

# Gender roles and family structure changes

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



In the 1950's, the ideal family consisted of a hard-working father, homemaker mother, and a couple of children (preferably one daughter and one son) all living together under a roof in the suburbs on the outskirts of a larger city. This view of the all American modern family was portrayed to society through social media, especially, and was widely accepted. I have experienced a similar family structure while growing up, but still had it's differences compared to the normative American family back then. Today, people realize and see that there is not the same consensus of family dynamics and lifestyles that the 1950's demonstrated when " the family life and gender roles became much more predictable" (Coontz 36). An analysis of Stephanie Coontz's, *What We Really Miss About the 1950's*, along with the episodes of *Leave It To Beaver*, have revealed certain roles and structure of a quintessential family that clearly exhibits the definite changes in family dynamics today. Throughout Stephanie Coontz's essay, she emphasizes her idea of family structures in many situations. She argues that " shows such as *Leave It to Beaver* were not the way families really were [...] people watched them to see how families were supposed to live - and also to get a little reassurance that they were headed in the right direction" (38). Here, readers should realize that these sitcoms that were watched were advertisements to families in a way to demonstrate the " American Dream". For example these episodes served as a guide to how to raise their children, organize their marriage, and have the perfect family structure. Today, we hardly ever see any television shows demonstrating these types of problems. We typically see more of reality television shows broadcasting the ideas of being the perfect individual, rather than a perfect family through celebrities and

figures we praise and look up to. Also, television shows like Family Guy, portray the opposite of family structures in the 1950's, revealing more of a un-idyllic household including disrespectful children and irresponsible parents. In contrast to Family Guy, several episodes of Leave It To Beaver demonstrated a 1950's family structure that society looked upon. In the episode "The Perfect Father", Ward Cleaver comes into the living room explaining to his children, "you don't want to leave all of these newspapers on the ground for your mother to pick up" (Leave It To Beaver). In this scene, a viewer can infer that since Ward works hard during the day, the role of June Cleaver as a woman is to clean up after every single mess the family makes in the household. Along with this, June appears in every scene with some type of a domestic sphere. For example, she is constantly in the kitchen either cooking or cleaning for her family. Even if she leaves the household, she continues her gender role of being a mother/woman by going grocery shopping for her husband and children. In society today, there are plenty mothers that keep up with their gender role from the 1950's, along with men too. We constantly see fathers taking care of their families as well; cleaning, cooking, and going grocery shopping. Also, women today work full time to take responsibility in the family, not just men. It's a part of parenting nowadays to take care of one's family even if it means doing domestic activities. It is important in society today to work together as parents, on taking that role of putting your children first. Coontz periodically talks about family structure in her essay about how "very few young people spent any extended period of time in a nonfamily setting: They moved from their parents' family into their own family, after just a brief experience with

independent living, and they started having children soon after marriage" (Coontz 36). It seems that in the 1950's, people wanted to start their families at an early age; they were quick to build that ideal family lifestyle and structure. Through the lens of the 1950's society, it was essential to form a perfect family, and starting at an early age would give you more time to successfully fulfill that dream. Young Americans today do not rush into having a family because most put their education and career first. They stay at their parent's care, living at their house as long as possible, to successfully earn an education and start their career. Once they have started their career, that is when the individual settles down, gets married, and starts a family. A lot of people in society today know that it is key to be financially stable to start a family, so that way there are no struggles. People in the 1950's clearly thought that making the decision to begin a family at a young age was not looked down upon because families are what made them happy, money was not an issue. It is clear that certain gender roles and family structure has changed throughout the years, especially since the 1950's, throughout the analysis of Stephanie Coontz's, *What We Really Miss About the 1950's* and episodes of *Leave It To Beaver*. As a scholar, I see the differences in family dynamics in several ways. Certain gender roles have changed, but are still there. For example, in the episode "The Perfect Father", Ward tries his hardest to compete with Mr. Dennison in who is the better father when he realizes his children are spending more time at his house (*Leave It To Beaver*). In today's society, we see fathers always competing with other fathers in everything that they do; whether it is sports, the working world, or with their children. Although some of these gender role

changes are not meant to be a bad thing, it is important to see that it takes the effort of two to create a respectful, "perfect" family structure. Maybe even someday in the near future, women and men will not be defined by their gender, but sometimes it is necessary for a mother to take on domestic roles, and a father to take on masculine roles. What people do not really understand is the meaning of family: no matter what roles the mother or father take on, how early a couple decides to start a family, how many children a married couple decides to have, or where to live - it's about family love and the happiness it brings. Works Cited Coontz, Stephanie. "What We Really Miss About the 1950s." *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*. 1997. *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. Seventh Edition. Eds. Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen and Bonnie Lisle. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007. 31-47. Print. *Leave it To Beaver: The Complete First Season*. Universal. 2005