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News from CCF: For America's Children, Family Diversity is the New Normal

MIAMI/September 4, 2014—As kids head back to school this week, teachers can expect a very different mix of students and parents than in the past. As the Council on Contemporary Families [reported](#) earlier this year, half of all children under the age of one are now ethnic and racial “minorities,” which means that within 5 years, kindergarten students will come from so many different racial and ethnic backgrounds that no single group will be a majority.

When it comes to family arrangements, however, we're already there. A new report prepared for CCF by University of Maryland's [Philip Cohen](#) uses a novel analysis of children's family arrangements from the 1880s to the present to show that family diversity—no majority family form and no typical mom—is the norm for kids today.

Cohen's report, “Family Diversity is the New Normal for America's Children,” includes new data in four telling graphs. The graphs show a remarkable multiplication of the kinds of families in which children live. In the 1950s, there was such a thing as a “typical” family – and it looked very much like the hit TV show of the era, “Father Knows Best.” Two-thirds of children lived in families where parents were married and father was the breadwinner. Today there is no such thing as a typical family.

In particular, Cohen reports:

Out of every 100 children, just 22 live in a married male-breadwinner family, compared to 23 who live with a single mother.

The single largest group of children – 34 – live with dual-earner married parents. But Cohen notes that this largest group is only a third of the total, making it impossible to point to a “typical” family.

Meanwhile, marriage—as illustrated by data from 1880 to the present—has lost its place as the dominant household arrangement.

Cohen, author of [The Family: Diversity, Inequality, and Social Change](#), demonstrates that women's work and family situations from 1960s to the present have also changed dramatically: In 1960, 60 percent of women ages 30-34 were stay-at-home moms with no college degree. Today, women that age are distributed over ten different work/family/education profiles. Those majority stay-at-home moms without a college degree from fifty years ago? Now they comprise 12 percent of women ages 30-34. The largest single group is composed of married working

moms without a college degree. But that “largest” group represents less than 20 percent of the total. For mothers as well as their children, family diversity is the new normal.

Not only is there no dominant family form, but children experience more transitions in and out of different family arrangements than in the past, and do so through more varied pathways than ever before. Cohen’s takeaway: “The children in America’s classrooms today come from so many distinct family arrangements that we can no longer assume they share the same experiences and have the same needs.”

Cohen’s report also offers an explanation for these family rearrangements. He argues that market forces and social reforms following the Great Depression and World War II are driving forces, though in surprising ways. To read the full report, [visit here](#).

-continue for contacts and background-

For further information, contact Professor Cohen at pnc@umd.edu; (301) 405-6414. Most of the charts above were prepared especially for this paper, but much of the data can also be found in Professor Cohen’s new book, *The Family: Diversity, Inequality, and Social Change*, available now from W.W.Norton: <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/978-0-393-93395-6/>.

The Council on Contemporary Families, based at the University of Miami, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of family researchers and practitioners that seeks to further a national understanding of how America’s families are changing and what is known about the strengths and weaknesses of different family forms and various family interventions.

The Council helps keep journalists informed of notable work on family-related issues via the CCF Network. To join the CCF Network, or for further media assistance, please contact Stephanie Coontz, Co-Chair and Director of Research and Public Education, at coontzs@msn.com, cell 360-556-9223.

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