A "new normal" characterizes many facets of our culture today, notably politics, a changing middle class and most especially the changing face of the American family. Notably, today’s households are less traditional — with “diverse” household compositions reflecting the new normal in terms of composition and ethnicity.

The American family many of us think we know — often some version of the “traditional” nuclear family with a married heterosexual couple with children — is no longer accurate. Nor will it ever be again. We would even go a step further and suggest that there really is no more a generalizable American family.

The American household is undergoing dynamic changes. The majority of American households, for example, are now child-free. If any single thing defines family structures today, it is diversity, and the fundamental lack of any one dominant type of family structure can be considered emblematic of the new normal.

Ours is now a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, beliefs and values, and America’s households have come to reflect that diversity.
Changes within household structure reflect profound alterations in a variety of big demographic "W's": **Who we are** (including our values, ages, ethnicities, etc.), **Who we live with** (within households) and **Where we live**.

Logistically, we are seeing sweeping changes in **How households operate**, with more women having joined the workforce over the past 50 years, men's and women's domestic roles have changed dramatically, with resulting impact on a wide range of behaviors, including shopping.

**Who We Are**

As we've noted in some of our recent research, the U.S. is growing more diverse as Millennials and Gen Z, the most ethnically diverse generations in U.S. history, grow in population size. Where Americans come from is also growing increasingly diverse, spurring cross-cultural exchange. This stems from the fact that, in addition to an increasingly diverse native population, the makeup of the U.S. foreign-born population is changing. As younger generations like Millennials mature, the U.S. is undergoing a political shift as well, with younger generations much more likely to lean left and liberal than older ones. Such shifts have significant long-term repercussions, since political values formed in young adulthood tend to remain relatively consistent throughout the lifespan of a generation.

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**The blossoming fusion culture.**

Where Americans come from is also growing increasingly diverse, spurring cross-cultural exchange.

**CHANGE IN FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION BY REGION OF BIRTH**

- **Latin America**: 53%
- **Asia**: 28%
- **Europe**: 12%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1850 - 2010 Decennial Census, American Community Survey

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diversity is the norm:
Gen Z and Millennials are the most diverse generations in U.S. history.

The U.S. is growing more diverse as Gen Z and Millennials grow in population size. The Millennials and Gen Z are the most ethnically diverse, which affords them the opportunity to incorporate eating habits from across many different cultures. This diversity will continue to drive food culture trends around the exploration of authentic, global food experiences. This tacit cultural knowledge influences their dining habits and their food choices, and it allows them to confidently face the vast array of ingredient options available today at even the most basic grocery outlets.

Who we are is also changing at a socioeconomic level, due to a shrinking middle class. The share of U.S. adults in the middle class has been shrinking since the 1970s, while both extremes of the income spectrum have grown. Although a smaller segment of the population, the buying power of upmarket consumers — and their influence on trends (including food culture) — has increased. In addition to growing in size, higher-income adults now hold a greater share of national aggregate income than in the past.

Who We Live With

Another facet of the new normal reflects shifts in “typical” household composition and who we live with. Such shifts in family structure are the result of multiple social and economic factors, including declining marriage and birth rates, the rapid rise of women working out of the home, social welfare reform and an increase in multigenerational households. Shifting attitudes around marriage and parenthood are two key factors that have helped to dramatically alter family structures over the last several decades. Once an expected life milestone, many people today are choosing to marry much later in life or forego marriage altogether. Fewer women are also choosing to become mothers, and those who do are having fewer kids.

A rise in single-person households and a decline in households with kids means that there is also wide variation in family structure. For example, less than half of children today live in what used to be defined as a “typical household,” and only 28 percent of U.S. households have children under the age of 18, down 13 percent since 1970. Today’s households are increasingly multigenerational, and while such households have typically included older parents who moved in with their adult children, today’s trend is younger adults staying or returning home. Also, historically, multigenerational living was driven by caregiving for older parents. Today’s trend is driven by economic instability but also by a cultural preference for multigenerational households among some ethnic groups.

Shifting attitudes around marriage and parenthood are two key factors that have helped to dramatically alter family structures over the last several decades. Once an expected life milestone, many people today are choosing to marry much later in life or forego marriage altogether.

Today’s households are less traditional. If any single thing defines family structures today, it is diversity — the fundamental lack of any one dominant type of family structure is now the new normal.

new normal: fusion culture and the redefinition of the American household

Where We Live

As part of changing households, where consumers choose to live is being driven by a reemergence of urban, metropolitan areas as the epicenters of domestic life and economic, social and cultural vibrancy. Analysis of census data shows that larger cities grew faster than smaller ones from 2000 to 2013, with the fastest-growing cities being medium-sized ones (pop. 500,000 – 1 million), often adjacent to larger metro centers. Many U.S. cities are growing faster than their suburbs for the first time in decades, and hyper-urban areas are demonstrating the greatest growth.

The New South is part of the urban revitalization trend, with young Southerners energizing regional cities throughout the South. Rather than moving away from the South altogether, young Southerners — part of the left-leaning Millennial generation — are choosing to leave smaller towns and rural areas for nearby cities for their cultural vibrancy and more tolerant social norms. Leading cities of the New South include Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Dallas, Nashville and New Orleans.

The New South is part of the urban revitalization trend, with young Southerners energizing regional cities throughout the South. Southern cities have seen high population growth from those looking for their unique combination of affordable housing, vibrant cultural scenes and a more liberal and tolerant social and political climate than the rural South.

How We Manage Our Households

With more consumers working for longer hours with longer commutes, time is precious in most households, all of which contributes to a sense of being time-starved. With more women having joined the workforce over the past half a century, gender-oriented roles have changed dramatically. While women still do most of the housework, food preparation and child care, men have stepped up to take on more of these household duties. Overall, shifts in household structure and duties have made the management of food much more democratic, resulting in many households now having both adults buying food regularly. Within households with children, children are becoming “co-shoppers” and decision makers.

When it comes to grocery shopping, men are in the store as often as women, changing the notion of the “typical” grocery consumer. The Hartman Group’s Food Shopping in America 2014 report found that 43 percent of primary shoppers are men and that men are very involved in food culture and food-related decision making. At the same time, while many, if not most, households now operate with dual shoppers, men tend to shop for a smaller share of the household groceries and are more likely to say they are influenced by their spouse when grocery shopping.
How America's Changing Households Influence Changes in Food Culture

While marketers often segment consumers on demographic, economic or behavioral factors, the redefinition of the American family requires new ways of thinking. Not only is the institution of the American family transforming itself, for example, but so too are eating styles, shopping styles and cooking styles. When viewed together through the lens of food culture, these social shifts have resulted in an evolution of how consumers “do” food, with resulting impacts on how we shop, cook and eat. Overall, marketers should consider the following:

- **Growing ethnic, racial and cultural diversity:** Will continue to drive more globally acculturated flavor preferences among all consumers and prioritization of savoring and social eating among certain groups (e.g., Latinos).

- **Shrinking middle class and increasingly liberal politics:** Will influence growth at both upmarket natural/specialty (e.g., Whole Foods Market) and downmarket discount (e.g., ALDI, Grocery Outlet) in food retail. Will also influence comfort with and desire for increasing government intervention and regulation.

- **Urban revitalization moves beyond first-tier cities and tech centers:** This will influence interest in regional foods, traditions and producers, with a widening gap between urban consumers and those in surrounding areas regarding quality expectations, taste and flavor preferences, and retailer/food service experiential expectations.

- **Smaller households, single parents, time-starved consumers:** Resulting in no “typical” household, no “typical” shopper, cook or caregiver and more alone eating, snacking and immediate-consumption occasions.
• **Changing family structures and roles:** Will mean more catering to a complex mix of needs even within one meal – as there is more democratic decision making for household activities, duties, shopping.

Ethnic diversity itself will drive significant trends in both culture and food for years to come, including:

• How we eat (more exposure to global/regional foods)
• How we communicate (more opportunity to be multilingual with parents from different ethnicities)
• How we get along with others (greater opportunity for acceptance)
• How we shop (everything is within the “norm”)
• How we see the world (fewer boundaries, moving away from an “us” vs “them” society)

**About The Hartman Group**

For over 25 years, The Hartman Group has been a recognized thought leader on demand-side trends in the food industry. We are 100 percent focused on the food and beverage marketplace.

Our expertise ranges from how the smallest nuances of product design affect your product’s ability to grow to devising portfolio strategies that maximize sustainable, demand-led growth. We have advised some of the world’s largest food and beverage companies on issues of portfolio management, brand renovation, consumer insights and innovation. Our approach is always highly customized to each client’s strategic interests and corporate culture. We never force-fit stock solutions, as we realize there are many paths to growth. We look forward to helping you find yours.

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