

## IDEAL FAMILY SIZE AMONG WHITE AMERICANS: A QUARTER OF A CENTURY'S EVIDENCE\*

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### RESUMEN

*Los datos sobre tamaño ideal de la familia recopilados de 13 investigaciones durante los pasados 25 años, señalan para las mujeres una variabilidad de 1 hijo entre el promedio mínimo y máximo, con un incremento en el tamaño ideal de la familia durante los años recientes. Entre los hombres la situación es similar aunque la variabilidad es menor. Un periodo de gran cambio social no provocó un incremento drástico en los deseos de reproducción del norteamericano blanco. El rango "2 a 4 hijos" ha enmarcado los ideales de aproximadamente el 80-90% de los norteamericanos blancos desde mediados de la década del 30.*

*Sin embargo, los encuestados variaron sus metas de reproducción dentro de este rango de 2 a 4 hijos. El análisis muestra un cambio desde 2-3 hijos hacia 3-4 hijos por familia entre las mujeres. Las familias de 3 hijos han comenzado a ser la moda para las mujeres de la década del 50 y "2 hijos," son elegidos por menos de la quinta parte de las mujeres entrevistadas en recientes investigaciones. Para aproximadamente el 40% de las mujeres que contestaron la entrevista, "excesiva fertilidad" (fertilidad superior al ideal) comienza solamente con el quinto hijo.*

*El cambio hacia 3-4 hijos por familia, es particularmente agudo entre las mujeres en edad reproductiva—menos de 30 años y de 30-44 años—mientras que las mujeres viejas—45 años y mas—eligen un tamaño de familia cercano al tope del rango a través del periodo de tiempo. En años recientes, las mujeres jóvenes prefieren familias grandes más que los hombres jóvenes.*

*Aunque la diferencia de opinión entre las mujeres jóvenes y viejas ha disminuído, en diferentes estudios el tamaño ideal de familia exhibe un consistente patrón de incremento con la edad. Tales resultados pueden quizá ser explicados en un aspecto por las distintas características socio-económicas de la gente joven comparada con la gente vieja de cada época, y por otro lado, por el cambio en los ideales sobre tamaño de la familia que los individuos tienen en el transcurso de su vida.*

Since most Americans exert some control over the size of their families, their reproductive desires are obviously a determinant of their reproductive performance. This fact received explicit recognition during the 1950's through the Growth of American Families Study and the two so-called Princeton Studies, but for periods prior to this no published analyses relating to the nation as whole may be found.<sup>1</sup> For

how long have Americans idealized an average of approximately three children? Did their ideals fluctuate greatly during periods of social change? Was the baby boom presaged by a marked upturn in family-size desires? Are men and women consistently different or similar in the number of children desired? Have religious, educational, occupational, and other differences in reproductive ideals changed significantly over time? Incredibly, the

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<sup>1</sup> The report of the 1955 Growth of American Families Study may be found in Ronald Freedman, Pascal K. Whelpton, and Arthur A. Campbell, *Family Planning, Sterility, and Population Growth* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959). The first Princeton Study has appeared as *Family Growth in Metropolitan America*, by Charles F. Westoff, Robert G. Potter, Jr., Philip C. Sagi, and Elliot G. Mishler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), and the second Princeton Study is reported in *The Third Child*, by Charles F. Westoff, Robert G. Potter, Jr., and Philip C. Sagi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

nation lived through the depression, the war, and the baby boom, without generating a national survey directed to answering such questions. The Growth of American Families Study in 1955 was, in fact, the first national survey concentrating on reproductive motivation and behavior.

However, although national studies of reproductive motivation for the period between the depression and the GAF study are unavailable, it is not true that national data on reproductive goals are nonexistent for these years. National surveys conducted by polling agencies like Gallup and Roper have periodically included questions on family-size ideals together with additional demographically relevant information. Such surveys are frequently used successfully by social scientists for nondemographic analyses (such as those relating to social stratification or political behavior), and there seems to be no valid reason why they cannot be used profitably for demographic analysis as well.

The present paper is the first in a series reporting on previously unanalyzed survey data regarding family formation in the United States. Although derived principally from Gallup and Roper surveys conducted at intervals between 1936 and 1961, our analysis includes comparable materials as well from the 1955 and 1960 Growth of American Families Studies. This initial report will devote some attention to methodological aspects of the research and then present information on family-size ideals as represented by thirteen surveys. Other papers will deal with important social differences, such as education, religion, city size, economic status, and occupation in relation to family-size desires over time. Since the presentation here concerns white Americans only, separate consideration will be given subsequently to our data for nonwhites.

#### FINDING AND USING THE SURVEYS

Since our analysis rests on many studies originated by other researchers over a protracted period of time, it has obviously re-

quired much co-operation from both individuals and research agencies. This help enabled us to solve the two major initial problems of locating the appropriate studies and acquiring them for our detailed analyses. The subject index at the Roper Public Opinion Research Center showed which polls and surveys on file there contained a question on family-size ideals. These polls, together with the two GAF studies, appear to be the principal national surveys including such a question in this country. The Roper Center also rented us the actual data—interview schedules, IBM decks, codebooks, and so forth—from each of the studies. Acquisition of these materials allowed us to compile comparative tables from all the surveys. In addition, Ronald Freedman, of the University of Michigan, and Arthur Campbell, of the National Center for Health Statistics (formerly of the Scripps Foundation), were extraordinarily generous in supplying us with IBM decks and other materials from the 1955 and 1960 GAF studies.<sup>2</sup>

#### NATURE OF THE SURVEYS

With the exception of two polls under the auspices of Roper Associates (those for 1943 and 1948) and the 1955 and 1960 Growth of American Families Studies, all the surveys reported on in this paper were conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion (the Gallup Poll). Except as otherwise noted in the tables, the AIPO surveys conformed to the usual sampling procedures of that organization. The Gallup Poll samples the civilian, non-institutional, adult population. Typically, the sampling units are of 1,500 persons, but since we have deleted nonwhites in the present analysis, our male/female

<sup>2</sup> Although we did not have an opportunity to use any of the studies on file at the Survey Research Center of our own university (they contained no questions of interest to use), the staff of the International Data Library was of continuing assistance to us. They suggested sources of data and allowed us to canvass their files of interview schedules and questionnaires for additional studies of relevance.

totals do not amount to the full number sampled by AIPO. When compared with Census data, the Gallup Polls have generally been found to be representative not only of major regions of the country but also of age, sex, and white-nonwhite groupings. More detailed discussion of relevant characteristics of these particular polls will be found below.

The 1955 GAF study is already widely known, but we shall remind the reader of the fact that it consisted of a probability sample of white, American, married women between the ages of 18 and 39 who were living with their husbands. It differs from typical AIPO surveys, therefore, in constituting a more restricted age and sex group of presently married individuals. The 1960 GAF sample was selected so as to be similar to and comparable with the 1955 study.

The two Roper surveys were also national studies, but they dealt with special age or sex groups in the population. The 1943 study sampled women aged 20-34 only, whereas the 1948 survey sampled a youthful group (aged 18-25) and a middle-aged group (aged 40-55) of both sexes.

Table 1 shows the age distributions of the populations sampled by sex in all the surveys and gives comparable figures for the census populations as enumerated in 1930, 1940, 1950, and 1960. In the surveys sampling the adult population in general (rather than a special age group), females tend to be concentrated somewhat more in the age group 30-44 than they are in the adult population of women in the country as a whole. Among males, there is a decided deficiency of those under 30 and an excess of those aged 45 and over. Because of the age differences among some of the samples (i.e., those where a special group, such as respondents aged 18-39, was chosen), all of our summary historical materials are presented with information as to the age range of respondents in each poll.

Some interest naturally attaches to the composition of these samples with respect to major socioeconomic characteristics and to the comparability of the respond-

ents with white adults in the nation as a whole. We shall, therefore, consider briefly the distributions of the surveys with respect to religion, farm residence, years of school completed, and region.

*Religion.*—The percentage distributions of the samples by sex and religious affiliation are presented in Table 2. The proportion of Catholics sampled has risen in recent years, presumably because Catholics now make up a larger proportion of our white population. In any event, the distributions by religion for the middle and late 1950's correspond very closely with the distributions found by the sample survey conducted in March, 1957, by the Census Bureau. For example, the Bureau found that among white women aged 14 and over in 1957, 65.1 percent were Protestant, 27.9 percent Catholic, 3.6 percent Jewish, and 3.4 percent "Other."<sup>3</sup> It

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Religion Reported by the Civilian Population of the United States: March, 1957," *Current Population Reports—Population Characteristics*, Series, P-20, No. 79 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office [February 2, 1958]), 8 pp.

PERCENTAGE WHO ARE FARM RESIDENTS

Year	U.S. population <sup>a</sup>	Polls and surveys
1936	24.8	16.3
1941	22.7	21.5
1943	19.6	16.9
1945	18.1	18.8
1947	18.9	16.1
1948	17.7	12.7
1952	15.5	15.7
1953	14.3	14.5
1955	13.6	10.5
1957	12.7	13.6
1959	12.0	12.1
1960	11.4	9.4

<sup>a</sup> Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1962, p. 608. The entire series, including the figure for 1960, conforms to the definition of farm residence in use prior to the 1960 Census. The census data refer to the total population, whereas the poll results relate only to the white population.

Table 1.—AGE DISTRIBUTION OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS IN THE SAMPLE SURVEYS, 1936-61, AND IN THE UNITED STATES CENSUS—WHITES  
(Percentage by Age)

Date	Age range	Under 30	30-44	45+	N. A.	Total	
						Per cent	Number
Females							
<u>1930</u> <sup>a</sup>	<u>20+</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>38</u>	-	100	<u>33,138</u> <sup>d</sup>
1936	21+	15 <sup>b</sup>	52 <sup>c</sup>	30	3	100	704
<u>1940</u>	<u>20+</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>41</u>	-	100	<u>39,112</u>
1941	21+	22	35	41	2	100	974
1943	20-34	65	31	-	4	100	2,787
1945	21+	17	35	47	1	100	1,449
1947	21+	23	34	42	*	100	1,396
1948	(18-25) (40-55)	49	-	51	-	100	1,756
<u>1950</u>	<u>20+</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>44</u>	-	100	<u>45,852</u>
1952	21+	20	38	40	2	100	987
1953	21+	22	39	39	*	100	677
1955	18-39	47	53	-	-	100	2,713
1957	21+	20	41	39	*	100	679
1959	21+	18	37	44	*	100	716
<u>1960</u>	<u>20+</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>49</u>	-	100	<u>51,118</u>
1960	18-39	46	54	-	-	100	2,414
1961	14-23	100	-	-	-	100	1,148
Males							
<u>1930</u>	<u>20+</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>39</u>	-	100	<u>34,108</u>
1936	21+	15 <sup>b</sup>	48 <sup>c</sup>	35	2	100	1,975
<u>1940</u>	<u>20+</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>42</u>	-	100	<u>39,228</u>
1941	21+	19	37	42	2	100	2,037
1945	21+	12	31	56	*	100	1,279
1947	21+	12	31	56	*	100	1,388
1948	(18-25) (40-55)	52	-	48	-	100	1,900
<u>1950</u>	<u>20+</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>44</u>	-	100	<u>44,432</u>
1952	21+	15	35	49	*	100	963
1953	21+	16	31	53	-	100	728
1957	21+	14	35	51	*	100	629
1959	21+	14	30	55	*	100	673
<u>1960</u>	<u>20+</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>48</u>	-	100	<u>48,023</u>
1961	14-23	100	-	-	-	100	1,002

<sup>a</sup>Italicized figures are from the census.

<sup>b</sup>24 and under.

<sup>c</sup>25-44.

<sup>d</sup>For the census totals, the numbers are given in thousands.

\* Less than 1 per cent.

should be noted, however, that the 1961 AIPO Youth Study of high school and college students contained almost ten per cent nonresponse on the religious question. As can be seen, the nonresponse rate is negligible or nonexistent for the other studies. The "other" category in the 1948 Roper Fortune poll is made up primarily of those who do not attend church. Aside from these anomalies, the distributions by religious affiliation appear to be reasonable and consistent.

*Farm residence.*—As with religious affiliation, reproductive desires are known to vary according to whether respondents have a farm background. Although we do not have data on the respondents' previous residence, we do have information concerning their present locations. The tabulation on page 156 shows that the proportion of farm residents in our polls generally corresponds closely to the proportions in the same years for the population as a whole.

*Educational level.*—There are, as Table 3 shows, conspicuously lower proportions of the sampled populations who have only a grade-school education than of the white population in general. Since grade-school respondents in the surveys have somewhat higher family-size ideals than those with more education, this bias in the sampling means that in general the respondents' ideals are slightly lower than would be the case for the national population of whites at the relevant dates. The selection against respondents having only a grade-school education is particularly great among the younger members of the 1948 sample (aged 18-25), the 1955 and 1960 GAF studies, and the 1961 sample of high-school and college students whose parents' educational levels are used in this breakdown. In part, the higher educational level of the two GAF studies is a function of the limitation of these samples to the reproductive ages.

*Region of the country.*—Table 4 demonstrates a fairly good correspondence be-

Table 2.—RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS  
IN THE SAMPLE SURVEYS, 1943-61—WHITES  
(Percentages)

Date <sup>a</sup>	Age Range	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other	N.A.	Total	
							Per cent	Number
Females								
1943	20-34	74	20	3	2	1	100	2,787
1948	(18-25)	60	22	4	14	-	100	854
	(40-55)	64	17	3	16	-	100	902
1952	21+	71	22	4	2	*	100	987
1955	18-39	66	28	2	4	-	100	2,713
1957	21+	70	28	2	-	*	100	679
1959	21+	66	26	4	4	-	100	716
1960	18-39	66	28	4	2	-	100	2,414
1961	14-23	59	23	4	4	10	100	1,148
Males								
1948	(18-25)	52	23	4	21	-	100	979
	(40-55)	52	16	3	29	-	100	921
1952	21+	70	23	5	2	*	100	963
1957	21+	69	25	2	2	2	100	629
1959	21+	64	26	5	5	-	100	673
1961	14-23	55	24	7	4	10	100	1,002

<sup>a</sup>The question on religious affiliation was not asked in the AIPO studies of 1936, 1941, 1945, 1947, and 1953. No males were questioned in 1943, 1955, and 1960.

\* Less than 1 per cent.

tween the surveys and the decennial censuses in many cases. There is, however, a tendency for the Northeast (and occasionally the North Central) regions to be over-represented and for the South to be under-represented. This bias is particularly great for the 1941, 1945, 1947, and 1952 studies.

INTERVIEWING

As far as we can ascertain, all the studies were the results of personal interviews with respondents except the AIPO

study conducted in 1961 among high-school and college students by means of a self-administered questionnaire. This questionnaire was different from the ordinary Gallup schedule in being unusually long and focused entirely on questions (some very personal) of relevance to young people. AIPO considered that its results would be more valid if these youngsters were allowed to fill out the questionnaires themselves rather than being interviewed by adults.

Table 3.—YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED IN SURVEYS AND CENSUSES—WHITE POPULATION  
(Percentages by Years of Education)

Date	None	1-8	High School		College		N.A.	Total		
			1-3	4	1-3	4+		Per cent	Number	
Females										
1940 <sup>a</sup>	<u>3</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>33,886</u> <sup>b</sup>	
1943	-	13		53		22	12	100	2,787	
1945	1	29	19	30	12	9	-	100	1,449	
1947	1	28	20	31	12	8	-	100	1,396	
1948 <sup>c</sup>	-	10		60		30	-	100	854	
1948 <sup>d</sup>	1	25		49		25	-	100	902	
1950	<u>2</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>40,704</u>	
1952	1	26	23	33	8	9	-	100	987	
1953	1	31	22	35	6	5	-	100	677	
1955	-	14	25	46		15	-	100	2,713	
1957	1	24	23	35	9	8	-	100	679	
1959	2	22	23	39	8	6	-	100	716	
1960	<u>2</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>46,322</u>	
1960	-	10	24	48	11	7	-	100	2,414	
1961 <sup>e</sup>	-	5	22	27	13	25	8	100	1,418	
Males										
1940	<u>3</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>34,114</u>	
1945	1	37	18	23	8	13	-	100	1,279	
1947	2	30	20	24	11	13	-	100	1,388	
1948 <sup>c</sup>	-	8		59		32	*	100	979	
1948 <sup>d</sup>	-	32		39		27	2	100	921	
1950	<u>2</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>38,753</u>	
1952	1	29	20	26	9	15	-	100	963	
1953	1	37	22	24	9	7	-	100	728	
1957	2	32	20	29	8	9	-	100	629	
1959	5 <sup>f</sup>	28	19	27	9	12	-	100	673	
1960	<u>2</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>43,259</u>	
1961	-	6	26	26	13	21	8	100	1,002	

<sup>a</sup>Census data are for the white population by sex aged 25 and over.

<sup>b</sup>For the census totals, the numbers are given in thousands.

<sup>c</sup>Ages 18-25.

<sup>d</sup>Ages 40-55.

<sup>e</sup>Education of the respondent's father, or head of household.

<sup>f</sup>None and 1-4.

\* Less than 1 per cent.

Obviously, we are unable to offer assurances concerning many refinements in the data-gathering process, such as comparability of interviewing. It may perhaps be significant, however, that the AIPO organization rarely varied the family-size question. Since, as will be seen, the stability and patterning of answers to this question are remarkable, we have little reason to search for gross differences in data gathering. The accompanying tabulation gives the percentage of nonresponse to the question on ideal family size for each of the studies by sex. Although the

band, a wife, and how many children?"), and it is this type of question with which we shall be dealing. The other concerns the size family the respondent "expects" to have ultimately, and this has come to be a preferred question in recent American fertility research. In order to suggest some of the problems involved in the use of the question on "ideal" family size, let us discuss its possible drawbacks and ambiguities briefly, including its relation to the question on "expected" number of children.

Clearly any question regarding "ideal" family size which specifies no conditions or points of reference for the respondent to take into account leaves him free to answer in whatever terms seem relevant to him. But are these terms similar for all respondents? Or, rather, is one respondent thinking of an "ideal" number of children who will appear under "ideal" conditions, whereas another is thinking of the best number under the stress of realistic limitations? Equally, are some respondents answering in personal terms and others in terms of some hypothetical "average man"? There are no satisfying and elegant answers to such queries for the studies under consideration, since typically only one very general question was asked. Fortunately, however, some experimentation with the phrasing of the question on ideal family size has been done, and this gives a sense of how much hidden variability may exist. A study by Freedman and his colleagues in West Germany contained a question on "ideal" family size for the "average" family in Germany, and another question on the number the respondent would himself desire if "conditions of life were very good." The difference in mean family size between the "ideal" for average Germans (2.6 children) and the number desired for one's self under good conditions (2.7 children) was obviously slight. Since more than one facet of the question was allowed to vary here, we do not know exactly the reason for the similarity of response. We can only say that, given a considerable variability in frame

## PERCENTAGE

	Females	Males
1936	.a	-
1941	5.5	8.0
1943	-	b
1945	1.9	2.8
1947	5.2	6.6
1948	-	-
1952	3.1	3.0
1953	1.2	1.8
1955	0.5	b
1957	7.5	8.6
1959	9.4	8.0
1960	0.3	b
1961	1.5	4.0

<sup>a</sup>Dashes indicate that all respondents replied.

<sup>b</sup>No males sampled.

AIPO nonresponse percentages are higher than the nonresponse rate in studies like GAF which were devoted exclusively to the topic of fertility, in no case did as many as 10 per cent of the respondents fail to reply.

## NATURE AND COMPARABILITY OF THE QUESTION ON FAMILY-SIZE IDEALS

Two principal types of question have been asked in surveys concerning attitudes on family size. One pertains to the respondent's opinion of the "ideal" number of children in a family ("What do you think is the ideal size of family—a hus-

of reference, the similarity was great. It is also possible to compare these data with a question in the same study on "expected" family size. Here the "expected" size of family was only 2.2 children.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the German study, two surveys in the Detroit area (one conducted in 1952 and the other in 1954) varied the "ideal" family-size question somewhat. In 1952 the question was asked with reference to the "average American family," whereas in 1954 it referred to "a young couple . . . if their standard of living is about like yours." The first study produced a mean "ideal" of 3.15 children, whereas the 1954 figure was 2.94. Because the "ideal" expressed by the higher socio-economic strata remained relatively constant between the two studies, whereas

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Freedman, Gerhard Baumert, and Martin Bolte, "Expected Family Size and Family Size Values in West Germany," *Population Studies*, XIII (November, 1959), 136-50.

the lower economic groups showed a definite decline, the authors believe that the more specific reference to level of living brought down the average for the lower economic groups.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the 1960 Growth of American Families Study demonstrates that the "ideals" will change considerably if *extremes* of economic status are explicitly brought before respondents. The table on page 162 shows the "ideal" family-size distributions resulting from three variants of the question: "ideal" for the "average American family," for a "high income family," and for a "low income family."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Freedman, David Goldberg, and Harry Sharp, "Ideals' about Family Size in the Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1954," *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, XXXIII (April, 1955), 187-97.

<sup>6</sup> The previously unpublished materials in this table were derived from the IBM decks of the Growth of American Families, 1960.

Table 4.—REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS IN THE SAMPLE SURVEYS, 1936-61, AND OF THE POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES IN 1930, 1940, 1950, AND 1960—WHITES  
(Region of the Country)

Dates	Northeast	North Central	South	West	Total	
					Per cent	Number
1930	31	34	25	10	100	108,864 <sup>a</sup>
1936	35	32	18	15	100	2,679
1940	29	33	27	11	100	118,215
1941	34	38	14	14	100	3,011
1943	27	30	32	11	100	2,787
1945	33	39	13	15	100	2,726 <sup>b</sup>
1947	32	37	13	18	100	2,784
1948	28	31	27	14	100	3,655 <sup>b</sup>
1950	28	31	27	14	100	134,942
1952	34	36	17	13	100	1,878 <sup>b</sup>
1953	33	32	21	14	100	1,405
1957	37	29	21	13	100	1,308
1959	29	33	22	16	100	1,389
1960	26	30	28	16	100	158,837
1960	24	30	31	15	100	2,414
1961	33	30	22	15	100	2,002 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>For the census totals, the numbers are given in thousands.

<sup>b</sup>Cards unpunched for region of the country are not included here. The 1955 Growth of American Families Study is also not included because its regional breakdown is not comparable with the other surveys.



## PERCENTAGES

Ideal family size	For high income family	For average American family	For low income family
0	-	} 0.1	5.0
1	-		8.8
2	4.0	17.6	61.8
3	9.0	29.4	12.0
4	36.6	43.4	9.7
5	15.8	4.2	} 2.2
6	24.2	4.3	
7	2.8	} 1.0	} 0.5
8	5.5		
9+	2.1		
Total	100.0 (2291)		
5+	50.4	9.5	2.7

Clearly, a general question on "ideal" family size leaves much to be desired methodologically, since we cannot be sure that respondents are answering in terms of similar frames of reference. It may, however, be heartening that Americans tend to think of themselves as "middle class" or "average," hence their answers to a general question on family ideals may refer to their notion of the "average" (including themselves). They may answer with reference to socioeconomic extremes only if the latter are explicitly pressed upon them by the questionnaire. We shall see that answers to the general question from studies other than the 1960 GAF study (for proximate years) are closer to the 1960 GAF "average American family" answers than to either the high- or low-income family distributions. However, the more data we accumulate and analyze on this topic, the more we are led to realize that greater precision is required in formulating the question itself if its usefulness is to be maximized.

*Ideal v. expected family size.*—One effort at improving the family-size question has been made in the Growth of American Families Studies of 1955 and 1960. The studies inquired about the number of children respondents "expected" to have, in addition to asking about "ideals." Al-

though this question has the advantage of specifying a personal reference (the respondent himself), the responses are in other respects very difficult to standardize. The problem of predicting fertility is shifted to the respondent—he is being asked for a calculus of the number of children he would *like* to have as a family (presumably thinking in terms of the family as an isolated goal), combined with the number that he thinks he will have, taking into account a wide variety of conditions (known factors over which he has no control). In some cases, the latter will be some fecundity problem of which he already has knowledge, but the younger he is the less likely he is to know of this difficulty. He will also probably take into account some notion of his long-term financial situation and whether he is in any way inhibited from effectively using contraception. But, in any event, the question scrambles together the issue of "ideals" or "desires" and the facts of life as the respondent is able to know them and assess them. Variability in the answers thus reflects to an unknown degree variability in many factors—family-size "ideals" (presumably under some conditions), knowledge and judgment, moral restraints. We have no way of knowing what weights each respondent should be assigned on the different elements in the mixture because all we are presented with by him is the result itself—"expected" family size.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Expectations" of family size have been found to be relatively good predictors of actual family size in the *aggregate*, apparently because involuntary factors (particularly infecundity and excess fertility) cancel each other out. For example, Campbell, Whelpton, and Tomasson have shown that expectations expressed by respondents in 1955 were remarkably accurate in predicting the number of children actually born between 1955 and 1960, as reported in the 1960 GAF study. However, the 1960 distribution of actual births is compared in the aggregate with the 1955 expectations. See A. A. Campbell, P. K. Whelpton, and R. F. Tomasson, "The Reliability of Birth Expectations of U.S. Wives," *International Population Conference* (London: UNESCO, 1963), pp. 49-56. The congruence between responses and behavior is less impressive where the two factors for the same individual are matched. The unex-

We therefore believe that future sophistication in research on family-size goals will emerge from separating rather than agglomerating the elements in the respondent's motivation. One separate element will always be some "ideal" or desired family size that the respondent holds for himself under certain conditions, as against other factors influencing "expected" family size. Consequently, although the data on ideal family size presented in this paper and others to come are the result of a relatively crude question, we believe that such a series of materials will form a backdrop for cumulatively valuable methodological improvements in the future.

Although we cannot be sure that respondents were thinking of the same issues during the quarter of a century under consideration, we are most fortunate that at least they were *asked* approximately the same question in most of the studies. As may be seen from the footnotes to Table 5, eight polls inquired, "What do you think is the ideal size of family—a husband, a wife, and how many children?" Another survey asked essentially the same question ("How many children makes the nicest size family?"), and the two GAF studies asked for "ideal" family size in terms of the "average American family." Two additional studies inquired as to the number of children the respondent would like to have.

#### TRENDS IN IDEAL FAMILY SIZE

Recent research on American fertility has established that parental desires currently fall within a range of two to four children. Whether this range is evaluated as "wide" or "narrow" depends, of course, on one's criteria of relevance. If one is concerned with the determinants of differ-

ential family-size desires, then one might claim (as Freedman and others have done) that the two-to-four-child range represents a remarkable consensus among Americans on a family of limited proportions.<sup>4</sup> Even here, however, it could be argued that there is a profound sociological difference between having two and having four children and that the determinants of such different ideals within the range require investigation along with the determinants of the limitations on the range itself. Such attention to the width rather than the narrowness of the range becomes particularly relevant if one is concerned with the implications for population growth of having twice two instead of two children. A family pattern of four as against two children not only has yearly manifestations in birth rates but builds into the population a much faster rate of demographic escalation. Therefore, we shall place as much emphasis in our trend analysis on shifts in preference for two, three, and four children as on any changes in the upper and lower limits of the range itself.

Mean ideal family size during the last quarter of a century has varied for both sexes by about one child at the most (Tables 5 and 6). For women, the mean never rises above 3.6 children or falls below 2.7, and for men the picture is similar. Moreover, the sex difference in the mean seems to exhibit a definite pattern. Men typically either want the same size family as do women on the average or they want fewer children. In only two cases, one of which represents a reported figure for husbands by their wives (the 1955 GAF study), are men found to want a slightly larger family than women. There would therefore seem to be an important consensus between the sexes concerning the

plained variance due to involuntary factors has been examined in detail in Philip C. Sagi and Charles F. Westoff, "An Exercise in Partitioning Some of the Components of the Variance in Family Size," *Emerging Techniques in Population Research* (Milbank Memorial Fund, 1963), pp. 130-40.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Freedman, "The Sociology of Human Fertility: A Trend Report and Bibliography," *Current Sociology*, X/XI, No. 2, 1961-62, pp. 35-68, and "American Studies of Family Planning and Fertility: A Review of Major Trends and Issues," in *Research in Family Planning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 211-27.

Table 5.—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY WHITE FEMALES IN THE UNITED STATES, FOR SELECTED YEARS, 1936-61

Ideal family size <sup>a</sup>	1936	1941	1943	1945	1947	1948		1952	1953	1955		1957	1959	1960		1961	
	(21+)	(21+)	(20-34)	(21+)	(21+)	(18-25)	(40-55)	(21+)	(21+)	Min.	Max.	(21+)	(21+)	Min.	Max.	(14-23)	
0	10	3	5	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	
1	2	2	5	1	2	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	
2	29	28	40	21	26	31	20	26	27	21	17	17	16	22	18	19	
3	30	25	25	27	28	35	32	28	29	34	30	36	27	32	30	27	
4	22	30	19	37	33	26	36	33	30	39	44	37	44	39	43	32	
5	4	5	3	7	6	4	5	5	7	3	5	4	7	3	4	10	
6+	3	7	3	7	4	2	6	6	6	3	4	4	5	4	5	10	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
(N) <sup>b</sup>	(704)	(920)	(2690)	(1421)	(1324)	(825)	(859)	(937)	(648)	(2684)	(2684)	(622)	(637)	(2378)	(2377)	(1115)	
$\bar{X}$	2.8	3.2	2.7	3.5	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.4	3.5	3.6	
2-4	81%	83%	84%	85%	87%	92%	87%	87%	86%	94%	91%	90%	87%	93%	91%	78%	

<sup>a</sup>All of the Gallup Polls (those dated 1936, 1941, 1945, 1947, 1952, 1953, 1957, and 1959) except the Gallup Youth Study of 1961 asked the following question: "What do you consider is the ideal size of a family—a husband, wife, and how many children?" The Gallup Youth questionnaire (1961) asked, "How many children would you like to have?" The Roper Poll of 1943 asked, "How many children would you like to have, if you had your choice?" and that of 1948, "How many children do you think makes the nicest size family?" The Growth of American Families Studies of 1955 and 1960 inquired concerning "the ideal number of children for the average American family." The minimum distribution arises from coding range answers (e.g., "two or three") to the lowest figure, and the maximum distribution results from coding them to the highest figure.

<sup>b</sup>Total number of respondents giving codable answers to question on ideal family size.

Table 6.—PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY WHITE MALES IN THE UNITED STATES, FOR SELECTED YEARS, 1936-61

Ideal family size <sup>a</sup>	1936	1941	1945	1947	1948		1952	1953	1955		1957	1959	1960	1961
	(21+)	(21+)	(21+)	(21+)	(18-25)	(40-55)	(21+)	(21+)	(18-39)		(21+)	(21+)	(18-39)	(14-23)
									Min.	Max.			Max.	
0	11	2	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	2	3
1	1	1	1	1	2	1	-	2	5	5	1	1	6	1
2	29	31	23	29	36	31	30	29	34	32	21	22	30	27
3	29	28	27	32	33	32	31	31	26	25	40	34	23	36
4	19	23	28	26	22	24	25	27	23	24	27	27	25	23
5	6	8	11	5	4	4	6	6	4	5	8	8	6	5
6+	5	7	9	6	2	7	7	5	7	8	3	8	8	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N) <sup>b</sup>	(1975)	(1874)	(1241)	(1297)	(905)	(854)	(916)	(694)	(1893)	(1893)	(564)	(593)	(2191)	(943)
$\bar{X}$	2.8	3.2	3.5	3.3	2.9	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.2	3.1
2-4	77%	82%	78%	87%	91%	88%	85%	87%	83%	81%	88%	84%	78%	86%

<sup>a</sup>See footnote a, Table 5, for discussion of the family size question asked on the various schedules. The 1955 data from the Growth of American Families Study are responses by wives about the number their husbands wanted, and the ages given are the ages of the wives who were interviewed.

<sup>b</sup>Total number of respondents giving codable answers to question on ideal family size.

number of children desired, and, if anything, a tendency for men to wish for smaller families than women. The following table clarifies this point:

On the other hand, if we look at variability within the two-to-four-child range, the picture is different—particularly for women. Among them, families of two

MEAN FAMILY SIZE CONSIDERED IDEAL

Date	Men	Women	Difference <sup>a</sup>
1936	2.8	2.8	0
1941	3.2	3.2	0
1945	3.5	3.5	0
1947	3.3	3.2	.1*
1948	2.9	3.1	.2
1948	3.2	3.4	.2
1952	3.3	3.3	0
1953	3.2	3.4	.2
1955	Min. 3.1	2.7	.4*
1955	Max. 3.2	3.3	.1
1957	3.2	3.4	.2
1959	3.4	3.6	.2
1960	3.2	3.2	0
1961	3.1	3.6	.5

<sup>a</sup>Cases where men want more children are marked with an asterisk.

Although the variability in means has been relatively small—especially for men—there is some tendency among women for mean ideal family size to rise in recent years. This will show more clearly when the samples are broken down by age. As it is, the later samples (with the exception of 1957 and 1959) are younger than most of the earlier ones and, since younger respondents want smaller families than older ones regardless of time period, this age difference in the samples somewhat obscures the rise in means.

Turning to the percentage distributions themselves, one finds that the preference for a family of between two and four offspring has been with us at least since the thirties. The percentage of women choosing this number varies only between 78 and 94 for the entire period and for men between 77 and 91. These data for the last quarter of a century thus confirm the view that family-size ideals do not respond very greatly to upheavals such as war, depression, and economic boom—the moderate- to small-size family prevails as the ideal.

children have declined markedly in popularity and the four-child family has become the modal “ideal.” From the 1955 GAF study onward, approximately 40 percent of the women consider a family of four children ideal, whereas in 1936, 1941, and 1943, this many offspring were favored by 22, 30, and 19 percent of the females, respectively. Among men, there appears in the late 1950’s to be some increase in those idealizing three children at the expense of those preferring two. Apparently, the baby-boom experience in the United States has been at least in part a result of a long-term shift in preferences among women from families of two and three children to families of three and four.

#### TREND IN IDEAL FAMILY SIZE AMONG COMPARABLE AGE GROUPS

A division of our surveys into comparable age groups removes the effect of differences in age classification and, in addition, enables us to study family-size ideals by age itself. Let us start with the ideals of youthful respondents—those under 30

—over time. Looking at the means for women in Table 7, one observes a rise in ideal family size among those in the prime reproductive period. The three earliest polls show an average of three or fewer children; none of the studies prior to 1953 exceed 3.3 children as a mean, and most fall below this figure. After the early 1950's, a mean of 3.3 children becomes the low rather than the high figure, and a number of polls exceed this average. Comparison of the three early polls with those of the fifties indicates, for these young women, approximately a doubling of the percentages desiring four children. Con-

versely, the two-child family has moved from being the choice of a third or more of young women to being selected by a poor fifth of them. Among young men, the means have changed less than among women. The former idealize a mean as high as 3.3 children in only one instance. There has been some decline in the percentage choosing two children and some increase in those selecting four, but in neither case has the shift been as great as for women. Young women in recent years quite consistently prefer a larger family than do young men.

The age group 30-44 shows the same

Table 7.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS, AGED UNDER 30, 1936-61—WHITES  
(Ideal Family Size—Percentages and Means)

Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total		$\bar{X}$
								Per cent	Number <sup>c</sup>	
Females										
1936 <sup>a</sup>	10	2	33	38	14	2	1	100	105	2.6
1941	1	2	39	30	22	1	5	100	213	3.0
1943	4	6	40	26	19	2	3	100	1771	2.7
1945	-	1	24	34	33	5	3	100	342	3.3
1947	1	1	29	32	30	4	3	100	310	3.1
1948 <sup>b</sup>	1	1	31	35	26	4	2	100	825	3.1
1952	1	1	31	32	30	2	3	100	195	3.1
1953	-	1	32	29	26	5	7	100	146	3.3
1955 Min.	-	1	23	34	37	3	2	100	1259	3.3
Max.	-	-	17	32	43	5	3	100	1259	3.4
1957	-	1	16	44	34	3	2	100	128	3.3
1959	-	1	18	26	48	5	2	100	121	3.5
1960 Min.	-	-	23	34	37	3	3	100	1099	3.3
Max.	-	-	18	32	42	4	4	100	1099	3.4
1961	1	1	19	27	32	10	10	100	1115	3.6
Males										
1936 <sup>a</sup>	10	3	34	30	16	4	3	100	290	2.6
1941	1	2	43	30	15	6	3	100	369	2.9
1945	-	-	32	36	22	7	3	100	148	3.1
1947	2	-	36	33	21	4	4	100	249	3.0
1948 <sup>b</sup>	1	2	36	33	22	4	2	100	905	2.9
1952	-	1	38	35	20	4	2	100	138	3.0
1953	-	1	43	29	21	3	3	100	117	2.9
1957	-	-	32	37	26	5	-	100	81	3.0
1959	-	2	26	32	26	8	6	100	86	3.3
1961	3	1	27	36	23	5	5	100	943	3.1

<sup>a</sup>Ages 24 and under.

<sup>b</sup>Ages 18-25

<sup>c</sup>Total number of respondents giving codable answers to questions on age and ideal family size.

trends over time (Table 8). For the women in this category, the mean ideal family size becomes consistently stabilized at around 3.5 children, whereas in earlier years it is closer to three. As early as 1945, the four-child preference is established as the modal category, with two-child families declining as a choice. Men in this age group exhibit little trend in the average number of children desired, but evince a continuous increase in the percentage preferring three children at the expense primarily of those choosing two. Small, erratic changes in other family-size categories for men compensate for this shift and leave the averages relatively unaffected over time.

Older women, those aged 45 and over

(Table 9), exhibit little consistent pattern of change in the averages. Beginning with 1941, their preferences run consistently in favor of about 3.5 children, and, except for 1936, the modal category is four children. The two latest polls for women of this age—1957 and 1959—show a pronounced drop in two-child preferences and an increase in four children as the ideal compared with the ten years preceding. With the exception of 1936, the means in this age group among men tend to be high—around 3.5 children—with little trend beyond the depression year. There does, however, seem to be some rise in the proportion selecting three- and four-child families.

This analysis by comparable age groups

Table 8.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS AGED 30-44, 1936-60—WHITES  
(Ideal Family Size—Percentages and Means)

Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total		$\bar{X}$
								Per cent	Number <sup>b</sup>	
Females										
1936	9	1	32	29	22	5	2	100	371	2.8
1941	2	2	34	24	27	6	5	100	321	3.1
1943 <sup>a</sup>	6	5	37	36	19	3	4	100	807	2.7
1945	-	1	25	31	33	7	3	100	503	3.3
1947	1	2	29	28	31	5	4	100	461	3.2
1952	-	3	27	26	34	5	5	100	358	3.3
1953	-	1	25	29	33	8	4	100	252	3.3
1955 Min. <sup>c</sup>	-	-	20	34	39	3	4	100	1425	3.4
Max.	-	-	16	30	45	4	5	100	1425	3.5
1957	-	1	19	36	37	3	4	100	258	3.4
1959	-	1	13	33	40	7	6	100	243	3.6
1960 Min. <sup>c</sup>	-	-	20	31	40	4	5	100	1279	3.4
Max.	-	-	17	28	44	4	7	100	1278	3.6
Males										
1936	10	1	31	32	17	6	3	100	949	2.8
1941	2	2	34	31	21	5	5	100	683	3.1
1945	-	1	26	29	29	8	7	100	393	3.4
1947	1	1	34	35	22	3	4	100	425	3.0
1952	1	1	35	34	20	4	5	100	322	3.1
1953	-	1	27	37	24	7	4	100	217	3.3
1957	1	1	22	46	22	6	2	100	203	3.1
1959	-	1	21	41	27	4	6	100	177	3.3

<sup>a</sup>Ages 30-34.

<sup>b</sup>Total number of respondents giving codable answers to questions on age and ideal family size.

<sup>c</sup>Ages 30-39.

over time shows that the shift to a three-and-four-child preference characterizes younger women and women in their thirties, whereas older women have remained more stable in the proportions desiring families this large. That older women do not push up their ideals markedly beyond four children seems to indicate that the "distance" between four and more-than-four is substantial and not readily bridged even by an age group consistently at the top of the two-to-four-child range. Of course, it remains for us to examine in later papers how the composition of these age groupings has changed over time with regard to important social and economic characteristics. Among men, the analysis by age groups leads us to suspect that larger family ideals may "grow" on men after the fact and that, if we had more masculine data for later years and older age groupings, we would find more of an

over-all masculine increase in the number of children considered ideal. It does seem important that our series of data gives little indication of a masculine desire for large families. In so far as women want them, their reactions cannot be ascribed to male pressure.

CONTRASTS IN FAMILY-SIZE IDEALS  
AMONG AGE GROUPS

A comparison of age groups themselves, rather than a trend for each age group separately, shows that, regardless of the period, older people tend to have larger family ideals. Within each study, we typically find a linear relationship with age. Among the nine means for the age group 45 and over, eight are as high as 3.4 children or more; among the 17 means among those under 30 and the 15 averages among those 30-44, only five are this high. The percentage distributions show the same picture (Tables 10 and 11).

Table 9.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS, AGED 45 AND OVER, 1936-59—WHITES  
(Ideal Family Size—Percentages and Means)

Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total		$\bar{X}$
								Per cent	Number <sup>b</sup>	
Females										
1936	12	2	25	27	25	5	4	100	209	2.9
1941	5	2	18	22	36	7	10	100	368	3.5
1945	1	1	15	21	42	8	12	100	559	3.8
1947	1	1	21	26	38	7	6	100	544	3.5
1948 <sup>a</sup>	-	1	20	32	36	5	6	100	859	3.4
1952	-	-	22	28	34	7	9	100	364	3.5
1953	-	-	26	28	29	9	8	100	249	3.5
1957	2	1	15	32	39	6	5	100	232	3.5
1959	-	1	16	23	45	9	6	100	268	3.6
Males										
1936	14	1	24	24	22	8	7	100	699	3.0
1941	3	1	24	24	27	10	11	100	792	3.5
1945	2	1	18	26	29	13	11	100	691	3.7
1947	1	2	23	29	30	7	8	100	611	3.5
1948 <sup>a</sup>	1	1	31	32	24	4	7	100	854	3.2
1952	1	-	25	28	30	7	9	100	449	3.5
1953	-	2	26	30	31	6	5	100	359	3.3
1957	-	2	17	37	30	10	4	100	277	3.4
1959	-	1	20	31	28	10	10	100	325	3.6

<sup>a</sup>Ages 40-55.

<sup>b</sup>Total number of respondents giving codable answers to questions on age and ideal family size.



Table 10.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY FEMALES BY AGE, 1936-60—WHITES  
(Percentage Distributions and Means)

Dates	Under 30						30 - 44						45 +					
	0-1	2-4	5+	Total		$\bar{X}$	0-1	2-4	5+	Total		$\bar{X}$	0-1	2-4	5+	Total		$\bar{X}$
				Per cent	N					Per cent	N					Per cent	N	
1936 (21+)	12	85	3	100	105	2.6	10	83	7	100	189	2.7	14	77	9	100	209	2.9
1941 (21+)	3	91	6	100	213	3.0	4	85	11	100	321	3.1	7	76	17	100	368	3.5
1943 (20-34)	10	85	5	100	1771	2.7	11	82	7	100	807	2.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
1945 (21+)	1	91	8	100	342	3.3	1	89	10	100	503	3.3	2	78	20	100	559	3.8
1947 (21+)	2	92	6	100	310	3.1	3	88	9	100	461	3.2	2	85	13	100	544	3.5
1948 (18-25)	2	92	6	100	825	3.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	88	11	100	859	3.4
1948 (40-55)	2	93	5	100	195	3.1	3	87	10	100	358	3.3	-	84	16	100	364	3.5
1952 (21+)	1	94	5	100	1259	3.3	-	93	7	100	1425	3.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
1955 (18-39)	-	92	8	100	1259	3.4	-	91	9	100	1425	3.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Min.	1	94	5	100	128	3.3	1	92	7	100	258	3.4	3	86	11	100	232	3.5
Max.	1	92	7	100	121	3.5	1	86	13	100	243	3.6	2	84	14	100	268	3.6
1957 (21+)	-	94	6	100	1099	3.3	-	91	9	100	1279	3.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
1959 (21+)	-	92	8	100	1099	3.4	-	89	11	100	1278	3.6	-	-	-	-	-	-
Min.	-	94	6	100	1099	3.3	-	91	9	100	1279	3.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Max.	-	92	8	100	1099	3.4	-	89	11	100	1278	3.6	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 11.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN CONSIDERED IDEAL BY MALES BY AGE, 1936-59—WHITES  
(Percentage Distributions and Means)

Dates	Under 30						30 - 44						45 +					
	0-1	2-4	5+	Total		$\bar{X}$	0-1	2-4	5+	Total		$\bar{X}$	0-1	2-4	5+	Total		$\bar{X}$
				Per cent	N					Per cent	N					Per cent	N	
1936 (21+)	13	80	7	100	290	2.6	11	80	9	100	949	2.8	15	70	15	100	699	3.0
1941 (21+)	3	88	9	100	369	2.9	4	86	10	100	683	3.1	4	75	21	100	792	3.5
1945 (21+)	-	90	10	100	148	3.1	1	84	15	100	393	3.4	3	73	24	100	691	3.7
1947 (21+)	2	90	8	100	249	3.0	2	91	7	100	425	3.0	3	82	15	100	611	3.5
1948 (18-25) (40-55)	3	91	6	100	905	2.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	87	11	100	854	3.2
1952 (21+)	1	93	6	100	138	3.0	2	89	9	100	322	3.1	1	83	16	100	449	3.5
1953 (21+)	1	93	6	100	117	2.9	1	88	11	100	217	3.3	2	87	11	100	350	3.3
1957 (21+)	-	95	5	100	81	3.0	2	90	8	100	203	3.1	2	84	14	100	277	3.4
1959 (21+)	2	84	14	100	86	3.3	1	89	10	100	177	3.3	1	79	20	100	325	3.6

Is this relationship with age a function of some characteristic—such as education—which is independently associated with family-size ideals? Subsequent analyses will be addressed to this point. An alternative, or additional, hypothesis is that the individual's position in the family cycle is influential. Those who have completed their families and reared their children may either rationalize the three, four, or five children they have had or, if their families have been smaller, they may feel that they could have taken on more, that they were too cautious, or that the family is more important than they believed when they were young and distracted by diverse aims and ambitions. A sense of regret for not having had more children may be a highly patterned characteristic of older people in societies where great pressure is experienced among the young to limit their families severely. Whatever interpretation turns out ultimately to be correct, it seems clear that the relatively substantial family ideals of the older generation during this period in American history must have had some influence on young people. During the past twenty-five years, the latter have grown up in a society where their elders believed a family of three or, more typically, four children ideal. Just what influence this apparently familistic orientation of the elders has had may perhaps be evidenced in the increasing family ideals among those under 30 once the depression years were over. It certainly seems to be true that new generations were not discouraged by their elders from investment in the three-to-four-child family.

#### SUMMARY

Our data on ideal family size from thirteen surveys and polls over the past quarter of a century show a variability among white women of about one child from the lowest to the highest mean, with a rise in family-size ideals in recent years. Among men, the picture is similar but the variability is less. It is apparent, therefore, that a time period which included the depres-

sion, the war, and the years of postwar prosperity did not give rise to a drastic realignment of reproductive desires among white Americans. Whether one looks at averages or percentage distributions, the two-to-four-child range has encompassed the ideals of approximately 80 to 90 per cent of our men and women since the middle of the 1930's.

However, although respondents did not go to extremes of change during the period under consideration, they did vary their reproductive goals within the two-to-four-child range in a demographically significant manner. Our analysis, which allows us to look at shifts in the number of respondents desiring two, three, and four children, respectively, shows a definite movement away from the two-and-three-child to the three-and-four-child family among women. Among men in the late 1950's, there seems to be some increase in the proportion desiring three children at the expense of two. It would appear, therefore, that the baby-boom experience in the United States has been in part a result of shifting preferences, especially among women, from the lower and middle parts of the family-size continuum to the middle and upper reaches. Hence, although fertility ideals are still compressed within the two-to-four-child range, the four-child family has become the modal category for the mid-century woman, and the two-child family is chosen by less than a fifth of female respondents in recent surveys. Such a result implies that the image of a "planned family" of two or, at the most, three children is archaic. For approximately 40 per cent of female respondents, "excess" fertility (fertility over and above the ideal) begins only with the fifth child.

The shift to the three-and-four-child preference is particularly sharp among women in the reproductive ages—those under 30 and 30-44—since older women, those aged 45 and over, choose a family size close to the top of the range throughout the time period. The net result of rises in family-size ideals among younger

women and relatively static desires among older ones is to make women of all ages more similar in reproductive goals than was previously the case. Among men in the various age groups, there is some proportionate shift away from an ideal of two children to an ideal of three or four, but the changes are not as marked as for women. In particular, young women in recent years prefer larger families than do young men.

Despite the fact that differences between old and young women are diminishing, family-size ideals exhibit a consistent pattern of increase with age in the various studies. Such a finding may perhaps be explained, on the one hand, by distinctive

socioeconomic characteristics of older as against younger people at every date and, on the other hand, by a change in attitudes toward family size as individuals move through the life cycle. Regardless of the antecedents, however, we are led to ask whether such pronatalist ideals among the grandparent generation have not constituted a moral backdrop for the reproductive renaissance among the young. In the future, therefore, it may be valuable to study the familial preferences of both the older and the reproducing generation in more detail, because the former—through their moral, as well as their tangible support—may influence the reproductive performance of young people.