

# Change of the family unit

[Family](#), [Mother](#)



Everyone can picture the traditional family unit; a working father, a mother who stays at home tending to the children, two children: a boy and a girl, and a dog named Spot. However, this idea has not always been the same. From the early Native American tribe of the Navajo and Hopi with extended families (Roberts), to the modern times with single parent families and families with gay parents, the idea of a family unit has been ever changing. At first, during the times of the Paleolithic Era, the family unit was comprised of a small group of people usually around 10-30 people. This group was more or less not related, foraging the land for food and resources. These "hunter-gatherers" were not a biological family but a group of people with a similar goal, to migrate to new land in search of food. However, as people began to discover the science of agriculture, they began to settle and form cities and agricultural settlements (Upper Paleolithic: 30, 000 - 10, 000 BC). As the civilizations began to form, the family unit began to shrink. During the time of the Roman era, the family consisted of parent-in-laws and the nuclear family. Grandparents were generally included in the family unit, and in some cases, great-grandparents, which held the power within the family. Also included in the family unit, were the household slaves. Children formed strong bonds with these, as they were a source of primary care given to the children (Durant). The family unit of Rome was not based on love or romance, but rather based on "recreational sex" (Dupont). However, this family unit based on sex was quickly uprooted with the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 A. D. During the colonization of the Americas and other nations, the first major occurrence of single parent families came into the picture. "Yonder woman, Sir, you must know, was the wife of a certain

learned man, English by birth, but who had long dwelt in Amsterdam, whence, some good time ago, he was minded to cross over and cast in his lot with us of the Massachusetts. To this purpose, he sent his wife before him, remaining himself to look after some necessary affairs," (Hawthorne). Men usually sent their wives over to the colonies to establish a living, while they took care of the final business in their home country. Although it appeared during this time, there was never a shift in the traditional family unit. In more recent times, however, the shift in the family unit has taken three forms; one being the traditional family unit with a mother and father, two being a single parent family, and lastly, families with gay parents. Families with single parents have been on the rise in recent years. About fifty-nine percent of children living in the United States will live in a single parent house at least once in their lifetime, and over sixteen million children currently live in single parent homes (U. S. Census Bureau). This is primarily due to the high divorce rate among married couples in the United States. Out of all the marriages in the United States, which is about 2, 230, 000 1/3 to 1/2 them end up in divorce or annulment (Klebanow). There are benefits from being in a single parent family. The parent and child have stronger bonds, that those of a child with both parents (Wolf). " It was times like these when I thought my father, who hated guns and had never been to any wars, was the bravest man who ever lived," (Lee). These strong bonds are a product of the child only having one person to turn to with their problems. The parents in turn are able to handle a variety of situations and are able to learn and grow with the child as a result. In addition to stronger bonds, children also learn more of a sense of responsibility. They are able to make

better financial choices and chores contribute to the entire family (Wolf). This trend of single parent families is not only in the United States. In Japan, as of 1997, seventeen percent of all households were headed by a single parent; and in Australia, twenty-five percent of children live with one biological parent. The occurrence of the father being the single parent is also on the rise. There has been a 62 percent increase in the event of the father being the sole caregiver of children since 1990. This number is up to about 2 million families. This family unit, along with a family with two mothers or two fathers is also in the mainstream of American society and is given much media attention. Gay families have been the center of much media attention the last few years, much of which dealt with their inability to get married, or even to adopt a child. Gay couples have had difficulties with many things, such as adoption. They have received criticism from many political figures about their ability to raise children for being the same sex. In the early 1970s, gay parents were demonized and were considered outcasts from society (Keen). However, today they have become more and more accepted by mainstream culture. Approximately 2 million American children are being raised by gay and lesbian parents. This was a 72 percent increase from last decade. Nearly one-third of lesbian households and one-fifth of gay households have children. The number of gay households has been on a steep incline from 1990 in 10 states. There was a 700 percent increase in same sex households in Delaware and Nevada; roughly 400 percent in Vermont, Indiana, Louisiana and Nebraska; and more than a 200 percent increase in Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts and Montana (Cohn). Gay couples are still facing adversity with the issue of adoption however. Only a

few select states allow for gay adoption, some of which include New York, California, New Jersey and Nevada. However, some states are out to seek the ban of adoption by gay couples. Some states, supported by Catholic charities, are seeking to join Mississippi, Florida and Utah in their ban against gay adoption, to take the total up to 10 states. Many couples in these states relocate to different states in order to legally adopt a child. However, some states do allow for a process called "second parent adoption," in which the biological parent's partner is allowed to adopt the child, without negating the biological parent's legal rights. This was started by the Nation Center for Lesbian Rights in the mid 1980s. States which allow for second parent adoption include Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington State and Washington D. C. Looking at the general picture of the family unit, one can see that the idea of the family unit has not shifted; it has come to include more diversity. By broadening the horizons of people and society, the family unit has grown past the tunnel vision view of father, mother and child. It has come to include single parent families and families with gay parent. This outlook only shows that society in general is becoming more accepting of things out of the stereotypes that people often see. Cohn, D. "Gay Households on the Rise." *The Washington Post* (2001): 4. Dupont, Florence. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. Blackwell Publishing Limited, 1994. Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. St Paul Minnesota: Paradigm Publishing, 1998. Keen, Lisa. "Anti-gay parenting tactic re-emerging ." *Gay.com/UK & Ireland*. 18 May 2006. 1 Jun 2007 . Klebanow, Shelia. "Parenting in the Single Family." *PEP Web*. 02 Feb 2001. 1 Jun 2007 . Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Warner Books, 1988.. "The Roman Family." *The Roman Family*. 23 Dec 2002. 30 May 2007 . "The

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