THE MODERN FAMILY: CHANGES IN STRUCTURE AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Activity Items
The following items are part of this activity and appear at the end of this student version.

• Item 1a: Figure 1, Households by Type, 1970–2012
• Item 1b: Figure 3, Households by Size, 1970–2012
• Item 2a: Table 1, Distribution of Same-Sex Couple Households by States Grouped by Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Couple Marriages and Unions: 2010
• Item 2b: Table 2, Couple Households With Children; 2010

Student Learning Objectives

• I will understand how sociologists interpret data and will learn how to make empirical statements.
• I will become familiar with past and present census data about family structures and living arrangements in the United States.
• I will be able to discuss how different families are defined and how structures of families have changed since the 1970s.
Part 1 – Analyze Data

Work in groups of three or four to complete part 1.

1. Examine Item 1a: Figure 1, Households by Type, 1970–2012. Referring to specific data, describe two ways that household types changed between 1970 and 2012.

What are some family structures that are not represented in Item 1a?

2. Examine Item 1b: Figure 3, Households by Size, 1970–2012. Referring to specific data, describe two ways that household sizes changed between 1970 and 2012.
3. Examine Item 2a: Table 1, Distribution of Same-Sex Couple Households by States Grouped by Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Couple Marriages and Unions: 2010. What conclusions can you draw about same-sex couple households in 2010?

4. Examine Item 2b: Table 2, Couple Households With Children: 2010. What conclusions can you draw about couple households with children in 2010?

Do you think any family structures are not represented in Item 2b?

Part 2 - Observe and Compare

Now you will watch a clip from the TV show “Modern Family” as a class. Be sure to take notes on your own observations (e.g., the types of families you notice, how they interact).

Rejoin your small group to answer the following questions:

1. What is the family structure often referred to as “traditional” and the roles associated with it?
2. How does “Modern Family” challenge or support the findings you pulled from census data in part 1 of this activity? How does the show challenge the idea of a “traditional family”?

3. How might a show about a modern family have been different if it aired in the 1970s? Is there a type of family or living arrangement not portrayed in the clip you watched, and if so, what is it?
The share of households that married couples maintained has fallen since 1970, while the share of nonfamily households has increased (Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows households by type from 1970 to 2012. Family households predominated in 1970, when they made up 81 percent of all households. This proportion dropped to around 66 percent by 2012. Note, however, that most of this change occurred between 1970 and 1990. Changes in household type since 1990 have been smaller.

The most noticeable trend in Figure 1 is the decline of married-couple households with their own children, from 40 percent of households in 1970 to 20 percent in 2012. As of 1970, married couples with children outnumbered married couples without children but by 2012 the opposite was true. Indeed, the number of married couples without children has grown in recent years, from 28 percent of households in 2005 to 29 percent in 2012. This change is likely related to the aging of householders, noted earlier, as well as delays in childbearing. 10

The other family households shown in Figure 1 (families whose householder was living with children or other relatives but had no spouse present) increased from 11 percent of households in 1970 to 18 percent in 2012. 11 Since 1992, however, the proportion of households that are one-parent families (included in the other family households category) has stabilized at about 9 percent. 12

The growth in one-person households (people living alone) is responsible for most of the increase in nonfamily households over time—and the corresponding decrease in family households. The proportion of one-person households increased by 10 percentage points from 1970 to 2012. 13


www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-570.pdf
To see the figure within the PDF, click on the link above and go to Page 5.
Item 1b: Figure 3, Households by Size, 1970–2012

Households (Figure 3). Households with five or more people decreased by half, from 21 percent to 10 percent of households, between 1970 and 2012 while the share of households with only one or two people increased from 46 percent to 61 percent. Consistent with trends in Figure 1 for household type, changes in more recent decades have been small. There was no significant difference, for example, in households with five or more people between 2005 and 2012.

Multigenerational households were less common among White, non-Hispanic householders (Table 2). The term multigenerational refers to family households consisting of three or more generations. These include families with either a householder with both a parent and a child, a householder with both a child and grandchild, a householder with both a grandchild and a parent, or a four-generation household (i.e., a householder with a parent, child, and grandchild present). In 2012, multigenerational households made up 5 percent of family households, although this percentage differed by race and Hispanic origin (Table 2).

16 The comparable figure from the ACS was 6 percent. See Tables B11017 and B11001, accessible on American FactFinder at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_1YR_B11017&prodType=table> and <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_1YR_B11001&prodType=table>.

The most common type of multigenerational household was one in which a householder lives with a child and a grandchild (64 percent). This pattern was especially pronounced among multigenerational households with a White, non-Hispanic householder. The next most common type was one in which a householder lives with a child and a parent (34 percent). This pattern was predominant among multigenerational households with an Asian householder.

www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-570.pdf

To see the figure within the PDF, click on the link above and go to Page 7.
Table 1.

**Distribution of Same-Sex Couple Households by States Grouped by Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Couple Marriages and Unions: 2010**

(In percent. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal recognition</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Reported as spouse</th>
<th>Unmarried partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Margin of error (±)</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total same-sex couple households</strong></td>
<td>593,324</td>
<td>11,395</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States performing same-sex marriages</td>
<td>42,195</td>
<td>3,055</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic partnership/Civil unions</td>
<td>169,205</td>
<td>6,133</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>90,023</td>
<td>4,569</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other states</td>
<td>381,924</td>
<td>8,804</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate’s variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

2. This includes Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the District of Columbia.

3. This includes California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin.

4. California performed same-sex marriages from June to November 2008.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.


To see the table within the PDF, click on the link above and go to Page 3.
**Table 2. Couple Households With Children: 2010**
(In percent. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Married opposite-sex couples</th>
<th>Unmarried opposite-sex couples</th>
<th>Total same-sex couples</th>
<th>Same-sex couples by reporting status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Margin of error (±)</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Margin of error (±)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with children (number)</td>
<td>24,443,599</td>
<td>83,848</td>
<td>2,684,978</td>
<td>23,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own children present</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No own children present</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with own children only</td>
<td>22,872,151</td>
<td>86,426</td>
<td>2,267,016</td>
<td>20,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological only</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step only or adopted only</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of own children only</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate’s variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

2 Households with at least one own child present under the age of 18 years. Can contain not own children as well.

3 Households that contain grandchildren, other relatives, or other nonrelatives under the age of 18 years.

4 Households with biological children only.

5 Households with either stepchild only or adopted child only.

6 Combination of two or more of the three own children types.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.


To see the table within the PDF, click on the link above and go to Page 3.