

trol information. The figures for men are similar. The question asked in 1964—the one question in recent years that did not mention illegality—brought 86 percent of the women and 89 percent of the men into the category of those who approved availability of birth-control information for “anyone who wants it.” Furthermore, in judging the level of disapproval, one should bear in mind that the remainder of the respondents, in all of these years, includes from 7 to 15 percent who claim that they have “no opinion” on the subject, not that they “disapprove.”

TABLE 1.—PERCENTAGES OF WHITE U.S. MEN AND WOMEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 21 AND 44 WHO, IN VARIOUS NATIONAL POLLS AND SURVEYS MADE BETWEEN 1937 AND 1964¹, EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT BIRTH-CONTROL INFORMATION SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO INDIVIDUALS WHO DESIRED IT.

Year	Men		Women	
	%	N	%	N
1937	66	1038	70	734
1938	67	1111	72	548
1939	74	1101	73	630
1940	72	1127	75	618
1943	67	628	73	866
1945	64	714	70	879
1947	76	353	75	405
1959	78	301	79	394
1961	82	336	81	394
1962	85	288	80	381
1963	78	323	79	373
1964	89	324	86	410

¹ The questions asked of respondents concerning birth control were as follows. In 1937: Do you favor the birth control movement? In 1938, 1939, 1940, 1943, 1945, and 1947: Would you like to see a government agency (or “government health clinics”) furnish birth-control information to married people who want it? In 1959, 1961, 1962, and 1963: In some places in the United States it is not legal to supply birth-control information. How do you feel about this—do you think birth-control information should be available to anyone who wants it, or not? In 1964: Do you think birth-control information should be available to anyone who wants it, or not?

An important difference of opinion corresponds to a difference in religious affiliation. Among non-Catholics (including those who have “no religion” and do not attend church) approval has been considerably higher than it has been among Catholics. Among non-Catholic women, over 80 percent approved as early as 1939, and among non-Catholic men the percentages were approximately the same. The 1964 poll showed that 90 percent of each sex approved. Among Catholics, in recent years about 60 percent have approved, and, in 1964, the question that mentioned neither the government nor legality brought opinions of approval from 77 percent of the women and 83 percent of the men.

Clearly, if birth-control information has in fact been unavailable to the poor, the cause has not been a generalized and pervasive attitude of prudery on the part of the American public. Although public officials may have misjudged American opinion (and may have mistakenly assumed that the Catholic Church “spoke for” a majority of Americans, or even for a majority of Catholics), most Americans of an age to be having children did not regard birth control as a subject that should be under a blanket of secrecy and, as far back as the 1930’s, evinced a marked willingness to have their government make such information widely available. It seems unlikely, therefore, that poorer sectors of our population were “cut-off” from birth-control knowledge primarily because informal channels of communication (the channels through which most people learn about birth control) were blocked by an upper- and middle-class conspiracy of silence.

What has happened, however, is that pressure groups for family planning, like the Catholic hierarchy they have been opposing, have been acting as self-designated spokesmen for “public opinion.” By developing a cause as righteous as that of the Catholics (the “rights” of the poor as against the “rights” of a religious group), the family planners have used the American way of influencing official opinion. Now public officials appear to believe that publicly supported birth-control services are what the poor have always wanted and needed, just as, in the past, official opinion acceded to the notion that such services would have been “offensive” to certain groups. Nonetheless, the question remains of whether or not publicly supported services are actually appro-