CLASS FERTILITY DIFFERENTIALS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

DENNIS H. WRONG*

MORE detailed and comprehensive information on class fertility differences is available for Great Britain than for any other modern industrial society. Moreover, information on *trends* in class fertility, as distinct from data on differences at a single point in time, is also more complete for Great Britain than for other countries. Between them, the famous 1911 Census REPORT ON THE FERTILITY OF MARRIAGE and the more recent Family Census of 1946 conducted by the Royal Commission on Population, the results of which have been exhaustively analyzed by D. V. Glass and E. Grebenik, provide a record of the fertility experience of British women grouped by social class that covers a full century.[1] The earliest marriage cohorts in the 1911 REPORT consisted of women who had married in 1851 or earlier, while the latest cohorts covered by the 1946 census were women who had married a few years previously after the beginning of the wartime baby boom.

More recent data on class differences in fertility have been made available by the Census of England and Wales of 1951 which has released preliminary tabulations based on a one per cent sample of the total census population.[2] Glass and Grebenik made use of these data to compare post-1946 trends

* From the Department of Sociology, Brown University. This paper was presented at the meetings of the Population Association of America, held at Brown University, April 25–26, 1959.

[1] Great Britain, Census Office, Census of England and Wales, 1911, Vol. 13, FERTILITY OF MARRIAGE, Part 2, London, H.M.S.O., 1923; Glass D. V. and Grebenik, E.: THE TREND AND PATTERN OF FERTILITY IN GREAT BRITIAN, Papers of the Royal Commission on Population, Vol. 6, Part I, London, H.M.S.O., 1954. The most thorough secondary analysis of the data on class fertility in the 1911 fertility census is John W. Innes, CLASS FERTILITY TRENDS IN ENGLAND AND WALES, 1876–1934, Princeton University Press, 1938, Chapters 2–3.

[2] Great Britain, General Register Office: CENSUS 1951. ONE PERCENT SAMPLE TABLES, Parts 1 and 2, London, H.M.S.O., 1953.

and patterns of class fertility with the trends and patterns shown by the youngest cohorts in the 1946 Family Census. Their use of them, however, is largely limited to this purpose and does not involve consideration of the 1951 data as a source of additional information on British class fertility differentials in their own right. The present paper essays this task to a modest degree.

The Data

Questions on numbers of children ever born were asked only of married women who were under 50 at the date of the Census, so the vast majority of the women in the sample had not yet completed their fertility. Cumulative fertility rates by social class were tabulated only for once-married women enumerated with their husbands, which tends, of course, to exaggerate the fertility of the sample as compared with that of the total population.

Fertility rates were tabulated by age at marriage and duration of marriage, both in quinquennial groups, with the exception of marriage durations under four years which were tabulated by single years. In contrast to the 1946 Family Census, rates were not tabulated by calendar year of marriage in addition to age at and duration of marriage. This omission and the fact that the age at marriage and duration of marriage distributions are tabulated only in quinquennial groups make it impossible to derive successive marriage cohorts subdivided by age at marriage from the data. Thus the fertility performance of successive cohorts cannot be compared, which greatly limits the value of the data for the purpose of analyzing trends.

The women were grouped into five social classes, modifications of the categories first devised by T. H. C. Stevenson in the 1911 fertility census which have been used in revised form by British Registrars-General ever since. The women were also divided into twelve socioeconomic groups.[3] Since the

[3] The twelve socioeconomic groups, listed and numbered roughly in accordance

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class categories fail to separate nonmanual, nonagricultural manual, and agricultural occupations, which have in other countries proved to be the broadest occupational groupings differing markedly in fertility,[4] the rates for the twelve socioeconomic groups provide a valuable detailed picture of differential fertility. Charts 1 and 2 show cumulative fertility rates by social class and socioeconomic group respectively for women marrying at all ages in four marriage duration groups, and for women marrying at ages 25–29 in three duration groups.[5] Late-marrying women are excluded from the longer duration groups—durations of 10 years and over—because of the restriction of the Census to women who were under 50 at Census date. Accordingly, the fertility of the longer duration groups is overstated. The 25–29 age at marriage group has been selected for presentation because it is the "core" age at marriage group for Great Britain as a whole; the average age at marriage for women in Great Britain has fallen within this quinquennial range from 1926–30 to 1946–1949.[6] The rates for women of all ages at marriage by duration of marriage shown

with their socioeconomic status, are: 1. Higher Administrative, Professional and Managerial Occupations; 2. Intermediate Administrative, Professional and Managerial Occupations; 3. Shopkeepers and Small Employers; 4. Clerical Workers; 5. Shop Assistants; 6. Personal Service; 7. Foremen; 8. Skilled Workers; 9. Semi-Skilled Workers; 10. Unskilled Workers; 11. Farmers; 12. Agricultural Workers.

The occupational composition of these twelve groups is described in detail in Great Britain, Census 1951, ONE PERCENT SAMPLE TABLES, Part 1, Table II.1, pp. 32–44. A thirteenth group, members of the armed forces, was excluded from the class categories and has been omitted from Figure 2.

The composition of the five social classes in terms of the twelve socioeconomic groups is as follows: Class I is identical with Group 1; Class II contains Groups 2, 3, and 11; Class III consists of Groups 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8; Class IV contains Group 9 and several Group 8 occupations as well; and Class V consists of Groups 10 and 12.

[4] Farmers are grouped with a number of other nonmanual occupations in Class II and agricultural workers with unskilled industrial workers in Class V. The problem of how to rank agricultural occupations in relation to nonagricultural, predominantly urban occupations is a perennial one faced by students of occupational stratification. In most modern countries agricultural occupations are quite distinct from the rest of the population with respect to fertility, but this is not the case in Britain where a smaller proportion of the population is engaged in agriculture than in any other contemporary country.

[5] Women who married at 25–29 and had been married for 25 years or more at the date of the census clearly fell outside the age limits of the sample.

[6] Hajnal, J.: The Marriage Boom. *Population Index,* April, 1953, 19, No. 2, p. 89.

in the Census tables were not standardized for age at marriage, although the percentage which each standardized and unstandardized rate made up of the rate for the standard population is shown, and confirms the persistence of the usual higher average age at marriage in the upper class groups.[7] The differences, however, are slight.

The rates shown for all durations of marriage for both the "all ages at marriage" and the 25–29 marriage group (the two top bar diagrams of Figures 1 and 2) include marriages of less than five years duration as well as the four longer duration groups shown in the other panels.

The earliest dates at which women in the 25–29 marriage age group had married are between 1927 and 1936, the calendar period of marriage for the 15–24 duration group. There were women still under 50 included in the Census who had married as long ago as the 1910–1920 decade, but only women who had married under 20 fall in this category and their rates are not shown separately; they are included, however, in the tabulations for women of all marriage ages and durations, and they comprise a large proportion of the women of all ages at marriage in the 25 years or more duration group (the bottom bar diagram of Figures 1 and 2). Thus the fertility experience of the total number of women in the Census sample covers roughly thirty-five years. The breakdowns by marriage duration provide material for an estimate of changing trends and patterns in class fertility differentials.

Trends and Patterns by Social Class

The bar diagrams below the top row in Figure 1 show class fertility differentials increasing with increasing marriage duration and also indicate a more marked and regular inverse relationship between fertility and class at the two longest durations. Greater lower-class stretching out of childbearing over the reproductive period clearly accounts to a large extent for these relationships between duration of marriage and the pat-

[7] Great Britain, General Register Office: Census 1951, Great Britain, One Percent Sample Tables, Part 2, Table x.9, pp. 278–283.

tern of differential fertility by class. Glass and Grebenik have shown, however, that in all classes there has been an increase in the proportion of total completed fertility which is achieved by the tenth year of marriage, although class differences in proportions achieved are still marked.[8] Thus the reversal of the traditional inverse fertility-class relation for the two top classes in the 10–14 duration group (Row 3, Figure 1) and for the three top classes in the 5–9 group (Row 2) may indicate a genuine trend towards narrowing differentials in completed fertility. The women in both of these duration groups married either just before or during the rising trend of the British birth rate that began in 1937 and thus were fully exposed to the baby boom. The break in the inverse relation at the top levels of the class system and the general contraction of fertility differentials suggest greater upper-class participation in the rise of the birth rate.

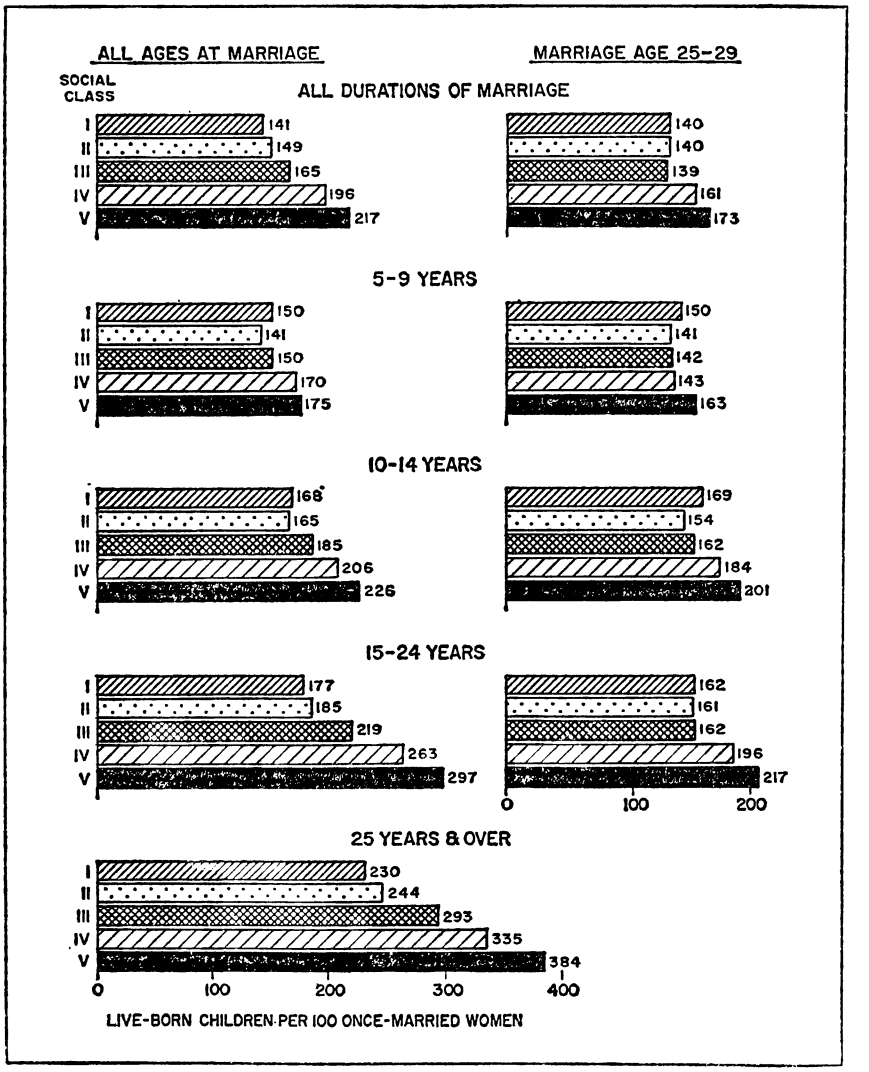
That this was indeed so has been shown for the two broad groups of nonmanual and manual workers by the Glass-Grebenik report on the 1946 Census.[9] The marriage cohorts of 1935–1944, which had not yet achieved ten years duration of marriage in the 1942–1945 period of rising fertility, revealed a marked narrowing of the nonmanual-manual fertility differential when compared with earlier cohorts at these same short durations.[10] The nonmanual group reacted more sharply than the manual group to the influences raising fertility in the wartime years.

Glass and Grebenik were able to combine the twelve socioeconomic groups in the 1951 Census into the two broad divisions of nonmanual and manual workers and compare the rates for the same marriage duration groups in both the 1946 and the 1951 Census.[11] At the longer durations—15–19 and 20–24 years—family size is consistently smaller for the manual group in 1951 than in 1946, whereas there is little difference between

[8] Glass and Grebenik, *op. cit.*, pp. 206–207.
[9] Glass and Grebenik, *op. cit.*, Table 5, p. 166, pp. 208–213.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 244–245.

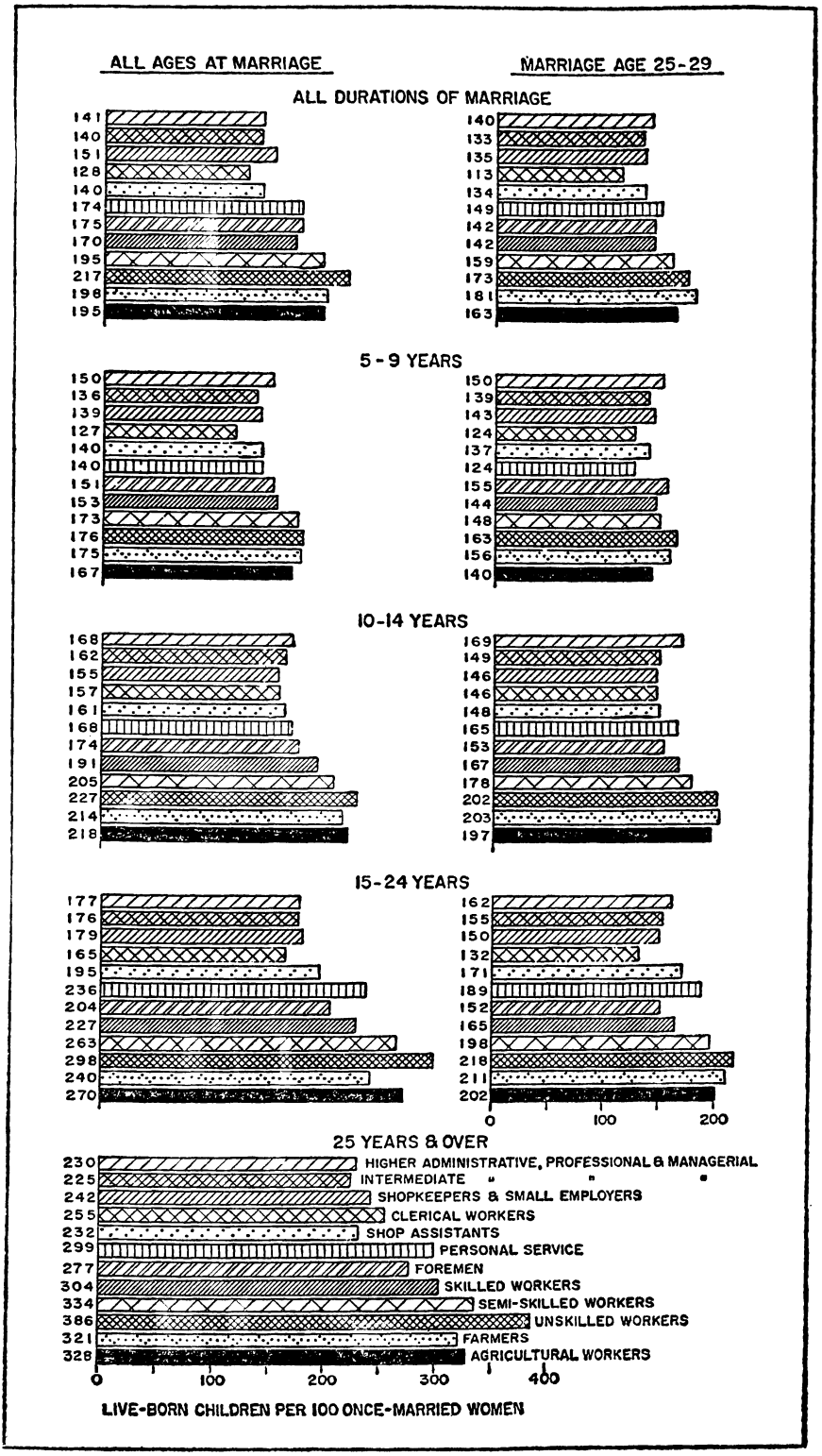
the two years for the nonmanual group. The 1951 long duration groups thus reflect the narrowing of the differential which took place in the 1930's.[12] At medium durations—5–9 and 10–14 years—the 1951 duration groups show higher fertility

Fig. 1. Class differences in numbers of children ever born by duration of marriage, per 100 once-married women, England and Wales, 1951.
Source: Great Britain, General Register Office: Census 1951, GREAT BRITAIN, ONE PER CENT SAMPLE TABLES, Part 2, x.9, pp. 278–283.



[12] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Fig. 2. Socioeconomic group differences in numbers of children ever born, England and Wales, 1951.



Source: Great Britain, General Register Office: Census 1951, Great Britain, One Per Cent Sample Tables, Part 2, x.9, pp. 278–283.

than the 1946 groups and the nonmanual-manual differential is still narrower. These 1951 medium duration groups contain the marriage cohorts of the late 1930's and early 1940's which exhibited a narrowing of the differential at the shorter durations in 1946. They continue to reflect the sharper rise in the fertility of nonmanual workers in the early wartime period of the baby boom.

At durations of less than 4 years, however, the 1951 Census reveals a considerably larger nonmanual-manual fertility differential than the 1946 Family Census at the same durations. In the later period of the baby boom, the five years following World War II, the manual group apparently responded more sharply than the nonmanual group. Glass and Grebenik observe: "Data for very short durations cannot be relied upon to indicate the probable ultimate family size of the cohorts in question. But for what they are worth, the ratios of manual to nonmanual fertility . . . for durations of 4 years or less rather imply a return to the older pattern of differential fertility, a reversal of the new trend which became visible with the marriage cohorts of the 1930's."[13] This widening of the differential applies, of course, only to these two broad occupational groups; the trend for social classes or status groups within each broad group may have followed a different course in the late 1940's. Unfortunately, the more refined socioeconomic status groupings used in the 1946 and 1951 Censuses are not comparable.

Returning to the 1951 social class rates shown in Figure 1, the total and the duration-specific rates for women who married at 25–29 (the vertical row of bar diagrams on the right) differ in a number of respects from the rates for women of all ages at marriage (the vertical row on the left). The rates for all durations of marriage in this marriage age group, unlike the equivalent rates for women of all ages at marriage, do not reveal the usual inverse fertility-class pattern: there is little difference in the rates for the three highest classes.

In all three of the duration groups on the right there is a

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 245.

virtual absence of any fertility differential between Classes I–III. In the 5–9 group, only Class V, unskilled workers, retains any excess of fertility over the other classes. Moreover, the highest class has become the second most fertile. Another striking feature of the duration-specific rates is that the fertility of Class I is actually higher in the 10–14 duration group than in the 15–24 group and the rate for Class III is the same in both duration groups. The sharpness of the increase in the fertility of the nonmanual groups in the early 1940's is reflected in these findings. Upper class wives clearly "moved up" their reproductive schedule to take advantage of the conditions favoring childbearing between 1942 and 1946. At longer durations the inverse pattern is likely to reassert itself, yet for these cohorts at least the inverse pattern may have been modified to an oblique J curve pattern in which family size decreases with rising socioeconomic status only up to the nonmanual groups of intermediate social status and then rises again to a slight but marked degree.

Trends and Patterns by Socioeconomic Groups

Figure 2 shows cumulative fertility rates for the twelve socioeconomic groups.

Deviation from the inverse pattern of relationship between fertility and socioeconomic status is far more evident when the five social classes are broken down into their component socioeconomic groups. At nearly all durations of marriage, both among women of all ages at marriage and among women marrying at 25–29, clerical workers (Group 4) are the group of lowest fertility. At most durations they are closely followed by intermediate administrative, professional, and managerial occupations (group 2), shopkeepers and small employers (Group 3), and shop assistants (Group 5). The group of highest socioeconomic status, higher administrative, professional, and managerial occupations (Group 1), exceeds all four of these nonmanual groups in fertility at all but the two longest marriage durations. From the longest to the shortest durations

among women of all ages at marriage and among women marrying at 25–29, the fertility rank of Group 1 increases, that of Groups 3 and 5 tends to decrease, and the relative positions of Groups 2 and 4 remain about the same.

Groups 1–5 contain the nonmanual middle-class occupations, and within this group the inverse fertility-socioeconomic status relation has all but disappeared, especially at durations of less than 25 years. At durations of less than 15 years the top-ranking nonmanual group exceeds the fertility of all of the others. Clerical workers are the most infertile group in British society with shopkeepers and small employers and shop assistants occupying second position; these three groups are the white-collar components of the Registrar-General's Class III (which also includes some manual occupations) and rank lowest in status of the nonmanual occupations.

At shorter durations Group 1 exceeds even the fertility of two manual groups: personal service (Group 6) and foremen (Group 7). These two groups, however, pose in all modern countries rather special problems of classification for both nonmanual or manual status and their socioeconomic rank.[14]

In the nonagricultural manual group fertility still tends to be inversely related to socioeconomic status. The only exception is the higher fertility of foremen as against skilled workers (Group 8) in the total sample (top row, left hand bar diagram), but examination of the duration-specific rates in the Census tables indicates that this is entirely the result of the higher fertility of foremen at durations of less than 5 years, which are not shown in the figure.[15] Unskilled workers (Group 10) are more fertile than either of the agricultural groups (Groups 11 and 12) at all marriage durations, as the marriage cohorts of completed fertility divided by occupational class in the 1946 Family Census also revealed.[16]

[14] Caplow, Theodore: THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1955, p. 42.

[15] Great Britain, General Register Office. CENSUS, 1951, GREAT BRITAIN, ONE PERCENT SAMPLE TABLES, Part 2, Table x.8, pp. 264–271.

[16] Glass and Grebenik, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Conclusion

The rise of fertility in the 1942–1950 period appears to have accelerated trends in socioeconomic fertility differentials which were underway when fertility was still declining in the 1930's. Yet the nonmanual-manual differential remains clear-cut and may have widened again at durations of less than 5 years. The smallest British families, however, are no longer to be found in the groups at the top of the socioeconomic status hierarchy, although they are still to be found among nonmanual middle-class occupations. Unfortunately, neither the 1946 Family Census nor the 1951 Census provide fertility data cross-tabulated with occupation and income. The low fertility of white-collar groups like clerical workers and shop assistants strongly suggest that it is the combination of low incomes with "bourgeois" styles of life characterizing these occupations which accounts for their low family size. The isolation of the income variable and the analysis of variations in fertility by income level within homogeneous occupational classes would greatly facilitate causal interpretation of group differences.