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The New Normal: What American Families Might Look Like in 2035

Over the past century, the “typical” American family has transformed substantially. From the postwar nuclear family of the 1950s where there were the male breadwinners and stay-at-home mothers to today’s melting pot of family structures, we as a country have seen every type of family and we continue to see more growth.

Sociologists have seen a long but steady decline in the traditional marital households, and with the trending rates of inclusivity in America, there has been a rise in diversity across gender, sexuality and caregiving roles. Some key shifts that will be recognized are the decline in marriage rates, an increase in participation of mothers working, and the growing societal norm of same-sex parenting. As we think about from now to the year 2035, this essay forecasts how these new trends will likely reshape the “typical” American family while simultaneously challenging the old hegemonic ideals, highlighting greater shift in inclusivity for America.

Firstly, marriage has steadily declined in popularity, especially among younger generations rising. The share of married households fell below 50% for the first time, “while cohabiting, never married, or divorced individuals represent a growing portion of adults” (U.S. Census Bureau). The causes of this may be related to an evolving self-

worth, shifting gender roles, and student debt. To some people, marriage has lost its meaning and it is more of just a label, especially to the younger generations. By 2035, based off the trending rates, marriage will likely continue to lose its importance as the primary maker of adult stability. Now this does not take away to the fact that marriage is still persistent among more privilege groups including college educated couples, cohabitants, unions, and other arrangements where it may be more common. We could see a rise in a more “unfair and outdated” system which may cause some issues in the future public eye. With this constant decrease and the rise of nontraditional partnerships, it can be inferred that in ten years this shift will likely cause new laws to be made to recognize and support other types of families and not just legally married heterosexual couples. As traditional marriage becomes less central to family life, these shifts have also reshaped who provides for the home. This continues to be a new era where working mothers are increasing this norm rather than accepting history.

The entrance of women in the workforce, especially mothers, has been one of the most important shifts in modern American Family dynamics. Mothers with children “under 18 years old had a labor force participation rate of 71.7 percent in 2021, up from less than half (47.4 percent) in 1975.” (USA Facts). The COVID-19 pandemic did temporarily disrupt these gains, but long-term trends show a consistent rise in mothers entering the workforce, with heavy trends leaning toward single mothers and dual-income households. By 2035, the stay-at-home motherhood will be relatively a rare choice and the dual model of income will slowly shift into a norm. On the other side of this topic, Doucet also mentioned from his reading that “stay-at-home fathers are now forging new masculinities,” redefining caregiving as a masculine trait. This is still definitely a

minority practice today, but in ten years we could see this could be more common with a broader societal social and institutional support for paternity leave, flexible work schedules, and sharing roles around the house within family dynamics. As more mothers have joined the workforce out of both choice and maybe with it being necessary, another opportunity shift has begun that can be related: it is the steady rise of single parent households, which now are a large portion of the American family ideals.

The negative label that surrounds single parenthood is slowly diminishing. Single mothers, especially women of color continue to face societal and structural challenges such as less income, less flexibility within jobs and scheduling, and not a lot of access to affordable childcare. Even with this, because of the positive progress society has made, the number of single parent households has steadily increased, driven by a few factors including choice, societal acceptance, and delayed marriage. By 2035, single parenthood by choice OR circumstance will be normalized at a vast rate compared to how it is now. There will be a broader acceptance of unmarried parenthood, causing more single parent situations, especially women, to parent independently. With improved social services, it will make that job easier to parent independently. On the other hand, blended families, which form through remarriage, could be a new normal in the future. Children growing up in 2035 will most likely have a higher chance to have “half siblings”, stepparents, or non-biological caregivers in general, which is not the best thing, but these family forms will challenge the legal system to adapt and expand definitions of rights beyond just blood related frame works. The fact that the marriage rate is decrease is not the best, but it is creating new opportunities and Richard Bach explains in a way where “the bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other” (*Happier*

Human). This demonstrates that blood does not mean everything, and that this movement does not all have to be bad. As family structures grow more fluid and diverse, as said, society is slowly rethinking traditional definitions of parenthood, which brings along another aspect of inclusivity, particularly among LGBTQ+ families.

Since the 2015 Supreme Court decision Obegefell v. Hodges, same-sex marriage has been legalized in America, which has opened a door that many have accepted in the past years. Since then, there has been greater visibility for those who were not being supported with that style of marriage in mind. Unfortunately, as Moore states, these “families still navigate institutional barriers”, particularly in adoption, birth, and schooling, and being biological parents. By 2035, same sex families will continue to change parenting norms, especially gay male couples because they cannot fill the traditional “biological mother” role. These dynamics will help with the inclusivity of creating this type of co-parenting across all family types. We can also expect growing in all of LGBTQ+ marriages including transgender and non-binary parents. As legal and cultural normal settle in, family diversity in 2035 will likely have a wide spectrum of gender identities. As these types of families continue to challenge norms and reshape parenthood, it is all part of one big goal, what everybody is curious about, what the American family will look like in the future.

In conclusion, if we were to look ahead and envision a “typical” American family in 2035, it would completely be different from the nuclear model on a heterosexual married couple with biological children. Instead, we can infer that one of the most common family dynamics you will see is a dual-income household where both parents, regardless of gender share caregiving duties. We can predict that just as likely, there

could be a single parent raising children with the help of a kin, or a same sex couple raising adopted or a donor child, and maybe even a blended family attempting to handle co-parenting with multiple houses. In these cases, and soon, families will be structured more by intention and emotional commitment than by blood or legal marriage. This progress and emerging norms will not only challenge the legal system but will change the dynamics of how society sees parenthood, custody, and family rights. By 2035, the American family will not be defined by a single “norm” or “image”, but its inclusivity, diversity, and change. It will set society into a transition, one with hospitality, support, and commitment become the true foundations of family instead of legal contracts and gender roles.

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