

A FURTHER LOOK AT CATHOLIC FERTILITY

BASIL G. ZIMMER AND CALVIN GOLDSCHIEDER*

RESUMEN

El propósito de este trabajo es determinar hasta qué punto la suburbanización ha influido en la tradicional diferencia en fertilidad observada entre católicos y protestantes. Se plantea la hipótesis de que la suburbanización ha servido para disminuir las diferencias religiosas en fertilidad porque en etapas avanzadas de urbanismo como es la suburbanización, los católicos tienen la tendencia a adoptar los patrones de fecundidad de sociedades más grandes y secularizadas. La atención se enfocó hacia dos objetivos: (1) Examinar aspectos selectivos sobre fertilidad para católicos y protestantes que viven en áreas metropolitanas y (2) Analizar diferencias religiosas en fertilidad entre residentes en diferentes puntos de la comunidad metropolitana.

Los datos, tomados de una muestra de vivienda en seis áreas metropolitanas y en tres clases sociales, comprobaron los resultados que habían sido encontrados en otros estudios en referencia a las diferencias de fertilidad entre religiones. Los católicos tuvieron familias más grandes, menor promedio de tiempo entre los niños y períodos mayores de fertilidad en comparación con los protestantes aun habiendo sido empleadas muchas variables de control. Examinando las diferencias en fertilidad entre católicos y protestantes en la ciudad central y en segmentos suburbanos de grandes y pequeñas áreas metropolitanas, los datos indican que marcadas diferencias entre católicos y protestantes se encuentran todavía en las ciudades centrales, sin embargo, las diferencias de fertilidad entre los dos grupos religiosos tienden a desaparecer entre los dos grupos suburbanos. La convergencia en los patrones de fertilidad en áreas suburbanas es debido a efectos combinados de alta fertilidad entre los protestantes residiendo en los suburbios cuando se compara con la de los protestantes de la ciudad central, mientras los católicos suburbanos tienden a tener menos niños que los que viven en la ciudad. El resultado neto es la convergencia en la fertilidad suburbana.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to determine the extent to which suburbanization has influenced the traditional fertility differences observed between Catholics and Protestants. It is hypothesized that suburbanization has served to decrease religious differences in fertility, since in the more advanced stages of urbanism, that is, suburbanization, the Catholic population is likely to adopt the fertility patterns of the larger and more secularized society. Attention is focused on two objectives: (1) to examine selected aspects of fertility for Catholics and Protestants living in metropolitan areas and (2) to analyze religious differentials in fertility among residents in different parts of the metropolitan community.

The data, consisting of a sample of households in six metropolitan areas in three population size classes, supported the general findings pertaining to religious differences in fertility that have been reported in the literature. Catholics had larger families, shorter average spacing between children, and longer fertility spans when compared to Protestants, even when a number of control variables were employed. Examining fertility differences between Catholics and Protestants in central city and suburban segments of large and small metropolitan areas, we found that the data indicated that marked Catholic-Protestant differences are still found in central cities. However, fertility differences between the two religious groups tended largely to disappear among suburban residents. The convergence in the fertility patterns of suburbanites is due to combined effects of higher fertility among Protestant suburban residents when compared to central city Protestants and the tendency of suburban Catholics to have fewer children than those who live in the city. The net result is convergence in suburban fertility.

It would seem that the literature on Catholic-Protestant fertility differentials, in the United States in particular, is so extensive and convincing that further work would be superfluous.¹ Yet there are dimensions of the problem that have been largely neglected and at best have re-

ceived only incidental research attention. Specifically, the influence of place of residence within metropolitan areas on the fertility behavior of different religious groups has been largely ignored in most studies of fertility. This is rather surprising, since the growth of population in sub-

* Brown University and the University of California-Berkeley respectively.

¹ See, for example, Ronald Freedman, Pascal K. Whelpton, and Arthur Campbell, *Family*

urban areas has been one of the major changes in population redistribution in the United States in recent years. There is a great deal of literature on the suburbs as such, but little attention has been focused on this in relationship to fertility behavior.

The evidence available from the two major fertility studies in the United States is unclear and conflicting. The 1955 "Growth of American Families Study" concluded that Protestant and Catholic wives in the suburbs of the twelve largest cities expected slightly more births than wives in central cities. Although the pattern of residential differential in fertility was the same for Protestants and Catholics, differences were greater among Protestants. However, in smaller metropolitan areas, there were no statistically significant differences in the fertility expectations of Protestant and Catholic city residents when compared to Protestant and Catholic suburbanites.² The Princeton study, although limited in sample and design, found that Catholic fertility was not at all associated with residence, while among Protestants the highest fertility appears to characterize central city residents. These findings do not present a clear picture of differentials in fertility among religious groups in different residential areas and suggest the need for further exploration and study.³

Planning, Sterility, and Population Growth (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959); Charles Westoff, Robert Potter, Philip Sagi, and Eliot Mishler, *Family Growth in Metropolitan America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Charles Westoff, Robert Potter and Philip Sagi, *The Third Child* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Dudley Kirk, "Recent Trends of Catholic Fertility in the United States," *Current Research in Human Fertility* (Milbank Memorial Fund, 1955); and Charles Westoff, "Religion and Fertility in Metropolitan America," *Thirty Years of Research in Human Fertility: Retrospect and Prospect* (Milbank Memorial Fund, 1958).

² Freedman, Whelpton, and Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-13.

³ Westoff, Potter, Sagi, and Mishler, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-81; Westoff, Potter, Sagi, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-82, 241-42.

The purpose of this paper is to determine the extent to which the suburban movement has influenced the traditional fertility differences frequently observed among Catholics as compared with other segments of the population. It is hypothesized here that the suburbanization movement has served to decrease the religious differentials, since, in the more advanced stages of urbanism, which is reflected in the movement to the suburbs, the Catholic population is likely to adopt the fertility patterns of the larger and more secularized and materialistic society. In short, the assumption is made here that in the more advanced stages of urbanism the total population tends to become increasingly homogeneous culturally. Thus, by the time Catholics have reached the point where they can participate in the suburban movement, they likely have become greatly assimilated to the "American" or Protestant way of life. Consequently, behavioral patterns, including reproduction, would likely tend to become more similar.

The present paper focuses on two objectives. First, we shall test once again, for the total metropolitan area population, selected aspects of fertility by religious groups. Second, we shall pursue the analysis in terms of the suburbanization movement by focusing on the religious differentials in fertility among the residents in different parts of the metropolitan community. The study is based on a sample of households in six metropolitan areas in three different population size classes.

In the original study, which was designed for a specific problem, an approximately equal number of families was selected in each of the metropolitan areas, with the same number of cases being selected in the suburbs as in the central cities.⁴ However, for purposes of this

⁴ The larger study, which includes 2,900 households, is concerned with problems of government and education in metropolitan areas with particular attention being focused on central city-suburban differences. The study is under the

analysis a sample proportional to the size of the population in each subarea was selected so as to have a random sample of the total metropolitan population.⁵ This sample, which consists of 1,223 households, serves as the basis for the first part of the analysis. Of this number, 524 were Catholic households while 699 were Protestant families. When attention is focused on central city-suburban residence, the total original sample for each subarea is used for both the large and the small metropolitan areas.⁶

Focusing first on the total metropolitan area sample, we find the expected Catholic-Protestant differences in the number of children ever born. The Catholic families at the time of the survey had produced an average of 2.64 children, as compared with 2.31 for Protestants. When only families with children are included, a similar difference is found, but the averages are somewhat higher. Here Catholics have 3.1 children as compared with 2.7 for Protestants.

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⁵ This, of course, meant that many cases were discarded, but this method of obtaining a random sample of the metropolitan areas seemed preferable to inflating segments of the sample, as was done, for example, in the Indianapolis fertility study.

⁶ The number of cases in each residential category is approximately equal. The sample sizes are: central cities, 477 and 488, for large and small, respectively; suburban areas, 495 and 492. The large metropolitan areas are Milwaukee and Buffalo; the small metropolitan areas are Saginaw and Rockford.

An inspection of the data presented in Table 1 indicates that these differences are due, at least in part, to the longer fertility span experienced by Catholics.⁷ On the average, the Catholic group spread their births over 7.4 years, as compared with only 6.5 years for the Protestant group. When we focus on those who have completed the reproductive cycle, that is those over 45 years of age, we find the Catholic span to be 9.3 years, whereas Protestants completed their fertility in 8.0 years. The longer span for Catholics persists within each age at first-birth category.

The differences by religion are largest among those who had their first birth in the youngest ages. Of those who had their first birth prior to reaching 21 years of age, the fertility span for Catholics extends 9.2 years as compared with only 7.5 years for Protestants. Thus the Catholic span exceeds the Protestant span by nearly 23 percent. However, the religious difference decreases with age at first birth and declines to only 7.2 percent among those who did not have their first child until after 26 years of age. In this category the average fertility span is only 6.1 years for Catholics and 5.7 years for Protestants. In both religious groups the length of the fertility span is directly related to the age at which they had their first child. The range, however, for the categories used here is nearly twice as long for Catholics (3.1 years) as for Prot-

⁷ The fertility span is the number of years between the first birth and the last birth. This is a crude measure, since it includes only whole years; thus the values should be viewed only as approximations.

Table 1.—FERTILITY SPAN BY RELIGION AND AGE AT FIRST BIRTH

Age at first birth	Catholic	Protestant	Percent difference
Total.....	7.4	6.5	13.8
20 years and under.....	9.2	7.5	22.7
21 - 25 years.....	7.4	6.3	17.5
26 years and over.....	6.1	5.7	7.2

estants (1.8 years). Catholics were less likely than Protestants to have their first births in the youngest category (21.5 percent v. 27.5 percent) but were more likely to continue to have children later in the reproductive cycle. Thus, while nearly half (46 percent) of the Catholics had their last child after attaining 31 years of age, only slightly more than one-third (36 percent) of the Protestants did so. The Catholic fertility span is larger and produces more children.

In Table 2 we find that within each religious group the number of children ever born varies directly and markedly by age at which the wife had her first birth. In both religious groups where first births did not occur until after 30 years of age, the total number of children ever born is more than one less than among those whose first birth occurred in the youngest category. Thus total fertility is decreased by approximately two-fifths by delaying age at first birth over the range presented

Table 2.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN BY RELIGION AND AGE AT FIRST BIRTH

Age at first birth	Catholic	Protestant
Total.....	3.1	2.7
20 years and under.....	3.3	3.2
21 - 25 years.....	3.3	2.7
26 - 30 years.....	2.8	2.3
31 years and over.....	2.1	1.9

here. However, within each age at first-birth category, Catholic fertility exceeds that of Protestants.

Similar differences are observed when we control for present age of wife. Within each age group and each age at first-birth category, Catholics report a larger number of children than Protestants. Differences among those 45 years of age and over, as shown in Table 3, are particularly interesting since those in this group have completed their fertility. Catholic fertility is higher within each age at first-birth category. However, within each religious group, marked differences are found by

variation in age at first birth. Catholics who had their first child under 21 years of age produced 4.2 children by the end of their fertility cycle, whereas the Protestant group averaged 3.5 children. Thus Catholics, by the time they had completed the fertility cycle, exceeded Protestants by about 20 percent. This is the group of maximum exposure, so one would expect the largest number of children, particularly among those who are likely to make infrequent use of birth control devices or use the less efficient methods. Even among those whose first birth was after age 26,

Table 3.—COMPLETED FERTILITY BY RELIGION AND AGE AT FIRST AND LAST BIRTHS

Age at first and last birth	Catholic	Protestant
Age at first birth		
20 years and under..	4.2	3.5
21 - 25 years.....	3.8	3.1
26 years and over...	2.5	2.3
Age at last birth		
Under 25 years.....	2.1	2.3
25 - 30 years.....	2.4	2.3
31 - 35 years.....	3.2	2.9
36 years and over...	4.7	3.6

Catholic fertility exceeds that of Protestants, but the size of the difference is much smaller. In this category, Catholics exceeded Protestants by only 8.7 percent.

The largest differences in fertility are found when we focus on age at last birth among those who have completed the fertility cycle. Little or no difference by religion is found among those whose last birth occurred under 30 years of age, but, of those whose last birth occurred between 31 and 35 years, Catholic exceeds Protestant fertility by 10 percent (3.2 v. 2.9 children). This difference increases threefold, to 30 percent, among those who continued to have children after age 35 years. In the latter category Catholics averaged 4.7 children compared with 3.6 children among Protestants.

Those whose first births occur early

tend to have a longer fertility span than those who did not have their first child until later in life. These differences are found within each religious group when a number of control variables are used. However, within each control category and each age at first-birth category, the fertility span tends to be longer for Catholics. The data presented in Table 4 illustrate these observations. Within each age at first-birth category at both occupational levels, the average fertility span for Catholics is longer than it is for Protestants. Thus, in having more children, Catholics utilize more of the reproductive cycle. Further, it is found that the lower-status blue-collar workers, in both religious groups, tend to use up more of the fertility cycle than do the higher-status white-collar workers. This is particularly the case among Catholics. Within each age at first birth-category, blue-collar families experienced a fertility span that exceeds that of the white-collar families by a year or more. The pattern of difference by occupation among Protestants is less consistent and much less marked. But the Catholic-Protestant difference is clearly evident.

Even though Catholics tend to have a longer fertility span than Protestants,

they also tend to average less spacing between births, as is shown in Table 5. Catholics average a shorter period of time between births at all age levels and within each age at first-birth category.⁸ In general, the younger the age at first birth, the longer the average length of time between births. This pattern holds within each religious group, but in all subcategories the average spacing is less for Catholics than for Protestants.

Thus our data, viewed in terms of several variables, clearly support the general findings pertaining to religious differences that have been reported in the literature. However, to this point we have been concerned only with the total metropolitan population. We now turn our attention to the influence of place of residence within the metropolitan area on fertility behavior. Fertility patterns will be observed in both large and small metropolitan areas, with particular attention being focused on central city-suburban differences.

In Table 6 is presented the average

⁸ Average spacing between births was calculated by subtracting the age of the youngest child ever born from the age of the oldest child and dividing by the total number of children ever born minus one.

Table 4.—FERTILITY SPAN BY RELIGION, BY OCCUPATION, AND BY AGE AT FIRST BIRTH

Age at first birth	White collar		Blue collar	
	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant
20 years and under....	7.9	7.3	8.9	7.6
21 - 25 years.....	6.8	6.3	7.8	6.2
26 years and over.....	5.8	5.4	6.6	6.1

Table 5.—AVERAGE SPACING BY RELIGION, BY PRESENT AGE, AND BY AGE AT FIRST BIRTH

Age at first birth	Under 35 years		35 - 44 years		45 years & over	
	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant
20 years and under....	2.67	2.70	4.28	4.64	3.43	3.79
21 - 25 years.....	2.33	2.63	3.60	3.71	3.92	3.96
26 years and over.....	2.13	2.38	2.97	3.80	3.18	4.15

number of children ever born for the total families in the sample and separately for families with children. The same pattern of difference by religious groups and place of residence is observed for both indices of fertility, but the Catholic-Protestant difference is largest when only families with children are considered. It is evident from these data that much of the religious difference disappears when we control for place of residence. Thus, in large metropolitan areas for the total sample, Catholics have 20 percent more children than Protestants, but in the suburban areas the difference declines to only 4.3 percent. In the small metropolitan areas the same pattern is observed. The difference between the two religious groups declines from 20 percent to 3.6 percent. If we focus only on families with children, we find that, while Catholics exceed the Protestants by 28 percent in the central cities in the large metropolitan areas, this declines to 11.5 percent in the suburbs. In the small metropolitan areas, suburban Catholics exceed Protestants by only slightly more than 3 percent, but in the central cities the difference is 8 times larger, that is, 25.9 percent.

According to the data presented in Table 6, fertility rates are higher in the small metropolitan areas than in the large areas. This difference is found for both Catholics and Protestants and for both central city and suburban residents. However, of particular significance here is the fact that there tends to be a convergence

of the fertility patterns of the two religious groups in the suburbs. For the Protestant families, the number of children ever born tends to be somewhat larger among those living in the suburbs than for those in the central city in both large and small metropolitan areas. This is the case whether we view the total sample or only the families with children. However, Catholics who are suburban residents tend to have fewer children than those who live in central cities. Consequently, religious differences tend to disappear among suburban residents, while the differences in the central cities exceed the average difference found for the total metropolitan population.

The same pattern by place of residence and religion continues to be found when we control for present age of the wife, as is done in Table 7. The only exception is found among those in the early stages of the reproductive cycle.⁹ In this category the central city-suburban pattern is reversed for Catholics but remains unchanged for Protestants. It may be that the convergence we have observed above, and which is also evident for the other two age groups, is not reached until late in the reproductive cycle. It may be only in the latter stages of the cycle that suburban Catholics decrease their fertility. At any rate, for those 35-44 years of age and for those who have completed their fertility, the Catholic-Protestant differences are much smaller among suburban than cen-

⁹ The following analysis is limited only to families with children.

Table 6.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN BY RELIGION, BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE, AND BY SIZE OF METROPOLITAN AREA

Size of SMA and place of residence	Total sample			Families with children		
	Catholic	Protestant	Percent difference	Catholic	Protestant	Percent difference
Large						
Central City.....	2.5	2.0	20.0	3.2	2.5	28.0
Suburbs.....	2.3	2.2	4.3	2.9	2.6	11.5
Small						
Central City.....	2.9	2.3	20.1	3.4	2.7	25.9
Suburbs.....	2.8	2.7	3.6	3.2	3.1	3.2

tral city residents. The significance of place of residence is particularly marked among those who have completed their fertility. Again we find that for Protestants the number of children ever born in the suburbs is equal to or exceeds the rate in the central city, but among Catholics the average number of children ever born is lower in the suburbs.

Thus the convergence of the two religious groups is striking. In the central cities, in both population size classes, the Catholic-Protestant differences are approximately 5 times larger than the differences found in the suburbs. In the large metropolitan areas, completed Catholic fertility exceeds the Protestant fertility by 34.6 percent, but in the suburbs the differential declines to only 7.7 percent. The same pattern and the same relative difference are also observed in the small metropolitan areas. Thus the convergence of the fertility rates in the suburbs is clearly not a function of the age composi-

tion of the population, for the differences persist when age is held constant.

Similarly, the same fertility pattern by religion and place of residence is found when we control for socioeconomic status.¹⁰ These data are shown in Table 8. At both socioeconomic levels Catholic fertility is higher than the Protestant rate within each subarea in both large and small metropolitan areas. But here, too, we find that, while Protestants in the suburbs tend to have more children than those in the city, the opposite is found among the Catholics, except for those in the small metropolitan areas at the lower socioeconomic level. But the fertility rate of the Protestant group in the suburbs at this status level is so high that the religious difference tends to disappear. Catho-

¹⁰ Socioeconomic groups were based on education of the wife and the income and occupation of the head of the household. If the family ranked high on at least two variables, it was placed in the high-status category, whereas, if it rated low on two variables, it was assigned a low status.

Table 7.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN BY RELIGION AND PRESENT AGE BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE AND SIZE OF METROPOLITAN AREA

Size of SMA and place of residence	Catholic	Protestant	Percent difference
Large	Under 35 years		
Central City.....	2.2	2.1	4.8
Suburbs.....	2.6	2.5	4.0
Small			
Central City.....	2.9	2.7	7.4
Suburbs.....	3.2	2.9	10.3
Large	35 - 44 years		
Central City.....	3.5	2.6	25.7
Suburbs.....	3.2	3.0	6.7
Small			
Central City.....	3.5	2.9	20.7
Suburbs.....	3.3	3.1	6.5
Large	45 years and over		
Central City.....	3.5	2.6	34.6
Suburbs.....	2.8	2.6	7.7
Small			
Central City.....	3.6	2.7	33.3
Suburbs.....	3.3	3.1	6.5

lics exceed the Protestants by less than 3 percent. However, at the same level in the city, Catholic-Protestant differences exceed this difference sixfold, that is, 17.2 percent as compared to 2.9 percent. In the large metropolitan areas, the religious differences in the central city at the lower socioeconomic level are approximately 8 times larger than the suburban differences, that is, while city Catholics have a fertility rate 26.9 percent higher than the Protestants, the difference in the suburbs declines to only 3.4 percent.

The importance of socioeconomic status in fertility behavior is also clearly evident from these data, but the same patterns by place of residence are also found at the higher-status level. In the large metropolitan areas, Catholic fertility at the higher socioeconomic level exceeds that of Protestants by 36.4 percent, but this difference declines to 16.7 percent among suburban residents. In the small metropolitan area, the decline is from 26.9 percent to only 7.1 percent.

It is evident from these data that the movement of population to the suburbs is a dimension that should be fully assessed in future fertility research. When attention was focused only on the total

metropolitan area population, the usual religious differentials were consistently observed, even when a number of relevant control variables were employed; however, we found that much of the difference tended to disappear when we controlled for place of residence within the metropolitan area.

Our data indicate that, while marked Catholic-Protestant differences are still found in the central cities, the differences tend to largely disappear among suburban residents. This is due to the combined effects of Protestants increasing their fertility in the suburbs and suburban Catholics tending to have fewer children than those who live in the city. The net result, as already noted, is that there is a convergence between the two religious groups in the number of children ever born. In short, the fertility behavior of the two groups is similar.

In the future it is likely that Catholics will make up an increasing proportion of the suburban population. Thus, to the extent that the findings of this study can be generalized, we would expect an overall decline in Catholic-Protestant fertility differentials. It is hoped that future fertility research will focus on this new pattern of settlement.

Table 8.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN BY RELIGION AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE AND SIZE OF METROPOLITAN AREA

Size of SMA and place of residence	High status			Low status		
	Catholic	Protestant	Difference	Catholic	Protestant	Difference
Large						
Central City.....	3.0	2.2	36.4	3.3	2.6	26.9
Suburbs.....	2.8	2.4	16.7	3.0	2.9	3.4
Small						
Central City.....	3.3	2.6	26.9	3.4	2.9	17.2
Suburbs.....	3.0	2.8	7.1	3.5	3.4	2.9