

PASCAL KIDDER WHELPTON
ARTHUR A. CAMPBELL
JOHN E. PATTERSON

Fertility and Family Planning in the United States



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**FERTILITY AND FAMILY PLANNING
IN THE UNITED STATES**

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and Family Planning
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BY

PASCAL K. WHELPTON

ARTHUR A. CAMPBELL

JOHN E. PATTERSON

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P R E F A C E

Whether or not to have another child is an important decision, both from a personal and a national point of view. If married couples in the United States were to have an average of 2.5 births by the time they completed their families, the population would eventually level off and nearly stop growing. However, if couples had only one more child apiece, or 3.5 altogether, the population would double within 40 years.

We have reached a point in our demographic history where either of these developments is clearly possible. The lower alternative has already been demonstrated by married women who reached age 50 in the period 1955-1965. The higher alternative may be approached, if not attained, by younger women who are still in the reproductive years of life. It has become increasingly important, therefore, to try to understand the variety of factors that influence family growth in the United States.

The first nationwide effort to find out about couples' family planning attitudes and practices was an interview survey conducted in the spring of 1955 under the direction of the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan and the Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. The findings of this survey are reported in *Family Planning, Sterility, and Population Growth*, by Ronald Freedman, Pascal K. Whelpton, and Arthur A. Campbell (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959) and in other publications listed in the Selected Bibliography, which appears in the latter part of the present book.

In the summer of 1960, the same organizations sponsored a second survey, which is the subject of this book. One important purpose of the second survey was to see how well the wives interviewed in 1955 had predicted the number of children that women like themselves would have in the 1955-1960 period. In addition, the second study was designed to get more information on certain subjects, such as couples' ability to have children and their success in using contraception, than was obtained in the first study. Also, the second study provides, for the first time, some data on the family planning attitudes and practices of nonwhite couples.

Both the 1955 and the 1960 surveys were supported largely by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation. Additional funds were

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provided by the Population Council. Neither of these organizations is responsible in any way for the findings or interpretations of the authors.

Two sponsoring committees endorsed the purposes and auspices of the 1960 survey in letters that interviewers showed to respondents in order to reassure them about the scientific usefulness of the study and about the confidentiality of their individual contributions to it. Although the committee members endorsed the purposes of the survey, it must be clearly understood that they have not been consulted about the findings or interpretations of the authors and are not responsible in any way for them. Their names and affiliations, as shown on the sponsoring letters, are presented below.

The members of the general sponsoring committee were as follows:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Mr. Samuel W. Anderson, Former Assistant Secretary of Commerce for International Affairs | Dr. John D. Millett, President, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio |
| Dr. Detlev W. Bronk, President, The Rockefeller Institute, New York City | Mr. Frederick Osborn, Former President, The Population Council, New York City |
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| Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Pastor Emeritus, Riverside Church, New York City | Miss Anna Lord Strauss, Former President, League of Women Voters of the United States |
| Mr. Ralph McGill, Editor, <i>The Atlanta Constitution</i> | Mr. Charles P. Taft, Member of City Council of Cincinnati |
| | Dr. R. B. Von Kleinsmid, Chancellor, University of Southern California |

The members of the medical sponsoring committee were as follows:

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| Dr. Russell R. De Alvarez, School of Medicine, University of Washington | Dr. Nicholas J. Eastman, The Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland |
| Dr. Baynard Carter, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, North Carolina | Dr. John E. Gordon, School of Public Health, Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts |
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| Dr. Frank R. Lock, The Bowman Gray School of Medicine, Wake Forest College, Winston-Salem, North Carolina | Dr. Howard C. Taylor, Jr., College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, New York City |
| Dr. John Dale Owen, St. Mary's Hospital, Milwaukee, Wisconsin | Dr. Herbert F. Traut, University of California Hospital |
| Dr. John Rock, Clinical Professor of Gynecology, Emeritus, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts | |

The interview schedule for the second study was developed in late 1959 and early 1960 in collaboration with Richard F. Tomasson, who was on the staff of the Scripps Foundation at that time, Harry P. Sharp, and Harold Organic, who were with the Survey Research Center. Two preliminary versions of the schedule were pretested: one in December 1959 (in Detroit, Tallahassee, and a southern rural area), and the other in February 1960 (in Paterson, Little Rock, and another southern rural area).

The sample was designed and selected under the direction of Leslie Kish and Bernard Lazerwitz of the Survey Research Center.

The interviewing was done in the summer of 1960 under the direction of Morris Axelrod of the Survey Research Center. His staff of supervisors and professional interviewers did a truly remarkable job of questioning women about subjects of a highly personal and delicate nature. Their success is attested to by the fact that fewer than 1 per cent of the wives interviewed refused to tell about their use of contraception.

The editing and coding of the interviews was supervised by Doris Muehl of the Survey Research Center.

Throughout the study, both in the early phases and during the analysis of the data, the authors benefited greatly from the generous help and advice of the senior author of the first study, Ronald Freedman of the University of Michigan.

During the analytical phase of the study, many people were asked to read preliminary versions of the chapters and to offer their comments. In the process, they made many helpful suggestions, which are gratefully acknowledged. In addition to Ronald Freedman they include Thomas K. Burch, Ansley Coale, Jerry W. Combs, Jr., John V. Grauman, Frederick S. Jaffee, Clyde V. Kiser, Norman Lawrence, Everett S. Lee, Frank Lorimer, Edward W. Pohlman, Steven Polgar, Robert Potter, Jr., Lee Rainwater, Philip C. Sagi, Warren S. Thompson, Christopher Tietze, and Charles F. Westoff.

Ruth W. Smith of the Scripps Foundation gave valuable assistance

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in the statistical analysis of the survey data, which was essential to the success of this study.

Mrs. Paul Demeny drafted the figures for publication. Mrs. Annice Cottrell prepared the index.

During the final stages of the work on the manuscript of this book, the senior author, Pascal K. Whelpton, died. The junior authors wish to acknowledge with great thanks his stimulating and kindly direction of all phases of the study. The extent to which this book may be regarded as useful is due largely to him.

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**FERTILITY AND FAMILY PLANNING
IN THE UNITED STATES**

GLOSSARY OF SYMBOLS IN TABLES:

- .. The category described by the column and line heading is not possible.
- The category described by the column and line heading is possible, but it contains fewer than 0.5 per cent of the cases (if the statistic described is a proportion) or has an average that rounds to zero (if the statistic described is an average).
- * Average or proportion not computed because base contains fewer than 20 cases. Sampling variability would be very large for such small numbers.

CHAPTER 1

Background of the Study and the Reliability of Birth Expectations

INTRODUCTION

This book is about the attitudes and behavior that determine the number of children born to married couples in the United States. The basic information comes from 3,322 wives who were interviewed in May, June, and July, 1960, by women on the staff of the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center. The interviews dealt with topics of great personal importance: the number of pregnancies and births the wife had had, the number of children she and her husband wanted, the number she expected altogether, whether she or her husband had any physical defects that made future births unlikely or impossible, whether they had ever tried to prevent pregnancy, and, if they had, the methods they had used. In addition, the wife gave a wide variety of information about the way she and her husband lived: their religion, educational attainment, income, whether or not the wife worked, and so forth.

This study is similar to one conducted in 1955, also by the Survey Research Center and the Scripps Foundation.¹ Both are known as the Growth of American Families (or "GAF") studies. One of the reasons for the 1960 survey was to see how well wives in the earlier study had been able to predict the number of children that women like themselves would have during a five-year period, and to see whether the total number of children expected by such women changed significantly between 1955 and 1960. Also, the 1960 study was designed to explore more thoroughly some topics that received only brief attention in the 1955 survey.

FERTILITY TRENDS THAT RAISED QUESTIONS

One of the main purposes of both the 1955 and 1960 studies is to gather information that will help to improve forecasts of numbers of births in the United States. Ever since the demobilization of the armed forces after World War II, birth rates have been well above the levels observed before the war. This is due partly to the fact that recently married women were having more babies while they were young than older women had had when they were as young.

¹The findings of the 1955 study are reported in *FPSPG*. See page xxxi for the meaning of any abbreviated reference.

FERTILITY AND FAMILY PLANNING IN THE U.S.

This concentrated unusually many births in the years during which the transition to younger childbearing was taking place. Another cause of high postwar birth rates is the fact that younger couples will have more births altogether than older couples had.

By 1955 it was not known which of these causes was more important. The popular explanation was that families were getting larger—that is, that young couples would have more children by the time they completed their childbearing than older couples had had. However, a few demographers knew that a reduction in the average age at childbirth can cause a short-run spurt in the birth rate even when the average size of completed families remains the same, and thought that this factor had not been given enough attention. One of the present authors showed, for example, that birth rates were higher in the postwar period than in the 1930s because (a) a higher proportion of young women had married, (b) a higher proportion of those who married had a first birth, and (c) a higher proportion of those who had a first birth went on to have more births. The least important of these factors was the third, which is closely related to average family size.²

It was obvious, however, that it would be impossible to disentangle the effects of changes in the age of childbearing and changes in average completed family size until we knew approximately how many children younger couples were going to have altogether. We had to know this in order to make reasonable forecasts about future trends in the birth rate. If we found, for example, that young women were having their children earlier but would have no more children altogether than older women, then we could forecast a substantial decline in the birth rate after the tendency toward younger childbearing ceased. However, if we found that younger women were going to have more children altogether than older women had had, then we could foresee a more gradual decline in birth rates as the effects of the tendency toward younger childbearing diminished.

Ronald Freedman and Pascal K. Whelpton, the designers of the first Growth of American Families Study, thought that a promising source of information about future births was the women who would be having those births. In the 1955 survey, information was obtained from interviews with white married women in the main reproductive years of life (taken here as 18–39 years of age) who were living with their husbands or whose husbands were temporarily absent in the armed forces. These women were questioned at length about their pregnancy histories and the number of children they expected to have in the future. Later in this chapter we shall see how well

² Grabill 1958, pp. 365–371.

BACKGROUND—RELIABILITY OF BIRTH EXPECTATIONS

their replies agreed with the number of births actually occurring in 1955–60.

THE SAMPLE

Because the 1960 study was intended partly to check the reliability and stability of the birth expectations of the wives who were interviewed in 1955, the survivors of such women had to be interviewed in 1960. We could not interview the same women because they were not asked to give their names and addresses in 1955. The authors of both studies felt that women would be more likely to give honest replies to questions about very personal matters if they were assured anonymity. Furthermore, from a methodological point of view it was considered undesirable to interview the same women. What we wanted to know was whether the average replies of a sample of women would give us a good indication of the future number of births that all women like themselves would have. Therefore, we thought that 1960 interviews with different women who had the same characteristics as those interviewed in 1955 would provide a much more critical test of the 1955 data on expectations than would second interviews with the original sample.³

For this reason, one essential component of the 1960 sample had to consist of women who would have been eligible for the 1955 sample. They had to be white women who were 18–39 years old in 1955, married and living with their husbands at that time, or temporarily absent from the husband because of his service in the armed forces. This meant that they had to be 23–44 years old as of 1960 and married as of five years previously. They could have been divorced, separated, or widowed in the meantime.

Other aims of the 1960 study required data for the same kind of women that were interviewed in 1955—that is, white wives 18–39 years old as of 1960. In addition, we wanted to get fertility data for nonwhite wives 18–39 years of age—the first such information to be collected for this group on a nationwide basis.

All of these purposes could be served with a sample containing the following components:

1. White and nonwhite women 18–39 years old, married and living with husband or with husband temporarily absent in the armed forces. Many of the white wives in this group can be used to represent the 1960 survivors of wives who were 18–34 years old in the 1955 study.

³ In fertility studies with different purposes, it may be desirable to reinterview the same women. This is the case with the Princeton Study and with the Detroit Area Study of 1962. See Bibliography for sources.

FERTILITY AND FAMILY PLANNING IN THE U.S.

2. White wives 40-44 years old, married and living with husband or with husband temporarily absent in armed forces. Nearly all of these wives can be used to represent the 35-39-year-old wives in the 1955 study.

3. White women 23-44 years old who had been married and living with their husbands as of 1955 (or whose husbands were temporarily absent in the armed forces at that time), but were no longer married and living with husband as of 1960. These women represent those who were married and 18-39 years old in 1955, but who had become widowed, divorced, or separated by 1960.

Table 1 shows the numbers of women in the various components of the 1960 sample, and the numbers who represent the survivors of the 1955 sample.

TABLE 1
Number of Women Interviewed in 1960, by Characteristics Defining the 1960 Sample, by Eligibility for the 1955 Sample

Characteristics in 1960	Eligibility for 1955 sample		
	Total	Eligible	Not eligible
Total	3,322	2,406	916
White, married, 18-44 years old			
Total	2,986	2,341	645
18-39 years old	2,414	1,787	627
40-44 years old	572	554	18
White, previously married (as of 1955), 23-44 years old	66	65	1
Nonwhite, married, 18-39 years old	270	..	270

When we compare 1955 and 1960 data for women who were eligible for the 1955 sample, we use the total sample interviewed in 1955 (2,713 wives) and 2,341 of the 2,406 wives who represent their survivors in 1960. We have left the 65 previously married women out of such tabulations largely because we do not have certain kinds of information for them that we have for the rest of the 1960 sample. For example, when we compare the total number of children expected by the 1955 sample and by their representatives in the 1960 sample, we find that we do not have the total number of births expected for women who are no longer married because it was inappropriate to ask them how many children they expected to have in the future. In order to avoid the many problems associated with changing the bases of comparisons for different variables, we simply excluded the women who were no longer married. Fortunately, they are few in number, and their replies would not affect the comparisons

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significantly. If there had been a substantially larger number of such women, we would have used their replies and made some accommodation for them in the tabulations.

Most of this book deals with the 2,414 couples with white wives 18–39 years old in 1960. They represent about 18 million couples with similar characteristics in the United States. The 270 nonwhite couples in the sample represent about two million similar couples in the entire country.

The sample was chosen under the direction of Leslie Kish of the Sampling Section, Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, by the method known as area probability sampling. The method of sampling and estimates of the sampling errors are described in Appendix A.

After the sampling experts had chosen a number of dwelling units that would yield approximately the desired number of eligible respondents, the interviewers visited these homes. In as many cases as possible, the interviewer's first visit was preceded by a letter from the Director of the Survey Research Center explaining the nature of the study and urging the women to cooperate.

In the homes containing eligible respondents, the interviewers were able to complete 88 per cent of the interviews they sought. Only 6 per cent of the eligible respondents refused to be interviewed. Most of the other respondents were never found at home, even after repeated visits by the interviewer. These results compare very favorably with those of national surveys on other subjects.

THE INTERVIEW

Each interviewer had an interview schedule from which she read the questions to the respondent and on which she recorded her answers. This schedule is available on request.⁴

The interviews lasted about an hour and a quarter, on the average. In most cases, the respondent welcomed the interviewer and did not hesitate to give the information she requested, even about topics that might be considered sensitive—such as methods of contraception. Only 7 of the 2,414 white wives 18–39 years old refused to tell the interviewer whether or not they had ever used contraception. An additional 15 wives said that they had used contraception, but refused to identify the methods used.

The interviewers noted that the respondent's cooperation was "very good" in 80 per cent of the interviews, "good" in 14 per cent, and "fair" or "poor" in only 6 per cent.

Subjective judgments like these, however, do not tell us how ac-

⁴ Write to Scripps Foundation, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

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curately the respondents answered the questions. Some of them undoubtedly found it difficult to recall specific details, even though they tried to report honestly. However, there are a few checks we can use to evaluate their replies.

For example, we have several reasons for believing that the proportion who have ever used contraception has been ascertained accurately. One is that the proportion reporting that they had begun contraception by 1955 is virtually the same for couples in the 1955 study (70 per cent) as it is for couples who represent their survivors in the 1960 study (71 per cent).

Another reason for believing that the use of contraception is reported accurately is that a large majority of the couples who do not use contraception, according to the wife's report, have credible reasons for nonuse. For example, among the white wives 18-39 years old, 81 per cent said they had used contraception by 1960 and 19 per cent said they had not. Among this 19 per cent, 7 per cent said they intended to use contraception at some time in the future (most of them were young couples just starting their families) and 10 per cent gave evidence of reproductive impairments that made the use of contraception less urgent than for other couples or completely unnecessary. Thus, only 2 per cent of all the couples were able to bear children and intended never to use contraception. Nearly half of these couples were already limiting their fertility by a method the wife did not consider contraceptive (douching regularly soon after intercourse for cleanliness only). The remaining few couples had strong attitudes against any form of fertility control, but most of them had not yet had to face the reality of excessively large families.

The only systematic inquiry about the reliability of survey data on family planning has come from the Princeton Study.⁵ In this study, the investigators compared replies by the same women to the same questions in two interviews three years apart. In general, they found that although some individual women gave different answers in the two studies, the distributions of the replies were nearly the same for both interviews. For example, some women gave different replies about methods of contraception used, but the distributions of replies were about the same. In other words, there were many compensating errors.

One fact of great importance to the investigator emerges from the interviews for the present study as well as from those for other surveys of family planning: the vast majority of married women are willing to give information about their family planning practices and other highly personal topics in direct interviews, and they try to report

⁵ Westoff 1961a.

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as accurately as they can. Such excellent cooperation surprised many of the people involved in social research when it first became known, but it is now a familiar feature of surveys in this area. Much of the credit for such excellent results must go to the interviewers, whose efforts to gain the respondents' interest and confidence have been essential to the success of this study.

RELATED STUDIES

The Growth of American Families Studies of 1955 and 1960 are the first *nationwide* studies of factors affecting the control of fertility in the United States, but there have been studies of similar or related topics based on more narrowly defined samples and with somewhat different objectives.

The first such study was the Indianapolis Study of 1941.⁶ The detailed analysis for this survey was based on 1,977 native white Protestant couples living in Indianapolis, married in 1927-29 when the wife was under 30, who lived in a large city for most of their lives and who had completed the eighth grade of school. The study was designed primarily to test specific hypotheses about factors affecting fertility. Some of the factors were socioeconomic status and security, personality characteristics (such as feelings of inadequacy), fear of pregnancy, tendency to plan, interest in religion, and husband-wife dominance. The purpose of this survey was not so much to describe variations in fertility for different population groups as it was to try to investigate some of the underlying social and psychological determinants of behavior affecting the control of fertility. The reason for sampling such a small segment of the United States population was to eliminate many causes of variation in fertility (such as differences between urban and rural residents, Protestants and Catholics, whites and nonwhites, etc.) that were not under intensive study.

The Princeton Study, the field work for which began in 1957, is a direct descendant of the Indianapolis Study. Its findings relate to a sample of white couples who were living in seven of the largest metropolitan areas of the country and who had had a second child five to seven months before the first interview in 1957. One of the purposes of this study was to investigate the factors determining whether or not the couple would have a third child. The reason for this focus is the fact that much of the higher fertility of the postwar period has resulted from the desire for more than two children. Among the wide variety of information obtained from both husband and wife in the first interview was the number of additional

⁶ See Bibliography for references to this and other related studies.

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children they wanted. The same sample was interviewed again in 1960 to see which couples had had a third child and to explore the factors influencing their control of fertility. As in the Indianapolis Study, many of the variables examined are psychological in nature, but there is also a strong emphasis on socioeconomic factors—particularly the major religious group with which the couple identifies. Again, a relatively narrow segment of the childbearing population was sampled in order to eliminate the influence of variables that were not under study.

Several of the Detroit Area Surveys, sponsored by the University of Michigan, have dealt with topics related to fertility. The 1954 Detroit Area Survey pioneered questions on the number of children expected. Similar questions were asked in the 1955 and 1958 surveys. The aims of these surveys were to study socioeconomic differentials in past and expected childbearing in the Detroit area, and to get some information on the reliability and stability of birth expectations. A much more elaborate survey was conducted in early 1962 of 1,215 women in Detroit who had recently married or given birth to their first, second, or fourth child. These women were questioned again late in 1962 about their fertility since the first interview and their future birth expectations. The major aim of this study is to examine social and economic factors affecting fertility.

Social Research, Incorporated, has conducted two surveys, under the sponsorship of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which are designed to examine psychological and interpersonal factors affecting the use of contraception in the United States. These studies are largely exploratory, so the sampling standards have not been rigid. The interviews have been "open-ended," because the aim of the investigators was not to test hypotheses, but to seek promising leads about the nature of less conscious attitudes affecting the use of contraception.

The University of Michigan Population Studies Center has begun adding questions on past and expected childbearing to nationwide surveys of the Survey Research Center that deal principally with other topics. The investigators hope to use the answers to these questions to develop a time series of birth expectations for the United States that will extend the series begun in the Growth of American Families Studies.

In contrast to the more analytical studies mentioned above, the Growth of American Families Studies seek simply to describe the distribution of certain fertility variables for the United States as a whole, to show how they differ for certain important subgroups of the population, and to trace their change over time.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Although we show summary statistics for whites and nonwhites combined (for wives 18–39 years old and their husbands), we do not present detailed data for both groups combined. Instead, most of the detailed analysis is for white couples with the wife 18–39 years old. One important reason for adopting this practice is that it greatly facilitates comparisons with the 1955 survey, which was limited to white couples. Secondly, white and nonwhite couples have different levels of fertility and different socioeconomic differentials in fertility. It was thought best to treat these two population groups separately in order to bring out these important dissimilarities. Finally, the small size of the nonwhite sample (270) does not permit us to subdivide it to the extent that was possible with the white sample and still produce reasonably reliable estimates for subgroups.

Therefore, most of the book is about white couples with the wife 18–39 years old. Unless otherwise specified, tables show data for this group. Tables presenting data for couples with wives in different age groups, for nonwhite couples only, or for both white and nonwhite couples will specify the relevant population groups in the titles.

Although there are references to the total population and the nonwhite population in nearly every chapter in the book, the main comparisons between white and nonwhite couples are presented in Chapter 9.

Inasmuch as the central focus of this book is the number of children wives expect to have, the early chapters deal with various aspects of this variable. The reliability and stability of wives' expectations about their additional births are discussed in the latter portion of this chapter. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with attitudes toward family size and the childbearing expectations of women in the present study. The next four chapters are concerned chiefly with factors affecting couples' control of fertility. Chapter 4 presents our findings about physiological limitations on the number of births couples can have. Chapter 5 discusses the extent to which couples use contraception to control their fertility. Chapter 6 describes how couples typically plan their families. Chapter 7 describes the different methods of contraception used and presents some data on their effectiveness. The next subject to be treated is the timing of births—that is, how soon after marriage births of various orders occur, the number of months between births, and the proportion of all births occurring by a given age or duration of marriage. This important topic, which was not included in the book about the 1955 study, is discussed in Chapter 8. As noted previously, Chapter 9 presents data for the nonwhite

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population, and compares this group with all white couples and with white couples who have social and economic characteristics that are similar to those of nonwhites. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses possible future trends in fertility, and presents projections of the population of the United States to 1985.

Although this book covers many topics that were dealt with in the book reporting the findings of the 1955 study, it differs from the latter book in many respects. One important difference has already been mentioned: the fact that this book presents the first findings about the control of fertility among a nationwide sample of nonwhite couples. Another addition is the inclusion of a chapter on the timing of births (Chapter 8).

An important difference between the two studies arises from the fact that we are now able to make time comparisons for certain variables with the use of two comparable nationwide samples. We can now see, for example, how birth expectations have changed between 1955 and 1960; whether operations preventing pregnancy have become more or less common; whether more couples are using contraception. In other words, with this book our knowledge of topics pertaining to the control of fertility in the United States begins to be cumulative.

Finally, on the basis of the experience gained with the 1955 study, we were able to introduce more detailed questions about certain subjects. For example, in the 1960 study, we asked not only whether the wife or husband had had an operation that prevented pregnancy (as was asked in 1955), but also what kind of operation and why it was performed. With respect to contraception, we added questions about methods used in each interpregnancy interval. Such additions have made possible somewhat more detailed analysis for some variables than was possible with data for the 1955 study.

THE RELIABILITY OF BIRTH EXPECTATIONS

The question we are asking in this section is: Do groups of women actually have the number of births they expect to have? The question relates to groups of women because in the final analysis, the demographer wants to know about the fertility of aggregates of individuals, rather than particular individuals.

We know that individuals are only mediocre predictors of their own fertility. This was brought out by a study of 145 engaged couples, mostly college-educated, who were originally interviewed in the middle 1930s. At that time they were asked how many children they wanted. Twenty years later they were contacted again to find out how many children they had had. The coefficient of correlation between the

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number of children the engaged woman said she wanted and the number she eventually had was only .27, which indicates very poor agreement for individuals. However, the average numbers of children wanted just before marriage (2.8 for the women and 2.6 for the men) are very close to the average number born (2.6).⁷ This suggests very good agreement between prediction and performance for groups of persons. Many of these couples had fewer births than they originally wanted, and many others had more. These deviations nearly canceled each other.

Approaching the problem from a somewhat different angle, the authors of the Princeton Study show that even though individuals are not perfect predictors of fertility, the number of pregnancies they have over a short period of time is correlated with the number of children they want eventually. The coefficient of correlation between the number of children the wife wanted in 1957 and her fertility during the three years between the 1957 and 1960 interviews is .48.⁸ Very similar results were obtained from 1955 and 1958 interviews with women included in the Detroit Area Survey.⁹

In the Growth of American Families Studies, as noted previously, we interviewed two groups of women in 1955 and 1960, who had the same characteristics as of 1955. There are several things we want to know about their expected and actual childbearing:

1. Are the two groups comparable with respect to the number of children they had borne by 1955? In other words, did we really sample the same kinds of women, as far as one highly relevant characteristic is concerned?
2. Did the wives interviewed in 1960 have the number of births in 1955–60 expected by wives interviewed in 1955?
3. Did the wives interviewed in 1960 expect the same final number of births as the wives interviewed in 1955?

We can ask these questions about the entire sample and about subgroups, such as Protestants, high-school graduates, etc., in an effort to see where discrepancies are concentrated and what caused them. Data on all three questions are presented together in Tables 5 to 10 because they are highly interrelated. However, in describing these data, we will deal with one question at a time.

Births by 1955—The average number of children born by 1955 is virtually the same for the 1955 sample (2.06) as for representatives of their survivors in the 1960 sample (2.01). Furthermore, the percentage distributions of the two groups by the numbers of children

⁷ Westoff 1957.

⁸ Westoff 1963, p. 68.

⁹ Goldberg 1959, p. 378.