

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

Subject Level:

High School Sociology

Grade Level:

9-12

Approx. Time Required:

60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

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

Activity Description

Students will learn why families are important social institutions and how family structures, household sizes, and living arrangements have changed substantially since the 1970s. In part 1, students will work in groups of three to four to analyze census data so that they may understand these changes. In part 2, students will watch a clip from the show “Modern Family” and compare their observations with census data.

Suggested Grade Level:

9–12

Approximate Time Required:

60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

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

Topics:

- Family
- Social institutions

Skills Taught:

- Analyzing change over time
 - Analyzing data
-

Materials Required:

- The student version of this activity, 8 pages; it contains images that should be printed in color
- Projector with Internet access (to show an online video to the class)

Activity Items

The following items are a part of this activity. Items, their sources, and any relevant instructions for viewing them online appear at the end of this teacher 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

Some data in this activity come from the American Community Survey, conducted monthly by the U.S. Census Bureau, which is designed to show how communities are changing. Through asking questions of a sample of the population, it produces national data on more than 35 categories of information, such as education, income, housing, and employment.

For more information to help you introduce your students to the Census Bureau, read *“Census Bureau 101 for Students.”* This information sheet can be printed and passed out to your students as well.

Standards Addressed

See charts below. For more information about the standards, read *“Overview of Education Standards and Guidelines Addressed in Statistics in Schools Activities.”*

National Standards for High School Sociology

Domain 1: The Sociological Perspective and Methods of Inquiry

Assessable Competencies	Essential Concepts
1.1 Students will identify sociology as a scientific field of inquiry.	1.1.2 Hypotheses 1.1.4 Scientific study of society
1.2 Students will compare and contrast the sociological perspective and how it differs from other social sciences.	1.2.1 Impact of social context on human behavior 1.2.3 Sociological imagination

Domain 2: Social Structure: Culture, Institutions, and Society

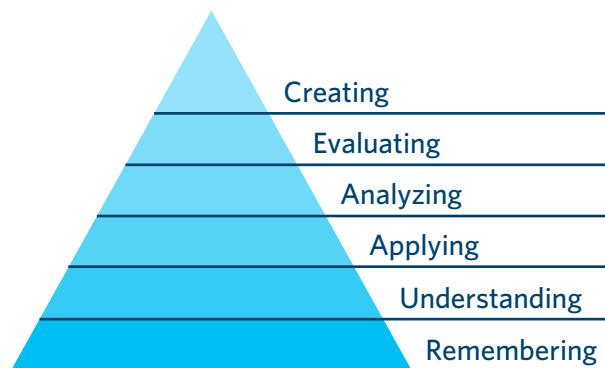
Assessable Competencies	Essential Concepts
2.1 Students will describe the components of culture.	2.1.1 Nonmaterial culture, including norms and values
2.2 Students will analyze how culture influences individuals, including themselves.	2.2.4 American values
2.3 Students will evaluate important social institutions and how they respond to social needs.	2.3.1 Social institutions such as: family, education, religion, economy, and government 2.3.2 Social statuses and roles
2.4 Students will assess how social institutions and cultures change and evolve.	2.4.1 Shifting historical context such as: industrial revolution, urbanization, globalization, the internet age

Domain 3: Social Relationships: Self, Groups, and Socialization

Assessable Competencies	Essential Concepts
3.1 Students will describe the process of socialization across the life course.	3.1.1 Primary agents of socialization: family, peers, media, schools, and religion
3.3 Students will examine the social construction of groups and their impact on the life chances of individuals.	3.3.2 Primary and secondary groups

Bloom's Taxonomy

Students will **analyze** census data to examine families as social institutions.



Teacher Notes

Before the Activity

Students must understand the following key terms:

- **Household** – a housing unit containing any number of people; every person living in that housing unit makes up the household
- **Householder** – the main person, at least 15 years old, who rents or owns the housing unit
- **Family household** – a household in which at least one person is related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption
- **Nonfamily household** – a household in which a person lives alone or a householder shares the unit with only nonrelatives (e.g., friends or acquaintances)
- **Family** – people in the household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption.
- **Own children** – an “own child” is the child of a householder who is never married, and under age 18
- **Unmarried partners** – a couple who lives together in an intimate relationship, but is not married

Students should have a basic understanding of the following ideas and concepts:

- Sociology, and what exactly sociologists study
- Basic familiarity with reading, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from bar graphs, then making empirical statements based on those conclusions
- How sociologists interpret the family as a social institution, and how they define a “traditional family” structure
- The margin of error in statistics — a margin of error reflects uncertainty in the estimates
- The legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013

Teachers should ask students to take five minutes to brainstorm the different types of families that exist today (e.g., married, unmarried, same-sex). Then teachers should ask students the following questions and discuss the answers as a class:

- What does a “traditional family” look like?
- What do families on popular sitcoms look like today versus in other decades? (*Teachers may opt to show clips from older television shows to get students thinking about how families have been depicted in pop culture. Some examples include “Family Matters,” “Step by Step,” and “Full House.” A clip from “Modern Family” will be shown later as part of this activity.*)
- What are some functions, roles, and responsibilities of families today?
- What can prevent a family from functioning successfully?

Teachers should explain how sociologists interpret and define the family as a social institution. Teachers should then ask students to reflect on how sociologists study socialization through families; how culture, ethnicity, and race may influence this socialization; and how current events — such as the national legalization of same-sex marriage — affect the socialization of children and the structure of a family.

During the Activity

Teachers should allow students to work in groups of three or four for the first part of the activity.

Right before part 2 of the activity, teachers should provide students with a brief introduction to the TV show “Modern Family,” just in case they aren’t familiar. A plot summary is available here: tinyurl.com/h85p9d8. Then, teachers should show students any clip from “Modern Family,” which can be found here: abc.go.com/shows/modern-family.

After the Activity

Teachers should prompt students to share with the class one thing they learned that surprised them.

Extension Ideas

- Teachers could lead an in-depth discussion on the ways that a specific current event can influence family structures. For example, the economic recession in 2008 may have contributed to the formation of blended and multigenerational families because some people with financial troubles moved in with their family members for stability.
- Teachers could discuss U.S. constitutional law and the recent legal debate about same-sex marriage. To support the discussion, teachers could show students a TED-Ed video about the history of marriage: tinyurl.com/nyj3aq4.
- After part 1 of the activity — during which students consider whether certain family types are missing from the census data they have examined — teachers could direct students who need a further challenge to find data sets that include other family types, such as multigenerational. These data can be from the Census Bureau (e.g., the multigenerational data on Page 8 here: www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-570.pdf) or other sources.

Student Activity

Printable student versions are available [here](#).

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.

Student answers will vary but could include the following:

- **Between 1970 and 2012, the share of households that were married couples with children under 18 halved from 40 percent to 20 percent.**
- **The percentage of households containing men living alone has increased — about 6 percent in 1970 vs. about 12 percent in 2012.**

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

Student answers will vary but may include unmarried couples living together.

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.

Student answers will vary but could include the following:

- **The percentage of households with five or more people decreased from about 21 percent in 1970 to about 10 percent in 2012.**
 - **The percentage of one-person households increased from about 17 percent in 1970 to about 27 percent in 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?

Student answers will vary but could include the following:

- **In 2010, about 42 percent of same-sex couple households reporting their partner as a “spouse” were located in states that legally recognized same-sex marriage.**
 - **In 2010, most same-sex couple households were located in states that did not legally recognize same-sex marriage or domestic partnerships/civil unions.**
4. Examine **Item 2b: Table 2, Couple Households With Children: 2010**. What conclusions can you draw about couple households with children in 2010?

Student answers will vary but could include the following:

- **In 2010, about 6 percent of married opposite-sex couples — compared with about 16 percent of all same-sex couples — had none of their own children in the household.**
- **In 2010, about 4 percent of married opposite-sex couples — compared with about 21 percent of all same-sex couples — had only step- or adopted children in the household.**

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

Student answers will vary but may include young adults living with friends’ families.

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?

A “traditional family” usually includes two parents of the opposite sex and their children; the mother may care for the home and children, and the father may support the family financially. This was never the traditional arrangement for many groups in the United States. It was created in the mind of the public as the “traditional family”, but was only the norm for a portion of the United

States for a limited time period. Descriptions of this idea should include acknowledgement of the fact that while this specific picture of family was touted as the norm in the 1950s, there were a lot of other family living arrangements going on at that time too.

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”?

Student answers will vary depending on the clip teachers show. Here’s a sample answer:

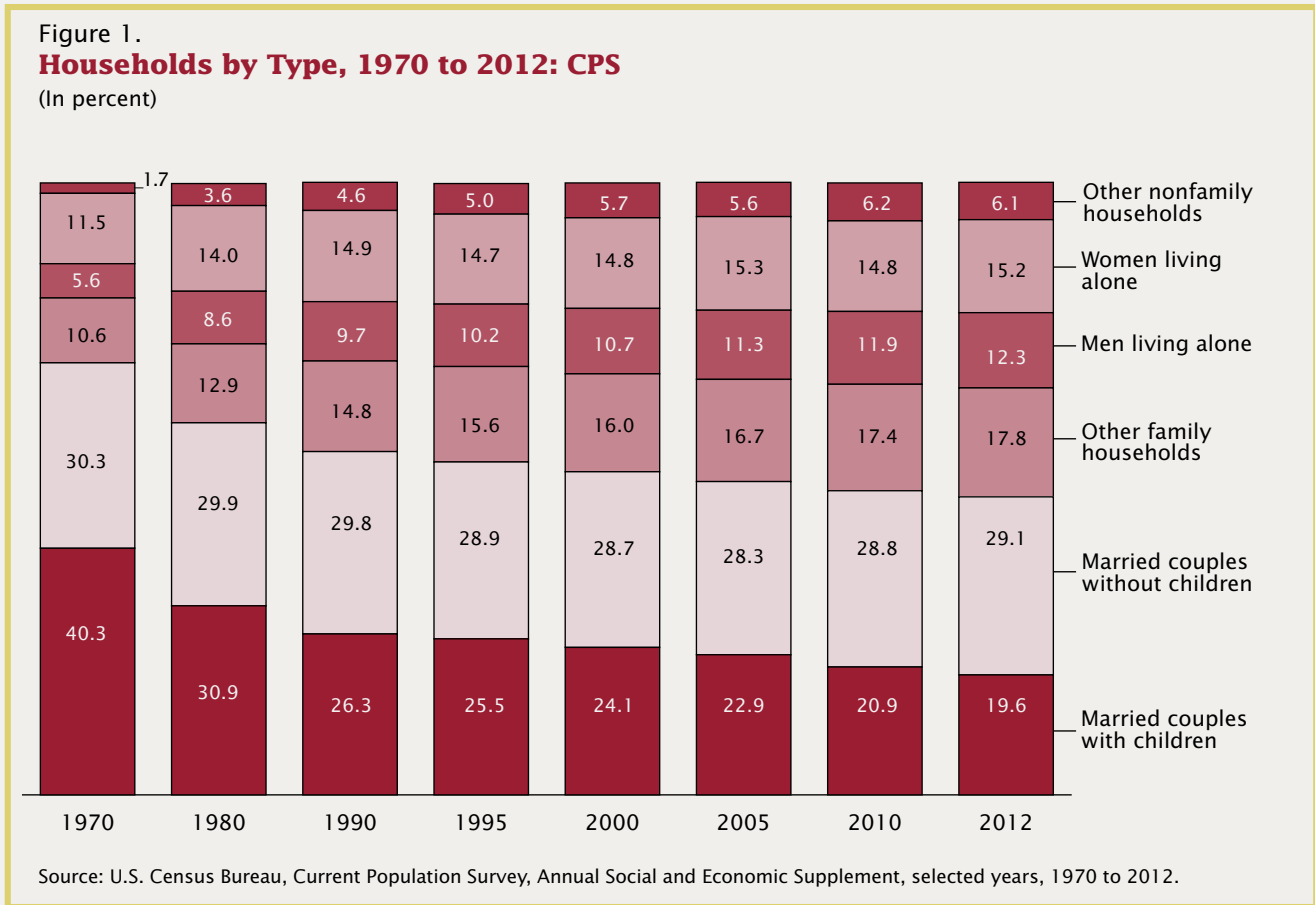
Most families depicted in the show have their own children in the household; this is supported by census data in Item 2b. The idea of the “traditional family” is challenged in two ways: The “traditional family” represented on the show adopts a nontraditional type of parenting — a combination of relating to children like a peer and acting like a parent. The show also depicts a man who is married to a much younger woman.

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?

Student answers will vary depending on the clip teachers show. Here’s a sample answer:

If this show took place in the '70s, it likely would have portrayed more “traditional family” arrangements (e.g., no same-sex couples). Also, the children on the show would not be as influenced by technology or by social media. The show depicts different types of modern families, but it doesn’t highlight nonfamily households.

Item 1a: Figure 1, Households by Type, 1970–2012

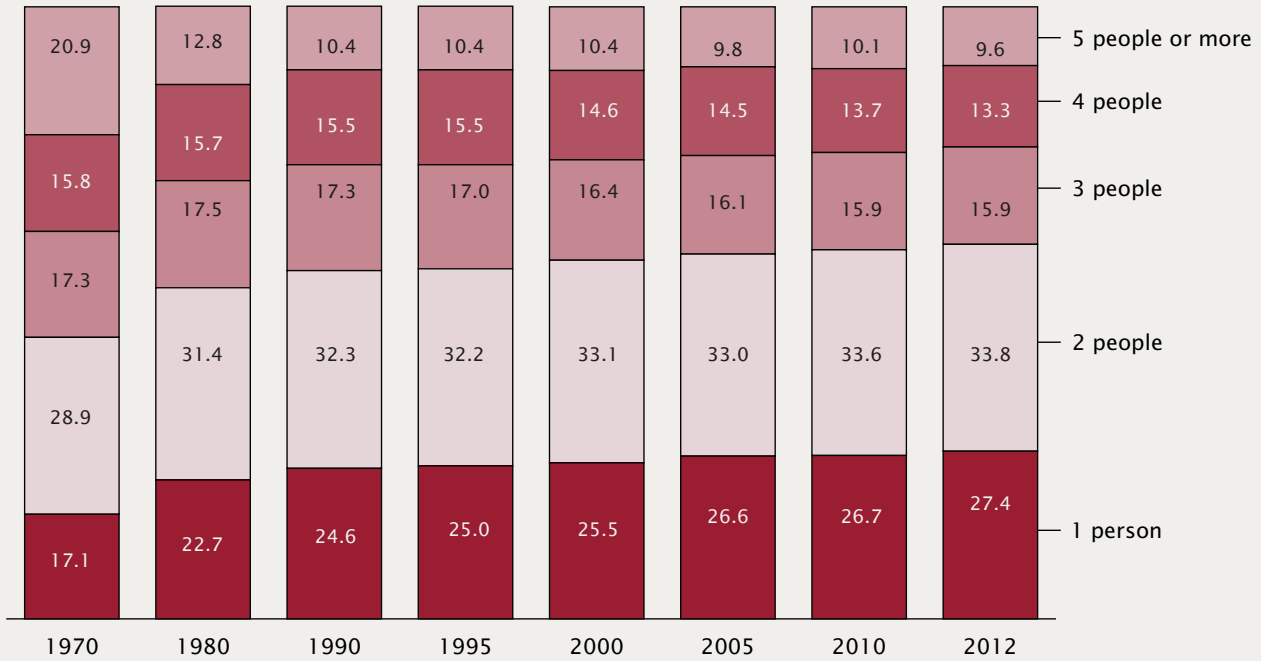


www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-570.pdf

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

Figure 3.
Households by Size, 1970 to 2012: CPS
 (In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, selected years, 1970 to 2012.

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.

Item 2a: Table 1, Distribution of Same-Sex Couple Households by States Grouped by Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Couple Marriages and Unions: 2010

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)

Legal recognition	Total		Reported as spouse		Unmarried partner	
	Estimate	Margin of error (±) ¹	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹
Total same-sex couple households . . .	593,324	11,395	25.7	0.8	74.3	0.8
States performing same-sex marriages ²	42,195	3,055	42.4	3.7	57.6	3.7
Domestic partnership/Civil unions ³	169,205	6,133	28.2	1.4	71.8	1.4
California ^{3A}	90,023	4,569	32.1	2.4	67.9	2.4
All other states	381,924	8,804	22.7	0.9	77.3	0.9

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.

^{3A} California performed same-sex marriages from June to November 2008.

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

<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acsbr10-03.pdf>

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

Item 2b: Table 2, Couple Households With Children: 2010

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)

Characteristic	Married opposite-sex couples		Unmarried opposite-sex couples		Total same-sex couples		Same-sex couples by reporting status			
	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹	Same-sex spouse		Same-sex unmarried partner	
							Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹	Percent	Margin of error (±) ¹
Households with children (number)	24,443,599	83,848	2,684,978	23,359	115,064	5,516	43,933	2,901	71,131	4,381
Own children present ²	93.8	0.05	88.5	0.20	84.1	0.93	89.0	1.43	81.1	1.48
No own children present ³	6.2	0.05	11.5	0.20	15.9	0.93	11.0	1.43	18.9	1.48
Households with own children only	22,872,151	86,426	2,267,016	20,771	94,627	5,026	38,778	2,738	55,849	4,077
Biological only ⁴	90.8	0.10	88.0	0.41	72.8	2.71	80.4	3.11	67.4	3.81
Step only or adopted only ⁵	4.4	0.07	5.2	0.30	21.2	2.26	13.1	2.83	26.8	3.36
Combination of own children only ⁶	4.8	0.07	6.8	0.30	6.0	1.51	6.4	1.84	5.7	1.81

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.

<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acsbr10-03.pdf>

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