

Diversity of the family

Family



? FamilyDiversity Term Papers If there is any one constant concerning the diversity of family and family structure in the United States over the past one hundred years or so, it is change. Almost every familial characteristic one would choose to study - from the median age at the time of first marriage, to the number of children per household, to the rate of divorce- has either risen significantly, declined dramatically, or both. What is certain is that the study of family diversity, and the evolution of such diversity in the United States is intriguing.

The very structure and character of the American family has evolved significantly from 1900 to 2000. From a strong patriarchal start at the turn of the century, the American family evolved into what is now referred to as a companionate marriage up until the 1960s, when individualism began winning out over traditional family values. The divorce rate first rose and later fell, but left in its wake a number of unmistakable trends. From 1970 to 1992 the number of single-family households in the United States increased from 13% to 32% .

Cohabitation evolved from a fringe phenomenon reserved mostly for hippies to a mainstream trend, with the number of heterosexual couples cohabitating outside of marriage up ten-fold since 1960. The number of households with children, in the mean time, has declined to just over a quarter of all households, falling from a high of 45% in 1972 to 26% in 1999. The most common household composition in the United States today is an unmarried couple without children.

More than anything else, the very diversity in the types of families and households has increased by what seems like an order of magnitude. In what follows, I examine and discuss the changes that have occurred in the diversity of family and familial structure in the United States over the past century. I begin with an examination of the evolution of family form. Next, I examine the diversity in family typology. I conclude with an examination of a variety of trends in family diversity.