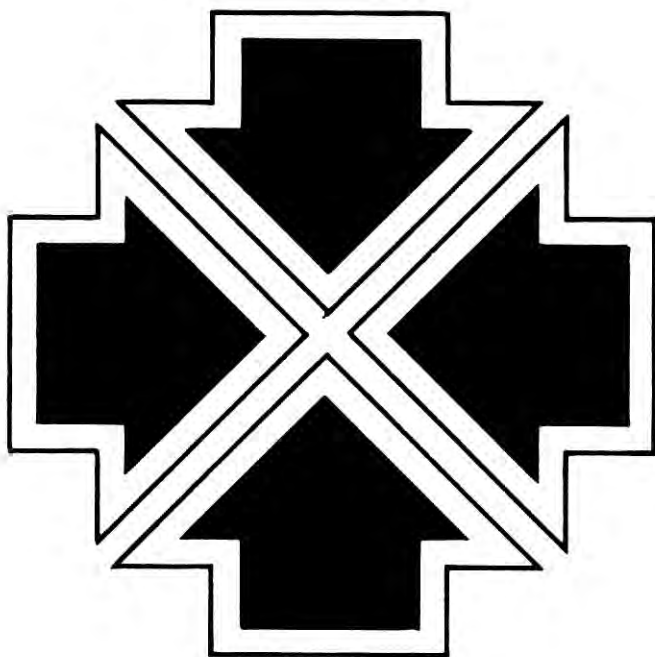


**A SYNTHESIS OF POPULATION  
COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE**

**PAPER 4**

**THE GREAT TABU:  
A HALF CENTURY OF POPULATION  
AND FAMILY PLANNING COMMUNICATION**

**J. Mayone Stycos**



**East-West Center  
East-West Communication Institute**

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**J. Mayone Stycos**

May 1977

East-West Center  
East-West Communication Institute  
1777 East-West Road  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96848

## ABSTRACT

The author discusses the tabus on contraceptive and sex-related communication that have been common throughout history up to the present. He traces the development of the birth control movement and shows how, in order to gain legitimacy, Margaret Sanger and other early leaders had to drop their stress on female, sexual, and social liberation and to "desexualize" family planning communications. As a result, the emphasis in birth control messages shifted from sexual consequences to social benefits, thereby making family planning acceptable to the medical profession and the eugenicists. Because Western ideology has dominated the international planned parenthood and population planning movement, current family planning communications, worldwide, reflect these Western attitudes toward sex and reproduction. The author discusses current problems in family planning communications including the quality of family planning communication personnel, the small percent of family planning budgets devoted to communications, the lack of good, useful communications research, the agro-communication bias that assumes the ideal communication strategy for family planning is interpersonal communication, and the myth that communicating family planning is more difficult than communicating new ideas in other sectors of development. The author concludes by speculating on the future of population communications.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. J. Mayone Stycos is Director of the International Population Program at Cornell University and Professor in the University's Department of Sociology. He has served as advisor and consultant on population matters to several agencies and organizations including the Population Council, the Population Reference Bureau, and International Planned Parenthood Federation/Western Hemisphere. His publications include Human Fertility in Latin America; Children of the Barriada; Ideology, Faith and Family Planning in Latin America; Clinics, Contraception and Communication; Margin of Life; and The Clinic and Information Flow.

## SERIES PREFACE

In 1970, the East-West Communication Institute undertook to develop and carry out a special program, involving numerous activities in the area of population and family planning communication under a major institution building grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Its activities for the past six years have included research; the development of innovative professional development activities for family planning communication specialists; international conferences and workshops; a variety of information sharing activities and services; and a large publications program that has produced: a population/family planning communication newsletter, research case studies, conference reports, an inventory of family planning communication activities and needs in 20 countries, a series of reports on donor and technical assistance agencies in the field, reference tools on sources of population information and materials, and 12 modules for family planning communication training.

As a final activity in its six-year program in population communication, the Institute has undertaken to publish a series of 11 papers which summarize developments in population communication over the last several years. The Synthesis Papers, as they have come to be called, cover the various public-oriented components of population/family planning communication programs--formal, in-school population education; education for adults and out-of-school youth; public information activities; use of mass media; and field extension programs--as well as the organizational and administrative concerns of national family planning programs including training for family planning communication personnel; the operation and strategies of family planning programs; the conduct and utilization of program-related research; professional and technical information services in support of population activities; and the integration of family planning with other development sectors. In addition,

two of the papers survey the international and regional activities that have had a significant impact on the overall development of national family planning programs and activities: technical and economic assistance, and meetings and conferences.

The papers are written by experts in the field--people who have had close personal involvement with the development and evolution of national and international programs over the years. In these papers, the authors have attempted to address several major questions: How have population communication programs developed? What has been accomplished? What has been learned? What do past experiences suggest for future efforts?

The Synthesis of Population Communication Experience Project was planned and initiated by Dr. Robert P. Worrall, who directed the East-West Communication Institute's activities in population communication from the beginning of the program in 1970 until he left in July 1976 to become Vice President of the Population Reference Bureau. Under his leadership, the Institute established contact with people in 133 countries and territories and involved in its programs more than 500 middle- and upper-level specialists in information, education, and communication.

Mr. Lyle Saunders, former Ford Foundation Program Officer in Population was a Visiting Researcher at the Institute from November 1975 to November 1976. During that year he was closely involved in the planning and implementation of the project. He has continued to serve as special advisor and consultant to the project, and has been one of the two substantive editors of the Synthesis Papers.

Dr. James R. Echols, former President of the Population Reference Bureau and now Population Communication Consultant to several organizations, has also served as Project consultant and as the other substantive editor for the papers.

Barbara Yount, Writer/Editor of the Institute's IEC Newsletter, which under her editorship grew from a 4-page to a 28-page quarterly newsletter reaching 8,000 people, has been general editor of the series.

Millicent Sanchez assisted the general editor with the copy-editing and the seemingly never-ending bibliographic work such a project requires.



Kay Garrett, EWCI Publications Officer, has been responsible for the design, production, and distribution of the series.

Alison Miura, Karen Katayama, and Roberta Morgan typeset the papers; Jill McEdward and Louise Good cheerfully helped with the volume of proofreading.

Shana Hurst has served as Secretary to the Project since 1975 and has taken care of a million necessary details.

To all of these people, including the writers themselves, I owe an immense debt of gratitude for their time, effort, and dedication to the Synthesis Project.

Elizabeth Buck  
Assistant Director for  
AID Activities

In Pocatello, Idaho, teen-agers giggle as they watch a TV star on "All in the Family" prepare for his vasectomy. In Concepción, Chile, a ten-year old submits a drawing of his family, one of 250,000 entries from 63 countries in a UNESCO-sponsored contest for World Population Year. In Ocho Rios, Jamaica, tourists are startled by a huge billboard advertising Panther condoms. In Pakistan, a villager is promised a pension if he is sterilized after his second child. In Bucaramanga, Colombia, a slum dweller tunes his transistor radio to a family planning jingle. In Colombo, Sri Lanka, the Junior Chamber of Commerce initiates a weekly question-and-answer column on family planning in the Ceylon Daily News. In a village in mainland China, a couple is delighted at being able to share in the production of next year's babies.

Ten years ago, the above paragraph might have made a good opener for a science fiction novel. Today, we take such examples of family planning communication for granted. This can be a mistake. We should remind ourselves occasionally of how fast the movement has traveled, and how far, not so much for the pleasure of nostalgia, as for clues concerning where we are going next. Indeed, I will try to show that we are not entirely liberated from our historic roots and that our current communication's blind spots can in part be traced to historical peculiarities of the population movement.

For all but the tiniest fraction of man's history, sexual relations and reproduction have been inextricably intertwined. Reproduction, in addition to perpetuating a group, has universally been utilized as a keystone of social organization. Since kinship specifications have traditionally governed the approved forms of social interaction, the conditions under which reproduction is permitted or encouraged have been of universal concern to human societies.

For most of our history, regulating reproduction meant regulating sexual relations, since contraceptive technology was relatively difficult and inefficient. There are many means of regulating such relations--for example, chaperonage or seclusion of women--systems under which sexually susceptible men and women are simply not given an opportunity to be alone. Under the appropriate conditions, these systems are highly effective. Under urban conditions, especially when accompanied by industrialization, such systems become difficult to maintain because the woman almost inevitably gains more freedom of movement. In such circumstances, two other broad mechanisms, by no means absent in the more rural setting, must be relied upon: first, the suppression of sexual information which might expedite sexual relations; and second, the sublimation or repression of sexual drives. The highest ideal of female purity in the Christian tradition has not only been the woman whose behavior has been chaste, but also one whose thoughts have been innocent, a state probably expedited although hardly guaranteed, by the suppression of information. Sex education, wherever opposed, is feared because it might lead to premature "awakening" and "stimulation" which in turn could be conducive to illicit behavior.

The tabus against awakening the young are so strong that two of the American states--Louisiana and Nebraska--still find it necessary to forbid sex education. These are not ancient laws which are still on the books; these were passed within the last decade. Louisiana's Act of 1970 forbids any elementary or secondary school teacher to give instruction "primarily dealing with the human reproductive system as it pertains specifically to the act of sexual intercourse. . . ." (Kellogg, et al., 1975, p. 47). Nor are such tabus confined to Christian communities. According to a 1975 review, "The taboo against in-school sexuality education, that is, the discussion of sex-related matters with the young, is so strong that, except for the Philippines, Japan, and Taiwan, no government (in East and South Asia) apparently dares to consider sexuality education on a large scale" (ibid., p. 27). Moreover, with the possible exception of Egypt and Tunisia, the same situation holds for Arab and Moslem countries of West Asia and North Africa.

Contraceptive information is a particularly interesting category of sexual information. If the point of suppressing sexual information is to inhibit illicit reproduction, then contraceptive information should be excluded from the tabu since it relieves sexual

relations of its undesirable consequences. Instead, contraceptive repression has been more common and more severe than repression of sex information in general. In Western society, this is in part explained by Christianity's definition of sex as a necessary evil; necessary, that is, for reproduction, but reproduction exclusively within marriage. Marital coitus without a reproductive end would render sexual relations unnecessary--and if performed therefore evil. Although particularly emphasized and rationalized by Roman Catholics, this ideology has pervaded other Western religions. The puritan current in American Protestantism reinforced the evaluation of pleasurable sexual relations as sinful and underlies the legislation against prurient print media common in the nineteenth century. Thus, in 1877, when England's Solicitor General explained why Charles Knowlton's Fruits of Philosophy should be suppressed, he referred to it not only as "a dirty, filthy book . . . that no human being would allow . . . to lie on his table . . . or allow his wife to have," but explained that its object was "to enable persons to have sexual intercourse and not to have that which in the order of Providence is the natural result of that sexual intercourse" (Fryer, 1965, p. 163).

We frequently hear that knowledge of contraception is a universal characteristic of human societies, and everything from crocodile dung pessaries to goat bladder sheaths is cited as evidence of man's eternal ingenuity. In fact, while such evidence indicates a universal demand for contraception--a demand strong enough to cause some groups or individuals in every society to discover an appropriate technology, there is no evidence that distribution of either information or methods was widespread in such communities. On the contrary, though information on contraception and abortion may have existed in all societies, it is more likely to have been a secret especially well guarded by the elites, or by professionals such as prostitutes, healers, and physicians. Prostitutes could not long survive without contraception, but it has never been in their interest to pass on such trade secrets to amateurs. Nor were elite lovers such as Casanova anxious to democratize methods which greatly enhanced the probability of their conquests. Healers and physicians have not only profited personally from exclusive knowledge about contraception, but also have promoted the mystique of ignorance as a mechanism of social control. In other words, they felt such powerful tools should not be placed in the hands of children or of the masses generally: they would be used irresponsibly and lead to increased promiscuity.

In many countries, tabus against publicity of contraceptives are more potent than laws against the sale or distribution of contraceptives themselves. For example, "The French law of July 31, 1920 prohibiting publicity for contraception has probably had the greatest effect in stopping the spread of family planning. This law was copied in all areas of the former French empire in Africa and Asia. Although the law has largely been repealed in France, it still remains in effect in one form or another in most of the countries that emerged from the empire" (Kellogg, 1975, p. 3). Restrictions on contraceptive publicity have been much more stringent than those relating to other delicate topics. Remedies for constipation, menstrual discomfort, and body odor are much more frequently advertised than remedies for excessive fertility. Indeed, "It is almost impossible to find any country, with the exception of Sweden, where commercial advertising of contraceptives is not subject to special limitations that do not apply to other equally personal aspects of bodily hygiene" (*ibid.*, p. 7).

Historical Western attitudes toward sex and reproduction are crucial to an understanding of worldwide communications in family planning because Western ideology has dominated the international planned parenthood and population planning movements. Western ideology is a blend of ancient Anglo-Saxon views of sexual morality and the modern compromises made by the movement in order to achieve legitimacy. The net effect has been to desexualize a movement which generically and historically has been sexually radical. In order to more fully appreciate the degree of desexualization, we should remind ourselves that there is one and only one reason for practicing contraception. From the beginning of history, the fundamental reason for using contraception has never varied in the slightest for the millions of couples who have ever practiced it. Contraception is practiced in order to enjoy sexual relations without suffering reproductive consequences. The definition of the negative consequences of reproduction will vary: for some it will be the embarrassment of an illicit pregnancy, for others the high costs of children, and for still others the reluctance to add to the world's population problem. But the part of the equation which never varies refers to the enjoyment of sexual relations. Contraception is practiced to avoid undesirable side effects of this enjoyment. Knowing this, one might expect that most communications aimed at motivating contraceptive use would utilize the theme of sexual enjoyment. Instead, there seems to be an intense effort to conceal the major

benefit and to concentrate on the side effects--better health or more wealth.

Ironically, the most successful examples of modern advertising have done just the reverse. Whether trying to induce people to smoke, to drive a car, or to wear hats, advertising has stressed the sexual rewards, invented them when necessary, and conspicuously ignored the implications for health and pocketbook. How can we account for family planning's astonishing failure to publicize the universal, predominant, and immediate advantage of contraception--enhanced and unincumbered sexual pleasure--choosing instead such abstruse and long-range benefits as good health and good economics?

We have suggested that contraceptive information has been viewed as especially threatening to the social order because divorcing sex from reproduction might encourage sex and discourage reproduction. Until recently, neither end has been regarded as desirable. Even in non-Christian societies, sexual pleasure as an end in itself was institutionalized only within prostitution or concubinage. In recent decades, however, two powerful ideological streams utilizing a similar technology have merged. One stream has attempted to define sexual activity as normal and desirable per se; the other has questioned the legitimacy of unregulated reproduction within marriage because of broader societal problems caused by population increase. By 1977 it is almost the case that the older universal values--sex is bad and reproduction is good--have been reversed. Increasingly, sex is being viewed as good and reproduction as bad. The family planning movement, through its provision of contraceptive services, its lobbying for permissive legislation, and its uneasy alliances with the population planning movement, has in fact done much to encourage this reversal of values--with one exception. The exception is its communications, which almost invariably emphasize reproduction and ignore sex.

When Veronica F. Heiskanen content-analyzed several hundred motivational pieces of family planning literature from around the world in 1967, she found that two-thirds stressed health benefits and only a quarter touched on sexual themes (1967, p. 88, chart no. 9). (I suspect her definition of "sexual" was quite broad.) A more recent analysis of 113 posters and pamphlets produced during the last six years in 16 Latin American countries found that while chil-

dren were featured in 82 percent, 81 percent had no sexual content. Of the few sexual references, two-thirds concerned the reproductive process and only a third had to do with liberating effects of contraceptive behavior. As the authors put it, "only 7 of the 113 materials analyzed associate family planning with a program of change in sexual conduct . . . this scarcely represents 0.8 percent of the sample . . . We found no material which referred to family planning as a way of permitting a married couple to have a more complete sexual life . . . of greater pleasure and communication" (Aller and Schiavo, 1976, pp. 23-25, emphasis added).

These Latin American authors argue that in Anglo-Saxon and Protestant cultures there has not only been a "diffusion of (family planning) services, but . . . new norms with respect to sex and marriage . . . after years of struggle." But if such a revolution in values has occurred, it has been in spite of family planning communications and not because of them. Unlike the reproductive revolution, the sexual revolution has been a people's movement almost unassisted, if not slowed down, by contemporary family planning organizations. When Margaret Sanger organized the birth control movement in the United States in the early part of this century, it stressed female and sexual liberation, but by the 1960's it had entirely changed its tone. In order to comprehend and improve contemporary communications, we must understand the nature of the shift, which took sex away from birth control and gave it family planning and population control in return.

That the roots of family planning were revolutionary is indicated not only by its early espousal by socialists, radicals, and free thinkers, but also by Margaret Sanger's belief that it was primarily "a means to alleviate the sufferings of working-class and poor women from unwanted pregnancies . . ." She viewed birth control "as an important weapon in the class struggle. . . . the technologic basis for women to control not only their pregnancies but their destinies" (Gordon, 1975, p. 255, p. 274).

Such ideas were both sexually and politically radical. In 1914, in some of the earliest pages of the radical journal The Woman Rebel, Margaret Sanger, in one breath, excoriated John D. Rockefeller as a "blackhearted plutocrat whose soft flabby hands carry no standard but that of greed," and in another referred to the marriage bed as "the most degenerating influence in the social

order" (Kennedy, 1970, pp. 22-23). She had no such contempt for sexual relations, which she described in her pamphlet "Family Limitation" as "of great benefit to the average woman, the magnetism of it is health giving, and [it] acts as a beautifier and tonic." Much influenced by the semi-mystical views of Havelock Ellis and the romanticism of George Drysdale, her early position was that the most important function of the birth control movement was to free the individual from sexual prejudice and tabus (Kennedy, 1970, p. 127).

Increasingly, however, she focused her efforts on birth control technology, that is, making available to the general public information and materials necessary to control conception. Achieving such ends early in the century meant changing repressive laws about contraception and establishing clinics--matters which required broader and more legitimate sources of public support than were usually available to radicals. To attain middle-class support at that time, it was probably necessary to drop the ideology of sexual liberation. In 1908, for example, the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Commission declared that birth control "cannot be spoken of without repugnance"--in short, the subject was unspeakable. By 1920, the Anglicans had become somewhat more articulate, but only to denounce the notion that sexual union between married couples could be an end in itself. As late as 1930, although now declaring that sex was a "holy thing implanted by God," they condemned birth control practiced out of "selfishness, luxury or mere convenience." Thus, to argue that the purpose of birth control was to liberate the feminine spirit would have completely alienated the middle classes. Consequently, Margaret Sanger shifted her emphasis from sexual consequences to social consequences more acceptable to conservatives or reformers: reduction of crime, unemployment, prostitution, ill health, and the genetically unfit. In so doing, the movement veered organizationally toward two groups with power and prestige: the medical profession and the eugenicists. The price was high.

## BIRTH CONTROL AND THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

It took several decades of wooing to win the medical profession over to birth control. As late as 1936, a special committee of the American Medical Association denounced birth control organizations and "propaganda directed to the public by lay bodies"



(Kennedy, 1970, p. 214). American doctors tended to oppose birth control methods as unsafe or immoral or both. Eventually won over by the seductive concept that contraceptives were better dispersed by physicians than by quacks, the profession was, and perhaps still is, uninterested in mass provision of either contraceptive information or supplies. For physicians, the appropriate criteria for use of birth control are health criteria. Advertising has traditionally been out of the question. Indeed, the difference between a medical and a "market" approach lies precisely in the ethic of demand and supply. Marketing techniques do not assume demand; they create it, catalyze it, or direct it. By way of contrast, the medical ethic abjures seeking, motivating, or to some extent even informing the patient. If the patient is sick, he or she seeks a physician. Since most doctors establish their practices in urban areas where their clientele can pay, they experience no shortage of patients; or if compelled to work in public clinics in rural areas, they are swamped with patients because they provide the only free service for many miles. Thus, they rarely experience directly the need for creating demand.

There are other ways in which their influence has been highly conservative in the communication area. Once contraception and abortion are viewed as medical techniques, then only doctors should prescribe them--or, by extension, even talk about them. For others to do so is to come dangerously close to "quackery"--along with advertising a major medical bugaboo.

Equally far from the marketer's concept of mass targets is the medical practitioner's belief that for every patient's problem there is a unique solution. The quintessence of medicine is the prescription, an indecipherable therapeutic recipe uniquely tailored to each patient. Only with extreme reluctance has any authority been delegated to paramedicals for dealing with groups rather than with individuals. (Even here, content analyses of nurses' or nurse auxiliaries' talks to patients in Latin American family planning clinics show them to be watered-down versions of a classical medical school lecture: the language is technical and scientific; the content stresses the physiology of reproduction; the charts and visual aids are textbookish; the tone is "professional," cool, and desexualized.) (Stycos, 1975.) Indeed, the closest parallel to mass communications in the medical armamentarium is "public health education." In effect, it is a low-keyed extension of the face-to-face approach embodied in the doctor-patient relation.

In Latin America, the private family planning movements were quickly captivated by progressive physicians using anti-abortion prophylaxis as their basic argument. One of the most frequent themes in Latin American motivational film and pamphlet materials concerns the risks of induced abortion. Much like contraceptive supplies in the pre-pill United States, abortion in Latin America is monopolized largely by non-professionals. To add insult to injury, the doctors often have to repair the damage done by the amateurs. In such circumstances, and until such time as abortion might be put under medical control, birth control was the lesser of two evils. As such, it could also be tolerated by the Catholic Church, so long as communication programs were either repressed or sublimated. Thus, in some countries, church authorities acquiesced if they were assured that there would be no "coercion" through propaganda and that the periodic abstinence method would be included in information programs. In other countries, communication programs were "sublimated" by stressing responsible parenthood and the avoidance of abortion rather than the enhancement of sexual relations. The Church did support sex education and marital counseling wherever it could infuse the content with its own morality--heterosexuality, sexual continence outside of marriage, sexual restraint within marriage, and the dominant value of reproduction and the family. It is a morality with which most Latin American physicians feel quite comfortable.

Thus, doctors have traditionally accepted family planning in a context of limited services for married women with health problems; and, insofar as information and education programs are tolerated, they are characterized by personalistic, moralistic, and desexualized communications. What is perhaps even worse is the general lack of enthusiasm for family planning that is characteristic of the medical profession. The doctors backed into family planning because of the threat of a quasi-medical technology passing into non-medical hands. As early as 1916, Dr. Robert Latou Dickinson put it quite bluntly: "We as a profession should take hold of this matter and not let it go to the radicals" (Kennedy, 1970, p. 174). When the American Medical Association finally approved of contraception in 1937, it was out of a "desire of doctors to check the proliferation and widespread advertising of useless and even harmful birth control techniques" (Piotrow, 1973, p. 8). The union of birth control and medicine was a marriage of convenience which followed a lengthy, tumultuous, but loveless courtship.

## THE EUGENICISTS

If the medical embrace was cool, a more intense and ideologically charged union occurred with the eugenicists. This group was also largely conservative, composed of biologists, demographers, and other social scientists who feared the qualitative consequences of dysgenic breeding, or who foresaw racial or national suicide as a result of declining fertility. While the latter concern would seem to be pro-natalist and therefore anti-birth control, as long as the more "desirable" nations or social classes were already adopting birth control, the eugenicists saw that their only hope lay in encouraging other nations and classes to do the same.

Margaret Sanger, seeing both organizational and propaganda value in joining forces with the eugenicists, increasingly emphasized this point of view. As early as 1919, she wrote, "More children from the fit, less from the unfit--that is the chief issue of birth control," and by 1932 she was recommending sterilization or segregation by sex "of the whole dysgenic population" (Gordon, 1975, p. 269).

The eugenicists and physicians jockeyed for leadership in the family planning movement in the 1920's and 1930's, and Margaret Sanger inclined her support toward the former. The first and most important benefit was linking with a group, which, unlike the medical profession, was alarmed about a problem and thus highly motivated to solve it. Having fewer inhibitions about publicity or advertising, the eugenicists directed much of their zeal toward periodically "sounding the alarm," but required that the alarm be dignified. Whereas Margaret Sanger had achieved her publicity goals by going to jail, vilifying Catholic officials, and defying the secular authorities (in short, by dramatically rebellious acts), the eugenicists achieved their ends by holding conferences, giving speeches, and issuing scientific-sounding press releases.

A second distinctive feature of this group was its concern for collective goals: improvement of the race, the nation, or "civilization." Thus, in contrast to the traditional physician's concern for individual welfare, a group orientation led the eugenicists to seek solutions applicable to the masses. There were, however, costs. The intellectuals tended to be snobbish and jealous of their "scientific" profile. They largely excluded Margaret Sanger and

other activist women from leadership positions and organized the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) and the Population Association of America partly to exclude the family planners. Moreover, as political and moral conservatives, they had no interest in birth control as a means of female (or male) sexual liberation. Lacking the radical's interest in sexual freedom or even the physician's interest in the reproductive system, their solutions often seemed abstract and olympian.

In any event, the eugenics movement was largely dissipated in the 1930's as the result of scientific criticism and its perceived association with Nazi policies. Had this stream disappeared entirely, the movement might have gone by default to the doctors. If so, it would probably have petered out. At best, birth control would have become another of the nation's inadequate health services, and the international movement would have been left to languish. Indeed, as late as 1959, International Planned Parenthood Federation's budget was only US\$35,000 and the US headquarters' budget for Planned Parenthood was only US\$340,000. Instead, however, the American movement "took off" in the 1960's, and the international movement was fueled with, first private and then public, American dollars. The "population problem" took over where eugenics left off. This in turn has strongly influenced the pattern of organization of funds and skills, not to mention the form and content of communications programs.

## THE POPULATION MOVEMENT

Although based on better science than eugenics had been, the population movement was equally zealous and also directed toward influencing masses, but it was divided between those favoring a scientific approach and those favoring publicity and lobbying. Frederick Osborn illustrates the first category and Hugh Moore the second.

Osborn was a key link between the old eugenics and the newer demographically-oriented population movement. Having made his fortune in business by the age of 40, he decided to give up a Wall Street partnership and to devote his life to the study of eugenics and population problems. Immersing himself in the scientific literature from an office at the Museum of Natural History, he hired with his own funds a small staff and began to do research and writing. He

soon discovered two other scholarly nuclei: The Scripps Foundation, where Pat Whelpton and Warren Thompson were working, and the Milbank Memorial Fund, where two other scholars, Clyde Kiser and Frank Notestein, had been hired to study population change in relation to public health. These groups did not know of each other for some time. Osborn's scholarly bent made him critical of many eugenic- and population-oriented publications, and he wished to establish a more scientifically respectable base for solution of population problems. In the late 1930's, he was instrumental in creating the Princeton Office of Population Research and was the first executive director of the Population Council (Osborn, 1966).

The Population Council took care, particularly throughout the 1950's, to project a scholarly image, to avoid alarmist-publicist efforts, and to keep its association with activist family planning programs to a minimum. Although a private organization, it tried, on the whole successfully, to deal with foreign governments and universities rather than with other private groups abroad. This added to its aura of scientific respectability. It not only inherited the eugenicists' snobbish attitude toward the private sector family planners, but also extended it to include organizations and individuals concerned with publicizing population problems. The Council gave little financial or technical assistance to such organizations, and its officers tended to be somewhat nervous when visited by representatives of these other organizations. Although it has done a splendid job in several areas, it has done little or nothing for the communications field. Indeed, as we shall see, it may have hindered it.

Like Osborn, Hugh Moore came late to the population field after a successful business career; but here the similarity ends. Moore, a Quaker, had always been concerned about international tensions, and, much taken with William Vogt's book, The Road to Survival, he became convinced in the early 1950's that excessive population growth was the most dangerous and imminent obstacle to world peace. Once convinced, he proceeded in the direct manner of every successful publicist: he carefully targeted his audience; promoted a gripping and easily communicated concept--the population bomb; and mobilized funds and talent. Initially, he sought assistance not from doctors, demographers, eugenicists, or family planners, but from successful and influential men such as Bruce Barton from advertising; Willham Clayton, father of the Marshall Plan; and Ellsworth Bunker. He soon recruited two persons whom

he later described as "my best disciples": William Draper and DuPont Copeland. (Indeed, the recruitment of Draper to the population movement may prove to have been Moore's most important single achievement; since Draper, another successful businessman, gave population fund raising, publicity, and lobbying the same single-minded, exclusive, and talented dedication that was characteristic of Moore.) Moore recognized that continued pressure on the press was necessary to keep the population issue alive and moving. He joined the Board of the Population Reference Bureau in 1957 and in 1958 became its Chairman. The Population Reference Bureau had been founded by Guy Irving Birch to promote his eugenic interests and was subsequently directed by Robert Cook, who had been managing editor of the Genetic Association's journal. By the time Moore joined the board, the journal was the principal periodical dedicated to "sounding the alarm." It was science journalism with a mission and provided a steady stream of material for the use of newspapers, magazines, and teachers. Moore helped to strengthen the financial base, but the Bureau's aloofness from the family planning movement caused him to withdraw his support for a number of years (Moore, 1966).

Moore's use of print was more daring than the Bureau's. His basic target was the nation's influentials, and he went after them in a characteristically straight line. All persons listed in Who's Who were sent a copy of his pamphlet "The Population Bomb," and later it was sent to all members of college faculties. By the mid-1960's, over one and one-half million copies had been distributed to the upper layers of American society. (The magnitude of this distribution may be compared with Margaret Sanger's famous pamphlet "Family Limitation," of which only 100,000 copies were printed.) Moore also used the mass media in a way which was traditional for big businesses, but highly unorthodox for family planners or even for eugenicists--he advertised, taking out full-page ads in the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and Time magazine (Lader, 1971, p. 76). The ads were somewhat embarrassing to the Population Council and Milbank professionals and probably even to those of the Population Reference Bureau, because, like most successful advertising, they claimed too much for their product. But the storm of controversy they stirred up, for example, attacks from the US Catholic clergy, was highly effective in informing the nation's reading public of the issues--a public far more extensive than had been reached by earlier communication efforts.

While Moore concentrated on non-sexual publicity about population, birth control groups profited from the heightened public interest in the population problem by introducing more public information on birth control as a solution. Fred Jaffe has described the late 1950's and early 1960's at US Planned Parenthood as "trying to persuade people that the roof will not fall in on them if they mention or support birth control" (Piotrow, 1973, p. 16). Whatever did it, there is no doubt of the explosion of newspaper and periodical coverage of birth control in the 1960's. Between 1915 and 1954, the number of entries under "birth control" or "contraception" in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature was fewer than 12 per year; between 1955 and 1959 the entries increased to 22; but in the next two five-year periods they rose to 61 and 98 respectively (interpolated from graph in Piotrow, 1973, p. 21). How much of this can be attributed to Moore and his efforts is hard to say, but it is certainly what he was trying to do. "I'm an old sales merchandising man," he told me. "I've learned how to influence public opinion. That's all I've tried to do in the population field. I sold the first Dixie Cup in America. That's promotion" (Moore, 1966).

In 1972, 58 years after publication of Sanger's The Woman Rebel had been banned because of its discussion of birth control, "the first nationwide advertising campaign in the half-century history of the U. S. family planning movement" was launched (Elliott, 1973, p. 241). It had been a long, hard struggle, and the content of the campaign showed the scars--the messages were so bland they probably could have passed Anthony Comstock. According to Planned Parenthood's Information and Education Director, "The messages highlight the personal and social benefits of planning the birth of children, and emphasize the dislocation that are a consequence of mistimed or unwanted births" (Elliott, 1973, p. 241). If this is as far as the United States could go in 1972, it would not be surprising if their leadership in communications was less than inspirational in the international area. Indeed, by the time the United States got around to sending dollars and advice abroad, the form and content of the programs it exported had been much influenced by the experiences of the previous decades. Among the proponents of birth control there was a history of conflict over means--publicity and advertising versus scientific research and low-keyed medical services. And there was even controversy over ends--female health and liberation versus economic development and political stability. At the

very least, the attitude toward information and education programs in family planning had emerged as ambivalent; but concerning the content of such programs, there was less debate. Lost in the shuffle, the issue of sexuality had been drummed out of the movement.

## CONTEMPORARY COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

The amount of activity in the information and education area is at first glance, staggering. So enormous is the volume of services being offered that, "Since late 1970 the East-West Communication Institute has been conducting a three-year worldwide inventory and analysis of the support being provided for family planning IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) activities in developing countries" (Worrall, 1972, p. 7). The North Carolina Population Center issues an International Directory of Population Information and Library Resources which, for Asia alone, lists 130 organizations from 20 countries. The East-West Center's Directory of IEC Assistance and Services (Buck, ed., 1976) lists no fewer than 51 agencies prepared to give consultative and advisory IEC services, and about half of these are prepared to assist with funding. Questionnaires returned by 150 "multilateral, regional, bilateral, non-governmental, university, research and other agencies" canvassed by the UNFPA indicated that 60 could provide assistance on communications programs, 58 on population education, and 46 on libraries and documentation centers in family planning and population (UNFPA, 1976[a]). With this much smoke one would expect a blaze of progress in the communications area. Alas, the smoke conceals the confusion, the amateurism, and the lack of commitment in the communications area which was more characteristic of the family planning service sector ten years ago.

One may start with the quality of personnel. According to a recent UNESCO publication, "Among the categories of staff in family planning programs, the least professionalism unfortunately is represented in the information and education sector" (UNESCO, 1975[a], p. 8). W. Bert Johnson claims that "the total leadership personnel assigned to full-time planning and direction in the public information field for 36 major national programs is less than 50, all but a few having had little experience and training for this work" (1973, p. 5). But is it reasonable that communications professionals should be scarcer than medical professionals? It is not. If they are



scarce, it is because, unlike the physicians, they are rarely offered salaries competitive with professional opportunities elsewhere, and within family planning programs, they are not given the budget and facilities commensurate with serious communications campaigns or programs. Donald J. Bogue refers to a "worldwide financial myopia with respect to IEC activity" (1973, p. 42). Of US\$50 million given by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) between 1969 and 1972, under US\$6 million went to communication and education (UNFPA, 1974). Budgeting breakdowns for the national programs of ten developing countries show that the average program in 1974 expended a third of its total budget on medical and paramedical salaries. By way of contrast, salaries for information and education personnel averaged only 12 percent (Nortman, 1975, p. 40). In terms of program function, in ten out of eighteen national programs, the percent expended for information and education was less than 15 percent (*ibid.*, p. 39). Is 15 percent enough?

According to one authority, "from 20 to 25 percent of the total budget of the family planning program is not unreasonable as an allocation for communications" (Saunders, 1973, p. 92). According to Wilbur Schramm, "Developing countries typically put one to ten cents per capita per year into family planning, of which 5 to 10 percent goes for information. What if they put twenty-five cents into family planning and 25 percent of that into information?" (1970, p. 13) Johnson prices worldwide needs at US\$38 million per year, a sum which "is at least three times the present annual world investment in all forms of mass communication support for family planning" (1973, p. 12).

There is little reason to expect much more in the future. One of the most sensitive weather vanes is the UNFPA budget. For the period 1977-80, it has allocated only 15 percent to the communications area (US\$69 million). The projected US\$69 million are to be contrasted with the US\$240 million for family planning services, or with the US\$114 million for data collection and research (UNFPA, 1976[b], p. 4).

Of course, money is not everything, but it is at least a reflection of priorities. It is not unlikely that the disputes and ambivalences of the earlier decades concerning the role and content of public information programs slowed their recognition on the part of the major organizations supporting family planning.

The leading technical agency in population and family planning has been the Population Council. Since its inception in 1952, it has exercised international leadership in research and technical assistance through its Demographic, Bio-medical, and Technical Assistance Divisions. It has made substantive contributions to demographic and bio-medical training, to data collection techniques, to contraceptive development, and to testing clinical services and distribution systems. However, the weak scientific base now characteristic of the communications field, as well as the deficit in communications professionals, insofar as it exists, can be in part attributed to the Council's weak record in the communication area. This is all the more surprising in the light of the Council's early decision to enter this field. As early as 1962, it hired a top communications specialist, Bernard Berelson as Director of the Communications Research Program. After only a few months on the job in 1962, however, Berelson told a Milbank conference that "communication research . . . is not itself likely to make a key contribution to the spread of family planning" and that "any reasonable program of communications plus supplies will do as well as any other" (1963, p. 159). On another occasion he told an audience of communicators that, "I came to this post an alleged specialist in persuasion, but I quickly persuaded myself that persuasion wasn't the problem . . . it is a general lack of adequate implemental machinery" (1967, p. 49). While he ignored communications research, Berelson did make a few stabs at developing communications materials--for example, a multipurpose audio-visual kit and a Disney movie--but soon abandoned such efforts. Whatever the reasons, it is clear that the leading organization for research and training in population and family planning virtually abandoned the communications field at a time when it sorely needed professional help.

But perhaps Berelson was right when he said that with respect to communications, "the problem now is more how to do it than how to study it" (1963, p. 168). Let us look quickly at how it has been studied.

A recent UNESCO review of research in 19 countries with communications programs concludes that, "by far the bulk of research into the communications component of population and family planning programs . . . are of the KAP variety" (1975[a], p. 22). If true, there is little we need to add. Over a decade ago I stated

that "the day of the general KAP type of investigation . . . should soon be over. . . . From this point on, our research should be designed to answer more specific questions" (1965, p. 300).

KAP surveys, while they provide general base lines, crude estimates of demand, and some identification of target groups, are highly limited in terms of programmatic applications. It is not surprising, therefore, that "the audience for the research usually consists of scientists attending social science conferences and their colleagues subscribing to academic journals" (Worrall, 1972, p. 4). If family planners are uninterested, it is not because they do not need good communications research, but because they are not getting it. "Asian population programs are drowning in studies," claims Worrall, "but administrators and practitioners are starving for useful program oriented information" (1972, p. 2). Referring to 241 KAP studies in India, Everett Rogers also maintains not only that such communications research is not utilized, but also that "much of it is unutilizable" (1970, p. 6).

How can we account for this remarkable profusion of unusable research combined with an equally remarkable dearth of usable findings? Certainly, medical research has suffered no such problems. From basic research to contraceptive development through clinical trials, its research has been funded generously and generally productive. While there is no simple explanation, the dominance of conservative medical and social science models may have discouraged use of more plausible models such as market research and advertising evaluation.

Although academic research in family planning research has played a highly important legitimizing function, it is, by definition, of little use in the directing and shaping of programs. Demographers, for example, are skilled in macro-level analyses utilizing macro-level theories. They are not trained in program evaluation, in experimental design, or in theories useful for dealing with small groups of target populations. Nor could they expect much help from the medical people, whose experience with clinic trials was a poor model for assessing program needs in the general community. Had the model been market research or even experimental social psychology, it would be hard to imagine that after over two decades of research, hundreds of KAP studies, and hundreds of pilot family planning programs it would be possible to say, as a recent review

of research has, that "only a quite small number of studies (about a dozen in all) . . . meet all the conditions of a true field experiment" (Hilton, et al., 1974, p. 50). Is it anything less than incredible that in 1977 we have no hard information concerning the effects of sex education or population education on age at marriage, fertility, contraception, or abortion?

Perhaps one of the major impediments to useful research has been the model lifted from communications research in agriculture. However useful this simple-minded view of diffusion has been for extension agents, it has probably done more harm than good for family planners. At best, its five stages of awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption have been useful ritual, intoned at the openings of the communications meeting, and then ignored. At worst, these stages are taken seriously and affect the shape of programs or research. Thus, a UNESCO review of communications research sets as priority number one ". . . the time lag from one adoption stage to another among different audiences, communities, or subcultures" (1975[a], p. 30). For agricultural extension, with its armies of agents personally dispensing innovations via word of mouth, this diffusion theory provides an attractive rationale for a slow and costly system of communication. The bias is a powerful one running through the recent UNESCO series on population communication. One of the series maintains that, "While innovators and early adopters are more influenced by mass media, the majority of the rest of the adopter categories are more influenced by interpersonal communication" (UNESCO, 1975[b], p. 30, emphasis added). We may have reason to believe that this is true for political decision making, but how can such a statement be made when most countries have not really tried mass media campaigns for family planning? Even if it were true that people are "more influenced" by other people, it does not follow that interpersonal techniques are more cost-effective than non-personal methods. This possibility seems explicitly denied in another of the UNESCO series: "At the specific stages of evaluation, trial, and adoption, interpersonal face-to-face communications counts for much more . . . , the inability of the mass media to maintain a two-way dialogue with regular feedback restricts this utility . . ." (UNESCO, 1975[c], p. 9, emphasis added). Indeed, if interpersonal networks are lacking, they must be created. Thus, "the most productive results will be secured when (the mass media) are used in conjunction with an existing or specially created network of interpersonal channels . . ." (*ibid.*,

p. 9). And should there be any doubt that such networks imply a family planning extension service, it is dispelled by another UNESCO report which complains that, "While practically all agricultural programs have linkers, usually known as extension agents, general development of such workers in family planning programs is yet to occur" (UNESCO, 1975[a], p. 53).

What might be called the agro-communication bias assumes that the ideal and complete communication is interpersonal and that all other forms are pale imitations which try to emulate, approximate, or accentuate person-to-person communication (Robinson, 1966, pp. 241-242). To this improbable assumption is added a second which concerns the alleged special nature of family planning information and technology. Communicating new ideas in agriculture is viewed as merely difficult--communicating family planning is seen as fantastically difficult, if not impossible. The UNESCO manual No. 3 (1975[a], p. 17) maintains that "the process of communicating about and demonstrating a new crop variety to a group of village farmers who can readily grasp the economic advantage of increased and improved crop production is a simpler process than persuading the women (and men) in that village that they should have smaller families." Surely exactly the contrary is equally plausible: that lovemaking without impregnation is a concept simpler and more immediately appealing than that of changing a crop variety or entering a new market scheme. The mystique concerning the awesomeness of family planning is further bolstered by continual reference to a belief which dies hard. Despite the scores of KAP surveys in rural areas indicating preferences for medium to small numbers of children, the agro-communications folklore has it, as flatly enunciated in UNESCO's communications monograph No. 3, that, "As long as the economy is based on the family as a producing unit, either on the farms or in family, cottage-type industries, large families will be desired as each member is a visible producer" (UNESCO, 1975[a], p. 18, emphasis added). Statements like this totally ignore not only contemporary surveys, but also European historical data on peasants from Bulgaria to Ireland.

Finally, as we move from concept to technique, is the technology of taking a pill more complex than the technology of applying fertilizers or that of improving irrigation? Indeed, is the record of family planning acceptance inferior to the record of acceptance of agricultural innovations? I doubt it.

But, let us assume for the moment that family planning communications involve something complex, mysterious, emotion laden, and slightly obscene. Would it, therefore, follow that face-to-face communication is preferable? Is it not more plausible that the opposite approach under such circumstances would be better? Certainly under properly controlled conditions, impersonal methods such as pamphlets, films, audio- or video-tapes have done reasonably well compared with face-to-face techniques. Market researchers are well aware that on delicate topics telephone interviews elicit franker responses than face-to-face interviews; and self-administered questionnaires may be better still. In Costa Rica, a radio program on health and sexuality introduced in 1968 had received 11,000 letters by 1974. A random sampling showed that 42 percent of the questions received concerned sexual anatomy and physiology, sexual relations, and family planning (Oliva-Llinás, 1975, p. 3, p. 7). It is questionable that the degree of frankness and intimacy revealed in these letters would ever be achieved in the typical face-to-face interview. Thus, it is important to appreciate the unique characteristics of person-less media which are anything but pale approximations of the face-to-face situation. Moreover, they may have advantages of impersonality, non-responsiveness, legitimacy, and technical excellence which puts them in an entirely different class from a face-to-face message. There is a growing volume of research indicating the relative effectiveness of such media vis-à-vis face-to-face approaches, but in many cases administrators are so convinced of the superiority of the fieldworker that they do not bother to test the assumption. In short, the research vacuum has been filled by dubious assumptions borrowed from agriculture and other fields.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Family planning has spent the last half-century trying to conceal its origins and to convince the world that it is something else. It has moved from birth control to planned parenthood, and has formed uneasy alliances with medicine, eugenics, demography, and ecology. Each move toward fame and fortune has been a step away from its American founder's early principles, a path which has involved various types of costs.

Now that much of the birth control movement is ideologically

wedded to the population issue (the US "marriage" was celebrated by an egalitarian but semantically tortuous name change: Planned Parenthood/World Population), where will its communications programs go? Where will the movement go now that most of the public is "aware" and, as the President of the Population Council, George Zeidenstein, put it recently, "much of the aura of crisis that once surrounded the population predicament has passed"? (1976, p. 2). Now, when the issues are coercion versus incentives, integrated versus vertical services, and population versus sexual education, the challenges for communications are quite different from those at the time when people were "sounding the alarm." If the objective changes from "creating public awareness" to inducing new reproductive norms, should we be putting our money on in-school education or soap operas? The fact that nobody knows is a reflection of the state of communications research, which has suffered benign neglect from most funding sources. The quality of communications research should be brought up to the level of demographic, biological, and medical research--or at least to the level of market research.

In accommodating the professional groups which helped family planning achieve respectability, the movement in general and communications in particular have lost a rich opportunity. If modern advertising has spent a half-century infusing the subject of sex into areas where it does not belong, family planning has spent the same amount of time busily eradicating it from a location it uniquely merits. The confluence of these two trends has given family planning messages the typically sterile, slightly prudish, and somewhat dated tone which reassures the older generation but which alienates or amuses the young. By failing to face squarely and honestly its revolutionary contributions to human sexuality, the movement may have given away the most precious of its early possessions. But it is not too late. There is still time to recast communications in terms of sexual liberation rather than of sexual control; and for slogans to move from "Love carefully" to "Love without care." Perhaps we have moved so far that we are at last ready for Margaret Sanger.

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