

CHARLES F. WESTOFF  
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# College Women and Fertility Values



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**COLLEGE WOMEN  
AND  
FERTILITY VALUES**



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**BY  
CHARLES F. WESTOFF  
AND  
RAYMOND H. POTVIN**

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## FOREWORD

Two surveys of the fertility of American couples conducted during the 1950's revealed an initially mystifying difference in the apparent influence of education on the fertility of Catholic and non-Catholic women.<sup>1</sup> Non-Catholic women who had completed four years of secondary schooling had about the same fertility as those with less than four years, and those who had attended college had fertility that was somewhat lower. But when the fertility of Catholic women in these educational groupings was examined, an unmistakable tendency toward higher fertility among women with more education was evident.

The researchers identified the source of this difference in pattern when they prepared separate cross tabulations of educational attainment and fertility for Catholic women whose schooling had been wholly, partly, or not at all in church-operated institutions. It then became clear that amount of education had essentially the same relation to fertility among Catholic women who had attended only secular schools as among non-Catholic women, and that the anomalous positive association involved women whose education was at least partly under Catholic auspices. The positive association was especially strong among women whose education had been wholly in Catholic institutions.

These findings left unanswered the question of whether education in American Catholic institutions tends in some way to

<sup>1</sup> One survey was the first of a series of studies of American fertility begun by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, and the other was the first phase of a continuous project conducted at the Office of Population Research, Princeton University. The findings are reported in: R. Freedman, P. K. Whelpton, and A. A. Campbell, *Family Planning, Sterility and Population Growth* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959); P. K. Whelpton, A. A. Campbell, and J. E. Patterson, *Fertility and Family Planning in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); C. F. Westoff, R. G. Potter, Jr., P. C. Sagi, and E. G. Mishler, *Family Growth in Metropolitan America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); C. F. Westoff, R. G. Potter, Jr., and P. C. Sagi, *The Third Child* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

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inculcate or strengthen attitudes favoring high fertility, or whether some process of selection causes women with high fertility predilections to seek their higher levels of education in Catholic schools. The principal purpose of the research reported in this book was to provide an answer.

The authors have not examined the effects of education on Catholic women alone. In the interest (initially) of providing relevant comparisons or statistical controls, they have analyzed the effects of various forms of college education and various differences in background on attitudes toward fertility of women of each of the principal American religious persuasions. Thus the findings of this book are a contribution to the sociology of American religion and education as well as to demography.

The authors of this book collaborated fully at every stage of their research, although the first draft of each chapter was an individual responsibility. Chapters 1-5 and 8 were drafted by Westoff; Chapters 6, 9, and 10 by Potvin; and Chapters 7, 11, and 12 were produced jointly.

ANSLEY J. COALE, *Director*  
Office of Population Research  
Princeton University

## P R E F A C E

Since this study involved the participation of students in forty-five colleges and universities, we have numerous debts of gratitude to discharge. In some instances, however, the administrator responsible for permitting us to distribute questionnaires preferred institutional anonymity. In view of this we feel we should maintain the anonymity of all institutions in our sample and simply express our appreciation to all of the presidents, deans, and professors for their splendid and frequently enthusiastic cooperation.

Our introduction to the Catholic institutions in the sample was facilitated greatly by the invaluable help of Dr. Roy J. Deferrari, Director of the Program for Affiliation, Catholic University of America, who contacted the presidents of Catholic women's colleges to secure permission for us to administer our questionnaires. The fact that we received complete cooperation from the Catholic schools is undoubtedly due in no small measure to his intervention.

During the months that we were collecting data, the study was greatly benefited by the managerial talents of Dr. Boris Karashkevych, then a research associate of the Office of Population Research, who is currently Assistant Professor of Sociology at Hollins College, Virginia. Dr. Karashkevych was responsible for most of the myriad details and logistics of the questionnaire administration, coding, and punching, and the early stages of data processing. We owe our single greatest debt of appreciation to Dr. Karashkevych.

Numerous other persons participated in the data-processing phase. Sally Ann Freedman of Peabody, Massachusetts, worked diligently as a research assistant at the Office of Population Research during the summer of 1964. W. Rudolph Struse, III, also a research assistant at the Office during the summer of 1965, prepared and processed many of the statistical analyses on the IBM 7094 at Princeton. Similar contributions were made by Millicent Taplow of the Office of Survey Research and Sta-



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tistical Studies at Princeton University and by two Princeton undergraduates, Johnson M. Hart and Orin Merrill. On a more senior level, we are grateful to Carl Helm of the Department of Psychology and Roald Buhler of the Computer Center for their help in adapting various computer programs to our needs. (This work made use of computer facilities supported in part by National Science Foundation Grant NSF-GP 579.)

On the clerical side we are indebted to Lorna Harvey and Hazel Chafey of the Office of Population Research for their manuscript typing. We would also like to acknowledge the cooperation of Dr. Robert Larson, Chairman of the Department of Sociology, Seattle University, for making available clerical help during the summer of 1965.

Last but hardly least, we would like to acknowledge the support of the Ford Foundation and the Council on Human Relations of Princeton University for a supplementary grant that facilitated the expansion of our sample. The study was conducted at the Office of Population Research, which is supported by sustaining grants from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations.

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**PART I**  
**INTRODUCTION**



## CHAPTER 1

### Background, Scope, and Method

One of the more interesting aspects of the unanticipated rise in the fertility of American women during the 1950's is that it evidently reflected a genuine shift upward in the number of children young couples considered desirable and that it coincided with types of social changes heretofore regarded as producing lower fertility—rising levels of living and increasing proportions of young persons being exposed to higher education. While social theorists have reflected occasionally on the complexity of the relations between income and fertility and the possibly changing significance of income for fertility at advanced stages of economic development, less ambiguity has characterized the assumed connections between higher education and fertility. In demographic terms, higher education is connected with lower fertility through the mechanisms of deferred marriage and greater use of the means of fertility control. In more social-psychological terms, the assumption is that persons (especially women) receiving higher education develop interests and values that compete with the attraction of home, family, and children. In addition, higher education in nonsectarian institutions is presumed to diminish religious values and, to the extent that religion and fertility are associated, a further significance for lower fertility is implied.

Concerns such as these form the main focus of the research reported in the first part of this monograph. More specifically, our interest in the influence of higher education on family-size values stems from a current study of social and psychological factors affecting fertility in the United States. This study features a longitudinal design, with a sample of mothers interviewed originally in 1957 some six months after the birth of their second child. They are currently being interviewed for a third and final time. A second series of interviews was conducted in 1960, in which the factors associated with the advent of a third child were studied. One of the prominent findings of this study was



## I. INTRODUCTION

that religion is the most important social determinant of family-size preferences as well as of actual fertility. Catholic couples expressed desires for the largest families and seem well on the way toward achieving this goal. Jewish families want the fewest children and appear to have exercised the greatest degree of control in family planning. Protestant couples fall in between these two extremes, being closer to Jewish couples in the number of children desired but more nearly similar to Catholics in their control of fertility.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of religion on fertility seems to operate primarily through its effect on the number of children desired and only secondarily through the mechanisms of fertility control. The comparatively ineffective fertility planning of Catholic couples should be viewed more as a consequence of a strong positive orientation toward large families, with a resulting casual attitude toward carefully controlled child-spacing in the earlier years of marriage, rather than as a simple result of their concentration among users of the less effective rhythm method of contraception.<sup>2</sup>

These particular findings grew out of an examination of the connections between amount of education and success in controlling fertility. Among Protestants and Jews there is some tendency for successful fertility planning to be associated with increasing education, while among Catholics, paradoxically, the opposite pattern prevails—the more educated Catholic women seem to be least successful in controlling fertility. This paradox was resolved by considering the kind of education to which a Catholic woman had been exposed, and the explanation seemed to lie in Catholic education. In other words, if the com-

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Westoff, R. G. Potter, Jr., and P. C. Sagi, *The Third Child* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> This does not imply that there would be no change in popular definitions of the ideal size of family if other methods such as the oral pill were officially approved. It also does not imply that the rhythm method is just as intrinsically effective as any other method, but it is clear that its effectiveness increases sharply when it is used following the achievement of desired family size, compared with its effectiveness in the earlier birth intervals in which spacing is the main concern.

### BACKGROUND, SCOPE, AND METHOD

parison is confined to Catholic women educated in nonsectarian schools, the relation of amount of education to fertility planning is in the same direction as in the Protestant and Jewish samples. On the other hand, among Catholic women educated in Catholic schools and especially in Catholic colleges, the association of education with fertility-planning success is sharply negative.<sup>3</sup> A similar set of relationships was uncovered in connection with the number of children desired. Among Catholics with no education in Catholic schools, there is no correlation at all between educational attainment and family-size preferences, while among women educated in Catholic schools and colleges a strong, positive correlation emerges.<sup>4</sup>

As noted above, the influence presumably exerted by Catholic education appeared to occur primarily at the college level. At the high school level, there seemed to be some association with fertility behavior and attitudes only among women, and even here the association appeared weaker than at the college level. At the time we advanced the following speculations about this question:

Why does fertility respond to Catholic school education primarily at the college level? . . . A number of possible explanations suggest themselves. Students in Catholic colleges receive instruction in the Catholic philosophy of marriage and the family. It may well be that Catholics who attend non-sectarian institutions are exposed to values which are more antithetical to those espoused in Catholic institutions at the higher level of learning than at lower levels of education. Also the four more years of education in the Catholic system can be viewed as simply that many additional years of exposure to the value system in the same sense that graduates of Catholic high schools have had more exposure than Catholics who do not reach that level of education. And then there is the

<sup>3</sup> C. F. Westoff, R. G. Potter, Jr., P. C. Sagi, and E. G. Mishler, *Family Growth in Metropolitan America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> Westoff, Potter, and Sagi, *The Third Child*, p. 117.