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| How Has America’s Family Culture Changed Since The 1950’s? |
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America’s culture is constantly changing. The family and marriage culture in the United States has changed significantly. The have been changes in the status of women in relations since 1950’s. The circumstances under which couples separate have broaden and divorce has become a norm. Our grandparent’s raised their children using different parenting methods than our parents. The household structure has undergone a transformation. The use of statistical records was the most beneficial because it gave a clear understand of the changes. There were also observations used to describe the effect parenting styles had on children. Previously, women were housewives who catered to their husbands and cared for the children. In the 1960’s, women began working outside the home and had the freedom to use contraceptives. This change was the beginning of the rise in divorce rates. Couples in 2000, are getting married later in life and often remarry after failed marriage. Another change since the 1950’s is how more women are having children out of wedlock which was once seen as a taboo. A major change is the presence of the interracial married couples which increased after 1970. Household do not all consist of mom, dad, and siblings anymore. In the 2000’s, there are more step families than nuclear families. The positive change from the 1950’s includes the liberation of women in marriages, the diversity of married couples, and the bondage between parents and their children. The negative change is the possibility that the lack of effective techniques could increase teen pregnancy.

Introduction

America’s culture has changed in major ways since the 1950’s. The music people listen to, the fashion industry, technological advances, and the type of activities people are doing for fun have all changed. There have also been serious changes in marriage and family culture. Marriages in the 2000’s are not like they were when our grandparents and parents were young. Change is a positive thing, if there was not a change man and woman would not be allowed to marry outside of their race or sex. Without a change all women would still be living life as a housewife like Lucy from “I Love Lucy.” Divorce rates have increased since the 1950’s and the couples are getting divorced under different circumstances. Parenting styles and household structures have also changes since the 1950’s. Not all change is for the best, more unwedded teens are getting pregnant around the country because it is becoming acceptable.

Marriage

Marriages during the 1950’s were stronger than relationships today in that divorce was not acceptable. Couples in 1950’s did not wait long to get married. Marriage rates were highest in this time period compared to the years prior to the 1900’s.[[1]](#footnote-1) During this time, people married within the same race. In the 1950’s, interracial marriages were not accepted or legal in some states. The average age for a man to get married during the 1950’s was twenty-two and twenty for women. [[2]](#footnote-2) Married couples during this time usually did not wait more than seven months before having their first child. The gender roles were the same for most married couples. The husbands were the breadwinners and the wives stayed home to manage the house. [[3]](#footnote-3) The wives were responsible for cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children.[[4]](#footnote-4) The wives only worked if the income of the husband was not enough to support the family. Normally, if a wife worked outside of the home, it would be an insult to the husband. This would be a sign that the man could not supply for his family. Wives enjoyed looking nice for their husbands by wearing dresses with high heels, having their hair done, and wearing make-up. The “perfect wives” catered to the needs and wants of their husbands. The husbands would come home everyday to a hearty meal. Many marriages during this time were happy and peaceful. [[5]](#footnote-5)Divorce was not a common option for married couples in the 1950’s. Less than twenty percent of couples in the 1950’s filed for a divorce.[[6]](#footnote-6)

However, every wife in a family that appeared to be happy around their husband was not always happy. In the 1950’s, there were wives who were suffering from depression. Women sacrificed a lot for their families during this time. Some women did not get to further their education because they had children in their early twenties. These women were unable to go out and participate in activities outside of the home because they had to be the “perfect housewife” and manage the home. It was like they were confined to the vicinity of their home. Some wives were unable to get well-paying jobs and when they did get a job they were not treated equal to men. All the following were causes for unhappiness in a marriage but even though they were unsatisfied, women often stayed with their husbands.

Divorce rates began to rise in the mid-1960’s because women gained more freedom.[[7]](#footnote-7) During the 1960’s, the gender role for women in marriages began to change with new legislation that proclaimed men and women should be treated equally. The wives started joining the paid workforce. The sexual revolution was another major reason couples divorced.7 In the 1960’s, women began using contraceptives which was a major change from the 1950’s.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Supreme Court legalized the use of birth control in 1965.[[9]](#footnote-9) Over eighty percent of married women were using the birth control pills by the end of the 1960’s.8 A survey from the 1960’s, showed that seventy-two percent of couples were married, which is not as high as the marriage rates in previous years.[[10]](#footnote-10) Wives gained the courage to file for a divorce if they were unsatisfied in their marriage. They felt free to release themselves from an abusive relationship.[[11]](#footnote-11) The majority of couples believed in waiting until after they were married to start having a family. Only five percent of women had a child before they were married.11

The marriage life has come a long way since the 1950’s. In 2008, only fifty-two percent of adults were married. Couples have started to have smaller families and there has been an increase in the number of women who have children before getting married. Three out of ten children are born out of wedlock. Women who had children out of wedlock were disapproved of by society before the 1960’s.[[12]](#footnote-12) Couples are not in a rush to get married because the thrill of marriage has decreased. Thirty-nine percent of Americans felt marriage is becoming outdated. In 1978, only twenty-eight percent of Americans believed marriage was outmoded.[[13]](#footnote-13) The 1970’s marked a transition in the view of marriage. Non-married couples are doing the same thing as couples who have said “I do” such as living together, having sexual intercourse, and enjoying each other’s company.

The age of first married couples has changed from being in the early twenties as it was in the 1950’s. Twenty percent of women between the ages of thirty and thirty-four have not married.[[14]](#footnote-14) In 2000, seventy-three percent of women between twenty and twenty-four had not been married.[[15]](#footnote-15) In nontraditional families today, the wives and husbands are working outside of the home. In this day it is necessary because of the economy and children’s expenses can add up over eighteen years. Sixty-two percent of wives are working which is nearly doubled since 1960. 14

Today, half of all marriages end in a divorce which is three times the divorce rate in 1950. 15 If the first marriage does not work out, an individual might seek another marriage partner. Second and third marriages are not often successful. Second marriages have a sixty-seven percent failing rate.[[16]](#footnote-16) The divorce rate increases to seventy-three percent for third marriages.

A lack of communication is the main reason for couples getting a divorce. A lack of communication leads to arguments which lead to unhappiness. During the 1950’s, married couples more often remained loyal to their spouse, but this is not always the case in the present day. Some marriages fail because there is a lack of commitment between the spouses. In the 2000’s, there are plenty of opportunities to have affairs with members of the opposite sex such as at work and at social gatherings. The greater use of technology, including the Internet, has festered this. Secret affairs can lead to sexual adultery, extramarital children, and divorce. Marriages may not last because a spouse has a substance or alcohol addiction which can ruin a family. Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse can also cause marriage to end. Financial problems can be a contributing factor to a mate wanting a divorce.[[17]](#footnote-17) Even though these turmoils have existed for generations, they are more prevalent today. Meanwhile, there are unhappy couples that will stay together even when they are no longer in love. They believe it is in the best interest of their children to have both parents present.

Divorces today can have a negative impact on the children involved. Twenty-five percent of children suffer from psychological, academic, and social problems after their parents get a divorce. The two years following a divorce are the most challenging for the child and their parent. These years are filled with emotions and mood swings. Statistics have shown that younger males have a harder time adjusting to divorce than the young girls. One affect divorce has on boys especially is poor behavior which is difficult for mothers to handle. After divorces in current years, the father is more likely to contact with their child if they do not have sole custody. After a divorce the children may suffer financially. Once couples separate, the parent with custody of the child may struggle to provide for their children which may result in the need of welfare. These parents often have a conflict with the non-custodial parent because of the lack of child support. [[18]](#footnote-18)

America’s society has become more diverse since the 1950’s because a wide variety of immigrants from various countries have moved to the United States. Johnson’s 1965 Immigration Act allowed for immigration from all parts of the world specifically Latin America. Since individuals are constantly exposed to people of different ethnicities and races, the presence of interracial marriages grew.[[19]](#footnote-19) After the *Loving vs. Virginia* case in 1967, the Supreme Court declared laws banning interracial marriages unconstitutional.[[20]](#footnote-20) Even though interracial marriages were legal, it took time for the couples to be accepted by members of society.

In 2008, one in seven couples in the US were married to a person with a different race or ethnicity. This is more than double the rate of interracial or interethnic during the 1960’s. The older generation has different feelings towards interracial couples because it is not what they were used to as children. This is a change some may not have gotten accustom to because they adjusted to African Americans with other African Americans and Caucasians with Caucasians. Only, thirty percent of the elderly over sixty-five approve of interracial couples. Between eighty and ninety percent of the generation under thirty are accepting of interracial dating. The younger generation was raised around different ethnicities and they have not witnessed life with laws banning activities because of race. 21

The Pew Report of 2008 showed, forty-one percent of marriages were between a Hispanic and Caucasian couple. A black and white couple made up eleven percent of total interracial marriages. There are more African American men marrying outside of their race which leaves a shortage of African American men for African American females. The amount had tripled from 1980 to 2008. Additionally, the report stated that fifteen percent of marriages were between a white and an Asian. [[21]](#footnote-21)

Not only have interracial marriages become accepted, same-sex marriages have also become popular. Even though gay couples were prevalent in 1970, it was not as welcomed as it is today. The Defense of Marriage Act of 1996, made same-sex marriages illegal and 40 states adhered to this act.[[22]](#footnote-22) Today, same-sex marriages are legal in the following states: Iowa, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, California, and Connecticut. In 2008, forty-nine percent of citizens opposed gay marriage but thirty-eight percent approved.[[23]](#footnote-23) In 2010, fifty percent of Americans believed same-sex marriages should be legal.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Today, people not only meet their love interest face to face but also on online dating websites such as eHarmony, Dating Direct, and Match.com.[[25]](#footnote-25) Online dating sites makes match making easier because they match people with someone who has the same personality and interest. In the 1960’s, computers were only found in the work place and social networking sites did not exist. This is why couples met physically and married people they knew personally. Seventeen percent of marriages in the last three years have resulted from online dating. A publisher of the Online Dating Magazine stated “Online dating is by now a preferred way for singles to find dates.” The majority of people have either tried online dating or knows someone who has used the dating sites.[[26]](#footnote-26) The dating sites now have televised commercials because of the growing popularity and the decline of stigmas attached to these relationships.

Household Structure

The Baby Boom between 1946 and 1964 produced a generation of 79 million Americans. Married couples were eager to have big families after their husbands returned from World War II. The households consisted of the mom, dad, and several children all living together. In 1960, eighty-seven percent of children lived with both parents present in the home. Unfortunately, the percentage of children living with one parent in the home increased from nine to twenty-five since 1960.[[27]](#footnote-27) This could be the result of having an exponential growth in the number unwedded parents. In 1970, family households were predominating.[[28]](#footnote-28) In recent years, there has been a change in family households.

In 2000, only sixty-nine percent of households are family. 26 Children do not always live with their mom, dad, and siblings like in previous years. Often times one would find a child living with their grandparent, aunt or uncle, or sibling. After a divorce, children may be alternating between living with their mom and dad because of a custody agreement. There are also children who have been removed from their original home and were adopted by a welcoming family. There are fewer nuclear families than step families in the 2000’s. A nuclear family consists of people within household such as the brothers, sisters, mother, and dad. In some cases, the step-parent has never been a biological parent so they must adjust to a new spouse and a new child.[[29]](#footnote-29) Households may blend if both the step-parent and the child’s parent already have children.

Even though most households are related by blood, the amount of non-blood related households are increasing because of adoption. Transracial adoptions steadily escalated in the 1970’s. A transracial adoption is an adoption in which the adopted parents adopt a child of a different race.[[30]](#footnote-30) Twenty-one percent of children today are adopted by a parent of another race or ethnicity. In the past, the adopted parents would sometimes not inform their adopted son or daughter that they were adopted. Since 1980, more parents have been informing their children.

Society realized that keeping the information secret could lead to the child resenting their adopted parents. The child’s biological mother decides if they want their child to be able to find them and form a relationship at a later stage in their son’s or daughter’s life. Sixty-two percent of parents have adopted a child while they were a newborn or under the age of one.[[31]](#footnote-31) These parents are likely to be the ones who have to make a decision of whether or not to keep their adoption a secret forever or tell them the truth when their older.

Parenting Styles

The majority of households were in favor of using the permissive parenting style during the 1950’s and 1960’s.[[32]](#footnote-32) Permissive parenting was common in the 1950’s because teens were encouraged not to conform and to be an individual.[[33]](#footnote-33) Permissive parents keep their rules and punishments to a minimum if there are any ground rules in place. Even if the parent tries to disciplines their sons or daughters, they lay off after a while. As a result, the children do not take it seriously when they are punished. These parents let their children make their own decisions. Permissive parents believe in letting their children learn from their mistakes. A characteristic of a permissive parent is letting their child’s misbehavior go unpunished. The permissive parent should not be mistaken for an uninvolved parent.

Unlike uninvolved parents, these parents are also sincere and nurturing to their young. In order to keep their children happy, the parents allow their children to have the freedom they desire. However, it may seem as if sometimes the children have the power over the parent. Children may give their parents orders.[[34]](#footnote-34) In the 1950, teenagers outwardly respected adults and carried themselves appropriately. The males were expected to be a gentleman and the females were expected to remain “ladylike”.[[35]](#footnote-35) This is the reason why it was not hard for a parent not to be extremely strict on their children. There was a mutual understanding for teenagers in society to carry themselves properly. In the 2000’s, permissive parenting can have a much more negative impact on the children.

Children of permissive parents are not “living the life” as spectators might think. They can be unpleased with what their lives have become. These children are prone to problems with depression and anxiety. Unfortunately, these children are more likely to be violent because they do not have any discipline. They are used to just doing whatever they want because there are no ground rules. These teens tend to lack self-control and can be anti-social.32

The authoritarian parenting style was also found in abundance in families before 1960. Authoritarian parents make all the decisions in a family. The children have to listen to everything they are told to do. Whatever the parent says was always correct so there could not be any debates. Authoritarian parents believe in boundaries and a firm structure. An authoritarian parent should not be confused with an abusive parent.[[36]](#footnote-36) Sometimes, there are reasons behind why a parent is parenting their child in a certain way. Some families live in bad neighborhoods which is why they tend to be authoritarian parents. The parents want their child to obey all the rules so they would be safe. [[37]](#footnote-37)

Children of authoritarian parents have a lower self-esteem and are more likely to fall into a depression. This is problematic because there are a lot of negative influences in society for teens to turn to. The children may also suffer from not having social skills.[[38]](#footnote-38) In school, the children are known for getting passing grades because their parents usually push education. They are respectful to elders because their parents demand their children to respect them. These children do not have many child to parent conversations because the children do not feel the warmth of talking to their parents about issues in their personal life. Their parents do not listen to their input and opinions so they keep to themselves. The communication is normally the parent telling the child what he or she should or should not do.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Currently, parents tend to be a mix between the authoritarian and the permissive parent. Authoritative parents set rules but also give the reasoning behind the rules given. Discipline is enforced, and unlike the permissive parents, it remains consistent. The children understand they must follow the rules of the house because their parents would not forget about their punishment after a few days. Being supportive and respecting the child are two values of an authoritative parent. They are open-minded and listen to their child’s point of view. Unlike the permissive parent, an authoritative parent is known for communicating with their child. The authoritarian parent has more parents –to- child communication than child- to-parents conversations.[[40]](#footnote-40) This parenting style is commonly used by Caucasian parents although it is also in families of other persuasions.35

An authoritative parent’s child is normally a well-rounded person. Better performance in school is positively correlated with having an authoritative parent. These children normally have the help and guidance of their parents to assist with their education. A child of this parent does not dread coming home every day from school because parents create a nurturing environment. Research has proven that children of authoritative parents have fewer problems with depression because they actually feel a sense of belonging. They have a higher self-esteem and are more social than children of other types of parents. Rebellion is not a normal characteristic of this child because the child is able to do things without having to sneak around due to strict parents. They have a better chance of being successful and finding a job because they have self-control, respect authority, and are responsible.36

Uninvolved parents are prevalent in more families in recent years than in the 1950’s, 60’s, and 70’s. Having an uninvolved parent is like having a parent that is paying no attention.[[41]](#footnote-41) In some cases, having uninvolved parents can result in the formation of a social work case. These parents are also referred to as a neglectful or undemanding parent. Uninvolved parents have no interactions with their child. They do not care what their sons or daughter does with their life. There is no love or nurturing present because the parent does not want the child around. [[42]](#footnote-42)

A child growing up in a house for eighteen years without a sense of belonging and feeling alone; can potentially suffer from emotional distress. These children are more likely to have trouble forming attachments, susceptible to depression, and are easily discouraged.37 In school, the child would likely perform poorly because they do not have the guidance they need.[[43]](#footnote-43) There are some individuals who do not let their lack of parental care hit close to the heart. These children would likely exhibit qualities of an authoritative parent and live a normal life.

Today’s parents are not using the same parenting techniques as their parents did when they were growing up in the 1970’s. Some parents have strayed away from their parent’s parenting style to form their own. Other parents have the “money see, money do” mentality. Uninvolved parents tend to be uninvolved because they are depressed themselves and are struggling to take care of themselves.[[44]](#footnote-44) A parent’s job influences how the parent is parenting. For example, if a parent or parents work long hours every day there is not much time left for their children.

Teen Pregnancy

The rise of various parenting styles could be the reason for the rise in teen pregnancies. Parents are letting their children have more freedom and are letting their children have private lives, which is why parents do not know what their sons and daughters are doing and who they are involved with outside of their home. Parents are shocked when their daughters come home pregnant because they automatically think their child should know better and some parent just do not care. Parents are not having talks with their children about the importance of abstinence and protected sex. Once their child is pregnant they feel guilty because they feel like they have failed the child by letting it happen.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Unwedded teen pregnancies were considered morally wrong during the mid-1900’s.[[46]](#footnote-46) Pregnancy was previous only suppose to be between married couples, which is why it was rare to have a pregnant teen walking the streets. In some instances it was acceptable because nineteen year old females may have been married. The unmarried females who got pregnant young were kicked out of school and sent to live with their family elsewhere. Some girls were sent to homes for troubled children.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Since 1970, the numbers of teenagers pregnancies outside of marriage are growing and as the years pass. Children walk around high school every day around the country and find teens that are pregnant. It is as if bringing a child into the world as a teen is a new trend. Females whose mother was a teen mom are twenty-two percent more likely to become pregnant as a teen themselves. In the US, eight hundred-twenty thousand teenagers each year are getting pregnant.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Family Involvement

In 1950, television became a must have item in every household. Families during this time considered watching TV together bonding time. Quality family time was also spent eating dinner together after a long day at school and work. Now that teenagers have more freedom less time is being spent with the family and more time is being spent with close friends. Getting a car is a step to more independence for a teenager. Families are eating dinner whenever they please though there are still families who value dinner time together. Fridays in some families are dedicated to being a night of family time and Fridays in other families are for getting out the house and having fun. Parents and children have busy lives being involved in extra-curricular activities in school and working weekends which take away from family bonding time. Father involvement is a major change since the 1950. [[49]](#footnote-49)

Conclusion

Drastic changes have occurred in families over the course of sixty years. People have not really thought in depth of how much people have overcome in the marriage and family life. The first thing that may come to mind is divorce rates are higher in the 2000’s or women are not just housewives anymore. For people of the 2000’s looking back, at the 1950’s generation, would probably think they rushed into marriage because they started families at nineteen. Marriages today begin later but families are still beginning earlier because more unwedded teenagers are being impregnated. Morals have changes since the 1950’s but not necessarily for the better. Previously, having children out of wedlock for teens and adults was seen as a taboo so it was not seen often. Women and men remained faithful in their commitment to their mates. The availability of contraceptives and job opportunities was the start of women empowerment but not all husbands were in favor of this. Would the divorce rates still rise in the 1970’s if there birth control was not legalized? No, because the use of contraceptives was a major deterrent for husbands especially since large families were favored.

The way a child is raised has an impact of the qualities and character traits a child may have and the time frame, ethnicity, and/or environment could possibly influence a parent’s choice in parenting techniques. There were more permissive parents but it was okay because the children still respected their parents, themselves, and others. Today, parents may be stricter due to the rise in the submission to peer pressure and negativity in the world.

Does a parent’s parenting style increase or decrease the likelihood of their child getting pregnant? Uninvolved parents could potentially have teenager who get pregnant because there is no one to teach them right from wrong. Since teens are spending more time away from home than teens did in the 1950’s, it’s harder to keep them in line. As years go by our culture is shaping into something new for the most part it is for the best. Women have more freedom in their marriage, people are allowed to marry who they please and still be accepted by society, and parents and children have closer relationships.

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