

Midterm Paper

My Personal Prediction of an American Family Structure in 2035

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Family life in the US has changed significantly over the past few decades. Our country started with a “traditional” family structure in every home, consisting of a mother, a father, and about two children. Now, we are seeing a decline in marriage, an increase in blended families with single parents, a rise of women and mothers in the workforce, and a larger acceptance of LGBTQ families. Along with these increases and adjustments that are being seen, there is also a sort of shift towards egalitarian relationships and marriage, which seems to possibly increase in the future. All of these sorts of adjustments and shifts that we have seen within the past couple decades leads me to believe that by 2035, the American family will be more socially inclusive, with higher equity in labor, childcare, and structure, within a marriage or relationship. Additionally, I believe that marriage rates and birth rates will continue to decline and egalitarian relationships will continue to grow and develop in the future, and a more sense of equality and equity between individuals in a relationship will emerge.

From the beginning, the idea of the “American Dream” drove individuals to chase such a traditional and conventional family life. It is understood that families are “social institutions that perform vital functions for their members and societies...” such as producing, nurturing, and socializing their children, caring for elderly family members, providing laborers for the economy, and meeting emotional needs for their family members (Hill, 2012). To be considered a social institution it is assumed that there are a set of roles that need to be filled. The traditional style family emerged from this sort of assumption for responsibilities, which was required to sustain this definition of general family life. In traditional marriages, “the most universal feature of marriage has been division of labor between men and women” (Hill, 2012). The division of labor sets the woman to be at home with household labor, while the man is head of economic decisions and outside labor. Historically, it is argued that “The fact that only women can give

birth to and breastfeed children makes them the logical caregivers for children and is at the root of the gender division of family labor” (Hill, 2012). This fact led to the assumption and assigning of gender roles as early as the hunting and gathering societies. The gender ideology that led traditional families and marriages was the one that pointed to “men were the dominant partner in the marriage or the heads of their families, and wives were subservient and obedient to their husbands” (Hill, 2012). Ultimately, this assumption and assigning of roles were the guidelines for a traditional marriage and family, and led our country’s relationships for decades.

The traditional family structure was the key to success for families in the US for years. During the 1970s, the feminist shift led to an adjustment of this traditional ideology of marriage. Women entered the workforce and were allowed to pursue careers. This shift allowed women to realize that they do not necessarily have to get married at a young age since they can make money for themselves and not start a family immediately. Women slowly began to realize that they are “independent and [became] reluctant to get involved in marriage and pregnancy” (Liang, 2024). The feminist theory that really took off in the 70s supported this theme of women taking a step back from young marriages and family development. The feminist theory and perspective reflects many different principles, but the ones that are most important are the “equal rights for women” ideology and the "theory of a woman's point of view and her experience" (Finn & Brown, 2022). When women began developing a stronger sense of self and individuality, they also began delaying marriage and starting a family to focus on themselves and their own successes. This included going to school and obtaining a higher education level degree, divorcing their husbands, and partaking in contraception to prevent starting a family at a young age. The development of allowing women into the workforce had an impact on the role that a woman plays in a family and also altered marriage rates and birth rates. This sense of self and

individual worth by the woman also allowed for communication towards desires of an egalitarian relationship. Becoming equal in the workforce was the beginning for women to push for equality in a relationship and in a family structure.

When identifying the shift of equality that women began to experience and comparing it to how a traditional family and role of a mother were seen in the past, it allows sociologists to identify differences and future changes that may occur within an American family structure.

When I look at the broad, general data, I can see an obvious difference between family structures, before the 1970s, and family structures after the 1970s. The main difference is the increased involvement and equality given to females in the workplace. The feminist shift pushed towards equality and is the reason for why women started to feel somewhat equal to men, or their partner. As women began feeling a sort of equality or push towards equality, marriage rates and childbirth rates started to decrease. This is most likely from the newly developed sense of independence and ability to become financially stable by themselves that the feminist wave pushed for. Back in a traditional family structure, the woman was dependent on her husband and her main tasks were to support the husband and children at home. Now, a woman can choose to delay having a family all together, and become dependent on herself only. The idea of a family can also shift and begin to change as women continue to find independence and equality.

After comparing and contrasting past moments and family structures in history, one can tackle the sociological question of “what an American family will look like in 2035.” In my opinion, I believe that marriage rates will slowly begin to decline, birth rates will decline, but, relationships and marriages that are developed, will shift into a stronger sense of egalitarianism. I think that women are continuing to view themselves as independent and continue to yearn for a more equal standing to a man, whether that is in a family structure or a career.

Assessing my forward thinking, my first prediction is that I think marriage rates and birth rates might decline more. I believe that as time continues on, women are going to keep realizing their worth and potential, and push back with force. I believe that with a strong education and growing sense of self, that women will be able to identify their own needs and wants, and be able to travel down the path that is right for them, without influence. Bertrand et al., 2016 states that “skilled women marry at a lower rate than unskilled women,” which supports my belief that women with an education will choose to wait longer or marry or not get married at all. I believe that having an education can open up one’s eyes to the inequality at hand with men and women, and allow women to push back. An example that I am going to use to back this up is my own experience. Before taking this Sociology of the Family course, I had a general understanding of the inequality between men and women in a relationship, and just assumed that it would always be that way. Now, with more education and understanding, I have a deeper knowledge of the inequality, where it stems, and how I can push back against it. I am learning to become more independent and one with my goals, regardless of what another man or person says. With this newfound sense of strength as a woman, my career plans have somewhat shifted, and so have my goals for marriage. I used to want to get married at a young age, and be a mother. I still want that, but now I find myself wanting more for myself and my career. This is a pretty big step for me, and I can attribute most of my independence and thinking to my education, this Sociology of the Family class, and my newly developed understanding of gender inequality. Therefore, I believe that in the next ten years, marriage rates will slow down, ultimately affecting birth rates as well.

My second prediction revolves around egalitarianism in a relationship. I believe that in the next ten years, men and women are going to continue shifting to an egalitarian partnership

and find more and more of a balance of equity. The reasons that I have for this prediction also revolves around my own thinking and developments. I am in a relationship, and see a future with my boyfriend. Although, during this class, I have begun to notice some things happening within the relationship that are not up to my standards in equality. It is mainly little things, such as not cleaning his dishes, getting irritated when I ask him to get out of bed and turn off a light, or pretending not to know how to do something so that I can do it for him. From my education during this class, these small actions have begun to irritate me more and more, thus making me realize that there is a sort of imbalance within our relationship. I can honestly identify a handful of things that he makes me do, solely because I am a woman. This used to not bother me, but throughout my education, I have realized that this is not the relationship that I want to engage in. So, I have started conversations with him about implementing new sorts of equity between us and our relationship. We are slowly working towards the theoretical egalitarianism structure that works best for us, and I can honestly say that it is going great. From my own experience, I am predicting that educated women are going to push for more equity within their relationship, and shift into more of an egalitarian partnership that benefits themselves and their family.

To conclude my predictions, I wholeheartedly think that these shifts will take place in skilled women, especially when educated in sociological perspectives and theories. The historical shift from past traditional families and relationships, to relationships now, support my prediction that there will be a continuation of the decline in marriage rates and birth rates. My own experiences and understandings of an egalitarian relationship is guiding my prediction of an increased sense of equity within a partnership in 2035. Ultimately, I believe that American relationships in 2035 are going to be defined by female independence, equity, and education.

References

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