup>73</sup> "Film Shows by the Thousand: LRCI's Educational Film Unit", *London Image*, Autumn 1966, p. 9.

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<sup>74</sup> *La Presse Médicale* ran an annual film prize, « Le Prix annuel du Cinéma Médico-Chirurgical », from 1953. The BMA's competition, and also the Scientific Film Association competition, ran in Paris from 1957 (Essex-Lopresti, 1998b, p. 54).

dealt with family planning<sup>75</sup>. This meant that borrowers requesting the latest films on family planning in 1964 would be given an LFME/LRC film.

## LRC films and their audiences

### The youth audience

As Lutz Sauerteig and Roger Davidson have pointed out, “*the history of sex education enables us to gain valuable insights into the cultural construction of what society perceived and prescribed as ‘normal’ sexuality*” (Sauerteig & al., 2009, p. 1). The sex education film can also indicate where corporate stakeholders sought to intercede in sexual norms, or to uphold them. In terms of competing with films from pharmaceutical manufacturers promoting oral contraceptives, the LFME/LRC differentiated itself by aiming for younger, pre-married audiences. As contraceptive users of the future, older school children and teenagers were an especially important target group. Market research suggested that LRC would benefit from educating teenagers in the value of contraceptive techniques<sup>76</sup>. Michael Schofield’s extensive 1968 study, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*, showed that most tee-

nagers aged 13-19 had some knowledge of birth control, and that the condom was almost always known by a commercial brand-name (probably Durex), but that detailed knowledge of contraceptives among teenagers was lacking. Based on some 2000 interviews held in England, 84 per cent of boys claimed knowledge of contraception, and 82 per cent of girls. Schofield reported that the majority of teenagers with experience of sexual intercourse did not use contraceptives, and that even among these, an understanding of methods was sketchy. 83 per cent of Schofield’s teenaged respondents agreed that young people should be taught about birth control (Schofield, 1968, pp. 87-88, 139, 180, 256). This was consistent with LRC’s market research, which reported that young people desired more information<sup>77</sup>. Short, sponsored films were the logical way of meeting teenager’s responsiveness whilst priming future contraceptive users for condom consumption under the cloak of benevolence. They also filled an obvious gap in the school curriculum. At this time, decisions on whether to programme sex education for children were left up to local authorities without guidance from central government. Lesley Hall, citing James Hampshire’s work in this area, says that, “*while, by the 1960s, most major players including the National Union of Teachers, concurred sex education was a desirable thing, nobody seemed very enthusiastic about undertaking it: there is a definite sense that all parties hoped*

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<sup>75</sup> “Additions to B.M.A. Film Library” (1964), *British Medical Journal*, September 19<sup>th</sup>, p. 134.

<sup>76</sup> The Pulse London, “Family Planning Enquiry”, 1961, p. 16, Table 13. FPA Papers, FPA/A7/81.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



someone else would actually do something” (Hall, 2013, pp. 139, 161-162; Hampshire, 2005). ITV, the commercial television channel, broadcast a sex education series called *Understanding* for teenagers in 1966 (Gregory, 2015, p. 195) but this was preceded by the LFME/LRC films which were, by this time, already in circulation directly to schools (see below). Given that the BBC did not begin broadcasting schools sex education shows on television for children aged 8 upwards until 1969 (Gregory, 2015, p. 187), the LFME/LRC films equipped local authorities and individual teachers to impart the sex education information they felt should be supplied, without being responsible for the tone or degree of content.

So far as this content was concerned, *Learning to Live* and *According to Plan* were two sides of the same coin: the first dealt with sex education for 10-16 year olds without advising on specific contraceptive techniques, whilst the second gave detailed information on individual methods primarily for young adults, or as the FPA’s Cornwall representative put it, “the unconverted and the ones needing advice most urgently”<sup>78</sup>. *Learning to Live* explained the basics of the human reproductive system through animation, in parallel with a live-action story about two young teens meeting at

a youth centre dance and feeling the first stirrings of adolescent attraction. According to Mara Gregory, the film “*stirred controversy because it was produced by a condom making company*” (Gregory, 2015, p. 198, n. 57), but LRC nonetheless reported that this was their most successful film<sup>79</sup>. It was approved by the London County Council and was seen by over half a million children in schools<sup>80</sup>. *Learning to Live* won awards around the world and was praised unanimously by health authorities and medical associations, at least according to LRC<sup>81</sup>. As of 1966, over 250 screenings were organised per month through the Rank film library, and there was a waiting list of three months, despite there being 100 prints in circulation. Copies were sold throughout the world – and as far afield as Singapore and New Zealand – at £40 each<sup>82</sup>. Verbatim quotes gathered by the LFME statistician, Miss R. Harris, indicated that school children themselves were also enthusiastic. “*I think it is an excellent film. Not everyone knew all about the facts of life or even understood before. The film gives REALITY*”, one 15-year-old schoolgirl wrote. “*I think this film is the best of its kind and now understand things much more clearly*”, said another. Not all respondents to the survey felt the film particularly necessary or valuable,

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

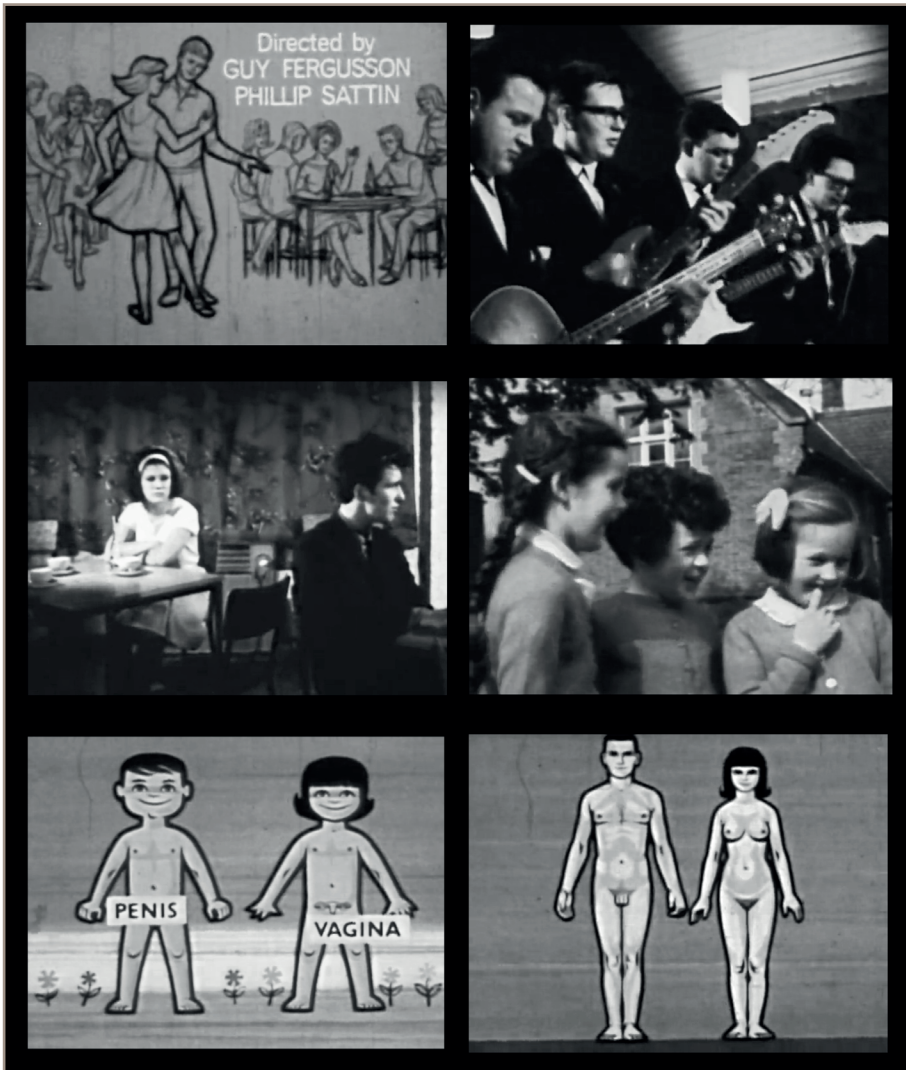
<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*; “*Learning to Live. Audience Survey Emphasises Overall Popularity of this LRC Film*”, *London Image*, Autumn/Winter 1964, p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> “*Film Shows by the Thousand*”, *loc. cit.*, p. 9.

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<sup>78</sup> “*The Pathfinders*”, *London Image*, Winter 1968-1969, p. 6-9; “*FPA Area Organiser’s Report*”, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1966, FPA/A7/81; “*Film Shows by the Thousand*”, *loc. cit.*, p. 8-9.



**Figure 1 - The teenager framed in transition from childhood to adulthood in *Learning to Live***

[UK, Eothen Films, London Foundation for Marriage Education, 1964,  
written by Guy Fergusson, directed by Guy Fergusson and Phillip Sattin]

however. Indeed, some children were forthright in their sense of offence. “*I find it intolerable, unnecessary and a source of embarrassment. It should be the duty of one’s mother, and not that of*

*an outsider*”, a 14-year-old wrote, whilst an older child of 16 said: “*I don’t think this film should have been shown to my form. The majority of this class are not ready for such a film yet. The boys are*



**Figure 2 - A focus on the inter-relatedness of happy family life with reproduction in *Learning to Live***

[UK, Eothen Films, London Foundation for Marriage Education, 1964, written by Guy Fergusson, directed by Guy Fergusson and Phillip Sattin]

*not mature enough in their minds to take it seriously.*” Other children took the pragmatic approach: “*Sex must not be taken shyly,*” felt one 14-year-old, “*as everyone must know about it sometime*

*or other; otherwise the world would not carry on.*”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> “Learning to Live. Audience Survey”, *loc. cit.*

## De/mystification for older audiences

In contrast, *According to Plan* explained all available contraceptive methods, including the pill, using animation and live action shots of contraceptives being handled. The depiction of contraceptives being touched (unwrapped, stretched, inserted, or cleansed) was especially significant, because the normalisation of appliance contraceptives, particularly the condom, also normalised the idea of genital touching. Kate Fisher's oral history study on pre-1960 contraceptive use has showed that, prior to the pill, British women preferred to leave contraceptives to their husbands, suggesting that a large number of women were not necessarily experienced with obtaining or touching condoms, or inserting female contraceptives for themselves (Fisher, 2006, pp. 59-60). Lara Marks and others (Marks, 2001, p. 196; Cook, 2004, pp. 111, 151-154) have earmarked the qualitative difference in contraceptive use as a key separator between the pill and pre-existing methods, observations that are consistent with LRC's market research, which indicated that "*Many women object to touching their own genital organs*"<sup>84</sup>.

In *According to Plan*, LRC was able to demystify appliance contraceptives by showing them being unwrapped and touched by both women and men. This

was a necessary intervention because market research said that the condom bothered many people, who thought that the pill sounded much better. "*Eighty per cent of the respondents felt that this method would do away with the 'interference,' 'messiness', and the 'complication' of the existing methods*", market researchers said<sup>85</sup>. They advised LRC to stress to the simplicity of condoms, which LRC did to the detriment of other contraceptive methods in *According to Plan*<sup>86</sup>. This was a tried and tested approach for LRC, which had long used booklets to discredit rival contraceptive methods under the guise of explaining them. "*It is hardly surprising*" one booklet read, "*that many women eventually give up on the diaphragm method and change to a method that is simpler and aesthetically more acceptable – the protective [or 'condom']*"<sup>87</sup>. Accordingly, the film depicted female contraceptives as laborious, requiring a consultation, fitting, smearing with jelly, insertion, delicate removal, and cleansing as opposed to the simple, reliable condom. The pill, in particular, was shown to require internal examination, multiple visits to the doctor, and the keeping of a personal calendar that could leave women confused.

*According to Plan* was expressly used as a vehicle for raising awareness of the condom's technical sophistica-

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Modern Family Planning*, London, Family Counsel, 1961, p. 8.

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<sup>84</sup> EDA, 1739e, *op. cit.*, p. 8; EDA, 1380c, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

tion in the face of popular opinion. Respondents to a market research pilot study were unaware of the great strides that had been made in condoms, which was especially worrying<sup>88</sup>. These great strides included Durex Gossamer, the first lubricated latex condom, and metal foiling to replace paper envelopes, both of which were launched in 1957<sup>89</sup>. These significant changes made condoms easier to use and carry; and yet they had no discernible impact on the cohort, which felt that condoms could not be changed or improved<sup>90</sup>. Researchers found “very little, if any, knowledge about modern forms of condoms such as pre-lubricated types of condoms, different and new storage and packaging facilities, new developments of safer and more convenient types of condoms”. By contrast, the “ideal” birth control method was “very definitely” thought to be the oral pill. LRC was therefore advised to “present condoms as a modern product” and to stress the existence of new developments in order to change the condom’s image<sup>91</sup>. *According to Plan* thereby showcased LRC’s state-of-the-art automated dipping plant in a balletic, 2-minute “process” montage (Gunning, 1997, pp. 9-24) with an original, orchestral soundtrack, depicting (as “process” films do) the stages of manufacture through to the end product

(Kessler & Masson, 2009, p. 80). In this way, condom production at LRC was depicted as technologically advanced and scientifically controlled. By showing the different states of the condom inside and outside of branded packaging, *According to Plan* followed market research recommendations in “discussing more freely the existence of condoms [...] and abandoning, to a large extent, the secretive way of discussing and displaying them” in order that “negative connotations might be eliminated”<sup>92</sup>. When *According to Plan* discussed the pill, the user experience was depicted as a cumbersome drain on time. Showing the many steps necessary to use it dismantled the idea of being able “to swallow a pill ‘so as to’ have sex at any time”, as described by research respondents<sup>93</sup>. The film’s concludes that “the modern protective [‘condom’] with or without spermicide meets the needs of most people” as boxes of freshly made Durex roll off of the production line, giving a lasting impression of Durex as a simple, reliable, well established and dignified contraceptive used by the majority of sensible people, without fuss.

### **The FPA’s enduring influence on the LRC film**

*According to Plan* opens and closes with shots of a contented family, happy because every child in the film has been

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<sup>88</sup> EDA, 1739e, *op. cit.*, p. 8; EDA, 1380c, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

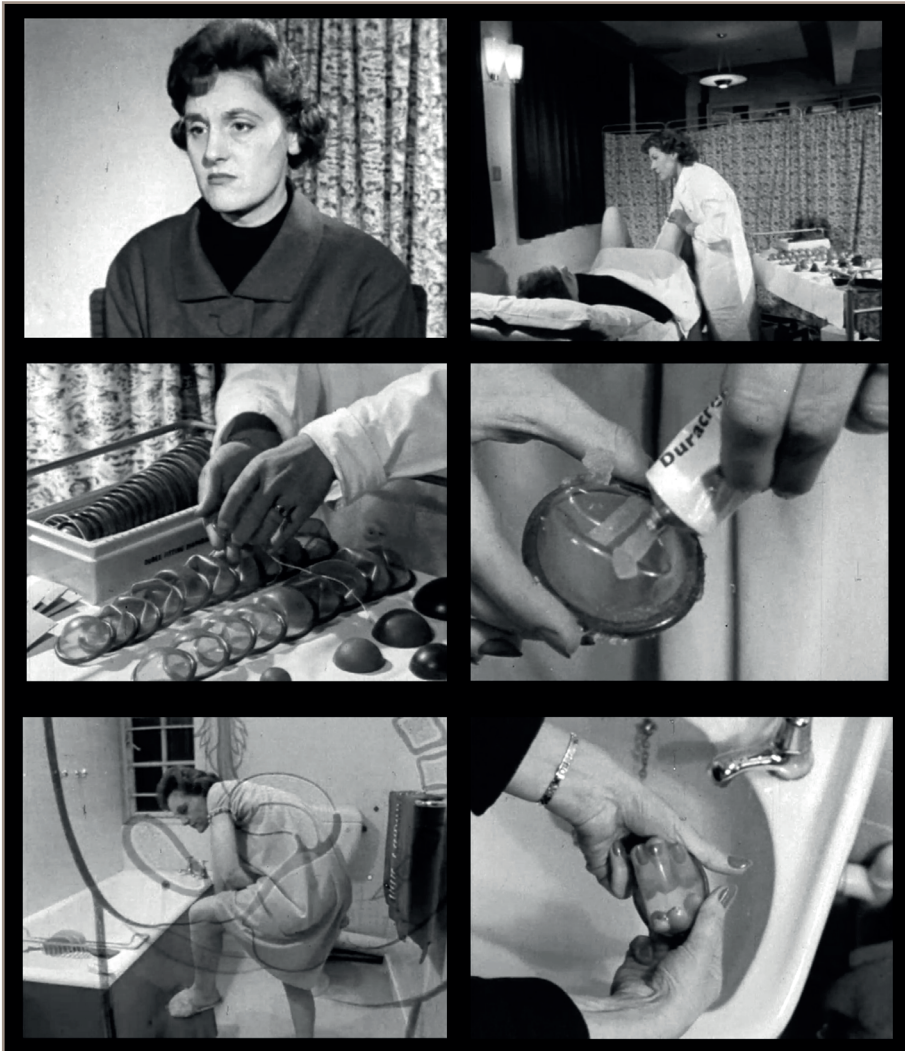
<sup>89</sup> MMC, Contraceptive pills, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>90</sup> EDA, 1380c, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.



**Figure 3 - Diaphragm fitting, prep, insertion/removal, cleansing in *According to Plan***

[UK, Eothen Films, London Foundation for Marriage Education, 1964,  
written by Guy Fergusson, directed by Guy Fergusson and Phillip Sattin]

planned and is wanted. Conceptually, the planned, happy family was the unofficial property of the FPA and allied organisations (e.g. the Population Council, and the International Planned Parenthood

Federation), which LRC and other commercial contraceptive manufacturers had long appropriated in the hope that it would generalise to their “unmentionable” products (Wilson & West, 1981,



**Figure 4 - The benefits of the technologically advanced condom against, for example, the withdrawal or coitus interruptus contraceptive technique in *According to Plan***

[UK, Eothen Films, London Foundation for Marriage Education, 1964, written by Guy Fergusson, directed by Guy Fergusson and Phillip Sattin]

p. 99). This much is evident in the catalogues of successful commercial distributors such as the mail-order house Lloyds, which depended on glossy, il-

lustrated brochures depicting beautiful children<sup>94</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> Lloyds Surgical catalogues, 1959-1968. FPA/A7/70.

So far as LRC was concerned, its “Planned Families” booklet had run to many editions and the company constantly played around with the title. The FPA was justifiably concerned that LRC booklets such as “Planned Families” and “Modern Family Planning” might be easily confused with “Family Planning Association” in the public imaginary; indeed, this was seemingly the intention<sup>95</sup>. Film offered further opportunity to attach LRC and its products to the FPA’s reputation, and to build on the audience that had been receptive to *Birthright*, and who had requested a sequel with information on up-to-date methods<sup>96</sup>. Having built up the FPA’s expectations of obtaining funding for *Happy Families*, the never-made *Birthright* sequel, LRC effectively stepped in to supply this sequel itself when it elected to make its own films.

It is impossible to say with certainty whether LRC intentionally stole ideas from Erulkar’s *Happy Families* treatment, but the sentiment presented in *Learning to Live* bears a very close resemblance to it. In *Happy Families*, Erulkar’s idea was to stress the centrality of joyful, everyday family life as a way of concluding a film that followed individuals through their treatment journeys with FPA doctors. In the final shot, Erulkar scripted a family romping in their living room where, the voice-over says: “*Contented parents mean children with secure and happy minds.*”

<sup>95</sup> “Note of conversation with Miss Gardner, Advertising Agency,” July 18<sup>th</sup> 1955. FPA/A7/75.

<sup>96</sup> FPA/A17/38.

Playful and secure, these children piggy-back and climb the father, whilst mother bounces baby on her knee. The shot is frozen, and the narrator concludes: “*and it all adds up to happy families in a healthy society.*”<sup>97</sup> In *Learning to Live*, a virtually identical scene is used to set the mood from the beginning, wherein a father rolls on the living room floor with two jolly young boys and a mother, sitting further back on a chair, plays with a toddler on her lap. Smooth-voiced actor Vernon Greeves (1924-1999)<sup>98</sup>, narrating, tells us: “*The strength of our society is – and always has been – the family. There’s no better foundation for a good life than a happy family circle.*” This is a fairly close-fitting remix of Erulkar’s treatment for *Happy Families*, and it would have made sense for LRC to follow the same line of thinking. The film’s closing lines could easily have come from the FPA, or indeed *Birthright*. “*It’s not so much a question of how to avoid babies*”, Greeves says, “*It’s a question of making sure that babies are born because they’re wanted. This, at least, we owe to our children.*” In this respect, *Learning to Live* used the sentiment of the FPA (and FPA films) to diffuse the

<sup>97</sup> “An idea for a film for the Family Planning Association”, *loc. cit.*

<sup>98</sup> Greeves was an actor and writer who had made small appearances in the British cinema, notably *Henry V* (1944), *Blackmailed* (1951) and *Time Without Pity* (1957). By the 1960s, Greeves’ deep, woody, and friendly-yet-authoritative tone led him into voice-over work for information films including *Radioactive Fallout Part I: The Overall Situation* (1960) [URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xjX\\_aoRUTQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xjX_aoRUTQ)] and *Carpets for Living* (1971). Greeves also became the voice of Rowntree’s *After Eight* mints.



sense of distaste often connected to commercial contraceptives by positing them as an apparatus for the public good.

### **Exhibition of LRC films**

Film was becoming increasingly important in international family planning education and training in the 1960s. For example, five shorts were shown at the 1963 International Planned Parenthood Federation conference on the themes of fertility planning services, sub-fertility, sex education, marriage preparation, the influence of contraception on birth rates, and the role of abortion<sup>99</sup>. Pharma companies such as Searle would continue to use film to promote the pill in England, but LRC was at an advantage because it could use screenings to give away samples of its products to anyone, not just prescribing doctors<sup>100</sup>. LRC further aimed to emulate the pattern set by its predecessors and to go one better. Whereas *Birthright* was screened at FPA clinics in the company of medical staff, and Searle's *Peace of Mind* was presented by lecturing nurses, LRC's films were toured with medically trained women lecturers who lead discussion and answered questions<sup>101</sup>. Searle's *Peace of Mind* was taken to audiences comprising pre-married groups, family planning clinics, public health departments,

health visitors, and midwives<sup>102</sup>. LRC films broadened the scope, travelling to townswomen's guilds, welfare clinics, relaxation classes, ante and post-natal groups, young farmer's clubs, health visitor's training colleges, church gatherings, H.M. Forces, nurses' training colleges, schools and further education establishments, prisons and borstals (young offenders institutions)<sup>103</sup>. In addition, LRC claimed such achievements as a seat on the sex education advisory panel of the 1968 Methodist Conference, first-time lectures on sex education at Holloway and Barlinnie prisons, and the attendance of Roman Catholic clergy at one family planning lecture<sup>104</sup>.

Nonetheless, the LFME only lasted until 1965<sup>105</sup>. It was replaced by an in-house department, the Educational Film Unit (EFU), which unlike the LFME was fully integrated into the company. The EFU exhibited films produced by the LFME during 1964-1965, and as such carried out "*an essential function in helping to promote the company's products and in informing the public about the facts of family planning*"<sup>106</sup>. The EFU was a busy and effective part of the

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<sup>99</sup> "Draft report on the IPPF 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference in Singapore", February 1963. C.P. Blacker Papers. Wellcome Library, London. PP/CPB/C.4/9.

<sup>100</sup> "FPA Area Organiser's Report", *loc. cit.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>102</sup> "You'll find 'Peace of Mind'", *loc. cit.*; Press Clippings, FPA/A17/99.

<sup>103</sup> "The Pathfinders", *loc. cit.*, pp. 4-9.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> The LFME was disbanded after it was exposed as part of a multi-platform anti-Pill offensive, which I have discussed elsewhere (Borge, 2020; Borge, 2017b, pp. 344-345, 385-392).

<sup>106</sup> "Film Shows by the Thousand", *loc. cit.*, p. 9.

company. It was run by the LRC advertising manager, Ted Corderoy, who was constantly surprised at the remarkable “*lack of knowledge*” that otherwise “*well informed people*” had on the subject of birth control. One example he gave was the case of two maternity ward nurses who thought that diaphragms had to be left permanently inside the vagina following intercourse<sup>107</sup>. Screenings were presented for free by travelling members of the EFU known as “*area film organisers*”, who were each equipped with projection equipment, backed up by a number of “*part-time lady speakers*”<sup>108</sup>. One such speaker, Doreen Perry, bought a distinctive London taxicab to move her kit around<sup>109</sup>. By 1969, the EFU comprised three full-time supervisors and 14 “*lady speakers*”. The EFU was mostly made up of women<sup>110</sup>. Screenings were really one-woman-shows accompanied by displays of LRC products and literature, refreshments, product sampling, and a lecture. The broad range of audiences made them for anecdotes<sup>111</sup>. On one occasion, national supervisor Alan Crook presented at a “*hard-of-hearing*” club with the aid of four extra-loudspeakers. “*The whole blessed building shook but the message got through*”, Crook said. “*Afterwards I answered all their questions on family planning through an expert in the art of speaking with the hands. You*

*can't imagine what some of the answers looked like!*”<sup>112</sup> On another occasion, area film organiser John Neville experienced a frightening airplane journey and was late to his screening in provincial Scotland, wherein the chairperson proposed a prayer for “*all those who travel in peril to show sex education films*”<sup>113</sup>. One especially uncomfortable presentation concerned EFU speaker Mrs Yates, who “*had the unnerving experience at a film show of walking the entire length of a prison hall, with upwards of 200 pairs of male eyes studying every step*”<sup>114</sup>.

As LRC diversified through the 1960s, so the EFU promoted LRC products other than contraceptives, including household and surgeon’s gloves, baby pants and disposable knickers<sup>115</sup>. Not all of these were consumer films: *Family Planning – A Medical Approach* offered contraceptive training for general practitioners, and *Theatre Techniques for Nurses* gave a practical illustration of LRC’s new product – disposable surgeon’s gloves – during an actual operation<sup>116</sup>. Unfortunately, comprehensive information on the EFU output is difficult to gather because, despite their apparent wide distribution, few extant examples are available. There are, however, some written accounts of *Every Baby a Wanted*

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107 *Ibid.*

108 *Ibid.*

109 “The Pathfinders”, *loc. cit.*, p. 4.

110 *Ibid.*

111 “FPA Area Organiser’s Report”, *op. cit.*

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112 “Film Shows by the Thousand”, *loc. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

113 *Ibid.*

114 *Ibid.*

115 “The Pathfinders”, *loc. cit.*

116 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

*Baby*, which describe a 35-minute film in Technicolor very similar to *According to Plan*, aimed at adult lay audiences, updated to include the Intra Uterine Device, and featuring the LRC Chairman Angus Reid's own new-born baby in the closing scene (Daines, 1970, p. 34)<sup>117</sup>. *Every Baby a Wanted Baby* was premiered to a specially invited audience as a means of showcasing LRC's expertise in, and commitment to, advanced family planning techniques. Accepting Zimmermann's observation that "Above all, it was the event that attributed the actual meaning to a film" (Zimmermann, 2009, p. 113), it is clear that LRC's exploitation of *Every Baby* was of great public relations value, both internally and externally. The film was premiered at the Millbank Tower Conference Suite, London, on the evening of Thursday 28 November 1968, introduced by Angus Reid, and was lavishly catered with a buffet and cocktails<sup>118</sup>. Among the 200 guests were senior obstetricians, gynaecologists and nurses, members of trade unions and the press, and representatives from non-profit family planning organisations such as the Brook Advisory Centre<sup>119</sup>.

The première also gave the extended LRC family (*i.e.* representatives from subsidiaries at home and abroad) an opportunity to mingle in a celebratory atmosphere that, through the film itself,

underpinned the work of their company, their respective departments, and indeed themselves, as a service to human happiness. Zimmermann has highlighted the significance of the "festive aura" of collective screenings in her study on Nestlé's 'Fip-Fop Club' movie programmes for children. "Like annually recurring family, communal, and religious festivities," Zimmermann says, "the repeated celebration of the community through film becomes a ritual to produce, confirm, and consolidate social coherence." For Nestlé, the "festive character" of film was deployed as a "social technique" applied to business, wherein the company "used the community-building power of film to develop a consumer community" (Zimmermann, 2010, pp. 294-296). The LRC EFU was formed expressly to fulfil this function, by taking festive film events to far corners of Britain, free of charge, to be shown to end-consumers, and to give them an evening out with free refreshments and samples. However, the première of *Every Baby* to a mixed audience made up of trade customers, advocates, the EFU and other LRC personnel, aimed at "community building" within the trade, and as a boost to LRC's internal culture. "It is a proud company that can boast such a dedicated team as the LRC Film Unit", read *London Image*, the company magazine. "Yet perhaps its members' greatest reward lies in the knowledge that they perform a virtually [sic] important service to the community, the realization of which is reflected in the increased clamour for sex education generally and family planning advice for potential

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*; Corderoy to Mrs F. Parker, November 26<sup>th</sup> 1968 FPA/C/F/7/1/15.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*; "The Pathfinders", *loc. cit.*, pp. 6-9.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

parents in particular.”<sup>120</sup> Clearly, it was just as important to promote the concept of the LRC condom as a service to humanity internally, as it was to convince stakeholder organisations and the end-consumer.

## Conclusion

Whether LRC films ultimately provided a “virtual” or “vital” service to the community in the context of sex education is something that needs further research. Certainly, by the beginning of the 1970s, the FPA and other social organisations in Britain, such as the Institute of Sex Education and Research in Birmingham, were producing and using film more regularly for this purpose, even as the sex education debate was becoming more adversarial (Hampshire & Lewis, 2004, p. 303)<sup>121</sup>. In the context of the LRC, however, it fits that the apex of its output occurred over a few condensed years in the mid-1960s when new contraceptive technologies were on the rise. LRC filmmaking began to drop off in common with the broader culture of British corporate sponsored documentaries more generally. “*The true fall of the British documentary film tradition*”, Patrick Russell and James Piers Taylor tell us, “*came not in the late 1940s but over the course of the 1970s, as British*

*industry, under recessionary financial procedures, began reducing investment in film, and tightening its criteria for it*” (Russell & Taylor, 2010, p. 5). LRC films were not produced to record the institutional memory of the company (Hediger & Vonderau, 2009, pp. 40-41), nor primarily to document social or business life, and so it is debatable whether they fit into the tradition of sponsored documentary shorts produced for governmental, corporate and trade bodies, which proliferated post-war (Russell & Taylor, 2010, pp. 60-100). The point nonetheless stands that the culture of the corporate film weakened as one decade turned to the next. It had also become less incumbent on LRC to agitate and problematize the acceptance of new contraceptive technologies as the governmental Committee on the Safety of Drugs, formed in 1965, delivered a report which saw half of the oral contraceptives in Britain publicly withdrawn from sale over the Christmas holidays of 1969-1970 (Marks, 2001, pp. 138-182)<sup>122</sup>. Accordingly, LRC reduced film production and touring activity, producing only one new contraceptive short, *Responsibility* (Eothen, 1976), and replacing the EFU with the less film oriented LRC Industries Contraception Information Service the same year. The company would go on to embark on smaller filmic ventures in later decades. For example, in 1990 the Durex Information Service for Sexual Health (which was the 1990s incarnation of the

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<sup>120</sup> “The Pathfinders”, *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, *Boys Talk and Girls Talk*, *Mother and Daughter: Mother and Father*, *Ave You Got a Male Assistant Please, Miss?* (FPA, 1973) and the highly controversial *Growing Up* (Global Films for The Institute for Sex Education and Research, 1971).

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<sup>122</sup> Committee on the Safety of Drugs, *Report for 1969 and 1970*, London, Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1971.

Contraceptive Information Service) produced *No Worries*, a sex education video specifically for deaf audiences<sup>123</sup> and in 1992, the Durex brand sponsored screenings of the hit American feature film *Mo' Money* (Columbia Pictures, 1992) in 42 British night clubs, following the success of similar schemes for informing young people in Holland and Italy<sup>124</sup>. For all intents and purposes, however, by the 1970s, the occasion for producing prestige pictures had passed.

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<sup>123</sup> London International Group, *Annual Report and Accounts 1990*, p. 14.

<sup>124</sup> "Safety First", *Chemist & Druggist*, December 5<sup>th</sup> 1992, p. 1021.

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