Introduction

Researchers and journalists have recently brought up the issue of the nuclear family being broken down, causing it to lose its original values and ideas that made it such a traditional way of living in the first place. This is causing stress in today’s society, as well as the hunger to develop more information on the topic in hopes to address the situation and possibly fix it if needed. Some people argue that there are a few major factors, such as technology, the lack of family dinners, and family grievances, in today’s society that are breaking down the traditional or nuclear family, however there are a few people who feel the technology change is not breaking down the traditional family, but instead making us stronger and simply conforming to the new changes in our families and society.

The Fear of Breakdown

Dessylyn Arnold, author of the article Decline in the Traditional Family, finds it necessary to first define the traditional family before we say why it is bad that it has broken down. Arnold says, “The traditional American family is a married couple, each only married once, and their 2.3 children” where “The male is the bread winner and female stays at home to care for the home and the children” (para 5). In defining the family first, Arnold believes it makes it easier to picture and understand what exactly is being broken down and why. Natasha Zaretsky, author of The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980, agrees with Arnold in the description of the traditional family. Zaretsky also wrote a book on the fear of the decline of the family, understanding that people were afraid of it happening even before it began. In this book, she explains, “How accusations against feminists and others of "selfishness" were rooted in wider cultural fears of middle-class white men and women abandoning their respective roles as breadwinners and mothers” (para 4). Zaretsky clearly states the fear that the men and women of this time period would abandon their common, everyday roles. This fear is now commonly seen in today’s society. Women of today’s time do not solely work at home; most women have branched out and have jobs other than the housewife. With this happening, it is harder to make time for the normal everyday dinner at the table with the family. This has sparked a fear in people’s eyes and thoughts of the decline of the nuclear family. However, as unfortunate as it is to say, the decline has already begun and is already being seen in the families of today’s society. These last few sentences seem to be your own opinion and claim, which are things inappropriate for a lit review. Remember, all you need to do is report on what they sources have to say about the topic.

Breakdowns of the Traditional Family

Over the years technology and fast food have been becoming more and more convenient for the human society. It is becoming more prominent that this convenience is causing families to lose interest in the standard ideals of the traditional life, such as everyone sitting around the table and eating a home-cooked meal together. George Ritzer, an author and professor at the University of Maryland, has researched the effects of fast food on today’s society. “Under cover of cheap convenience, McDonaldization entails dehumanization for both worker and consumer” (para 6). Trevor Noble, author of Family Breakdown and Social Networks, agrees with what Ritzer has to say. Noble believes that, “With a loose-knit network of relationships outside the family no new normative definition of the conjugal relationship is readily available since the mechanisms of a detailed conformity are not there” (136). Noble is saying that people today are so caught up in technology that they have a strong bond with it, which leads to a weaker bond with the people’s family. Both Ritzer and Noble, when putting their ideas together, are showing how today’s
society is loosing touch with what is important such as family bonding like eating a home-cooked meal or not having cell phones at the dinner table, which too seems to be more common. Alex Colvin, researcher of the Breakdown of a Family in a Secular Culture, does agree that the nuclear family is declining or breaking down, however he has some different ideas as to why this breakdown is happening. Colvin takes a different path with his research and explains that, “Children of divorce 3 times as likely to need psychological counseling” at some point in their life (para 19). By researching the way he does, Colvin is implying that the parents are at a large cause of some of the family breakdowns. Colvin is saying that divorce really does affect a child emotionally and can cause the family not to stay as strong together after the divorce. However, Colvin is also showing that divorce, itself, can breakdown a nuclear family to a certain point of no return, which in time does affect the children. Even though Colvin looks more into the emotion of the family rather than the technology or fast food issues, it is still seen as a major effect on the family as a whole. Ritzer, Noble, and Colvin all show great examples of the breakdown of the nuclear family in today’s society.

Why is the Breakdown Bad?

Now that it has been established that there is a current breakdown in the nuclear or traditional family, it must be decided as to why the breakdown is such a big deal as the people make it out to be. Jac Alyn, writer of the article What Will Happen to Our Society if the Structure of Family Breaks Down, says that, “Traditional families are structures of strength” and “As our families continue to break down, we will continue to see the decline in society” (para 1). Unfortunately, this is a common idea in today’s society that our families have always been our strength in this life and with society declining, we will need to rely on our family even more. But how is that possible to do if we are continuing to decline our base of the strength, our family? Karen V. Hansen, author of Families in the U.S.: Kinship and Domestic Policies, seems to go along with this idea as well. “Large-scale demographic changes over the century have similarly changed family size” (4). With this being said, Hansen is trying to show that the large changes in our society are changing our family as well. Alyn and Hansen are both showing how the society is affecting our families, ultimately leading to the decline in the nuclear family.

In contrast to this idea, Arlene S. Skolnick, author of Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty, believes that this change may not be as bad as we are making out to be after all. “The nineteenth-century version of the family now widely viewed as “traditional” was in fact the first incarnation of the modern family” (20). By pointing this out, Skolnick is implying that the people today might just be freaking out over nothing. Skolnick is saying that the family we are saying is beginning to disappear was just an incarnation from the original family and its lifestyle. Therefore, even though our nuclear family, as we see it today, is changing, it could be that it is just reforming to form a newer traditional family. One that will be better suited to fit our newer society and surroundings as they change too. So even though Alyn, Hansen, and all the other researchers seem to be worried about what is happening and could essentially happen in the future, Skolnick provides some peace of mind saying that this has happened before, is currently happening, and is very likely to happen again in the late future in order to fit, to the best of it’s ability, our new society and families today.

Conclusion

As seen throughout each and every one of these articles and books mentioned, it is apparent that the nuclear family is changing and breaking down into something else. However, what we did not think about is how that something else could actually just be a more modified version of the nuclear family made to better fit the people of today’s society. Just because our tradition of
family is breaking down, does not necessarily mean it is for the worst. Therefore, it is apparent that today’s traditional family may not be the same in a few years, but we will still have a traditional family, just newer and better fit to the people of that time.

Works Cited