

# Home Alone: Households of Singles Go to First in U.S.

New calculations of the 2000 census show that individuals account for 31.6% of all homes, while couples with children make up 31.3%.

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WASHINGTON — For the first time, single adults outnumber couples with children as the most common type of household in the United States, according to new tabulations of the 2000 census.

In 1990, couples with children were the most prevalent family type, followed by singles, childless couples and single parents.

Previous studies showed that singles had moved ahead of married-with-children households. But the Census Bureau analysis, released Tuesday, is the first to divide homes by whether they have partners of any sort, regardless of marital status. Previous examinations put families in one category and "nonfamilies," including unmarried couples, in another.

The report, based on new calculations of the 2000 and 1990 tallies, found that solo households grew by 21% over the decade, while the next-largest category, married couples without children, grew by 11%. As a result, married or unmarried couples with children make up 31.3% of all homes. Individuals make up 31.6%.

The extent of the shift was no surprise to San Francisco author Sasha Cagen, who wrote "Quirkyalone: A Manifesto for Uncompromising Romantics."

The book is being translated into Portuguese and German after bringing her broad notoriety as a prophet of the voluntarily single.

"For people like me," Cagen said, "living alone is the big step into adulthood. Forty years ago, people went directly from their parents' home to a marital home, with maybe a brief stopover of living with a roommate."

No more. Michael Carline, an economist with the National Assn. of Home Builders, said unmarried people "are probably not just thinking of it as a transitional arrangement. That makes them more likely to buy a house."

For builders, he said, that means a bigger market for homes with less privacy, fewer rooms, and reduced square footage, but "more Jacuzzis."

"They place a greater priority on being close to the action," Carline said.

"They are not worried about school districts or space, so they put a higher priority to being close in. That's been a factor in boosting demand for urban or close-in suburban housing."

Thomas F. Coleman, executive director of Unmarried America, an information service in Glendale, said the increase in singles was showing up in consumer goods. As evidence, he pointed to the Bambino watermelon, a cantaloupe-sized melon first marketed in 2004, and to an increase in the availability of individual-serving containers at warehouse stores such as Costco.

For the first time, the Census Bureau also analyzed whether households included partners, regardless of marital status. It found 60 million households in which the person responding to

the census survey lived with a partner, compared with 46 million without.

The new analysis puts 3.3 million homes that were previously considered "nonfamily households" into the new "partner household" category.

It also shows that 15 million households in which there were family members — children or parents, for example — did not have a partner present.

The number of households reporting an unmarried partner rose by 72% from 1990 to 2000. Whether that reflects an increase in committed unmarried relationships or an increased willingness to admit to a partner's presence cannot be determined from the census figures, U.S. census demographer Bill Hobbes said.

Although committed partnership is still more popular than the single life, an analysis of long-term trends by Unmarried America shows that living alone has staged a long, gradual climb since at least 1960, when 13% of American households had one member.

By 1980, that had increased to 23%.

Cagen said the change was partly economic.

As Americans work more, she said, "people don't have time to meet a significant other or even just friends. And finding someone to date becomes a job too, so we have speed dating and online dating."

Marshall Miller, co-founder of the Alternatives to Marriage Project, an advocacy group in Albany, N.Y., said the new numbers should serve as a "wake-up call to the politicians and pundits about what is going on in the real lives of real Americans."