ROLE CONFLICT, ROLE AMBIGUITY, AND CHANGING

FAMILY ROLES IN SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

ROLE CONFLICT, ROLE AMBIGUITY, AND CHANGING FAMILY ROLES IN SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

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This study examined role conflict, role ambiguity, and self-esteem in single parent versus two parent families. It also examined these concepts and their relationship with the birth order and gender of the participant as well as time since the divorce or permanent separation had occurred. Seventy-two students from a suburban high school in southwestern Ohio, 39 from single parent families and 32 from two parent families, participated in this study. Measures utilized in this study included: the Pre-Screening Questionnaire; the Role Ambiguity Scale, which was constructed by combining altered forms of selected items from scales created by J. R. Rizzo, R. J. House, and S. I. Lirtzman (1970) and T. A. Beehr, J. T. Walsh, and T. D. Taber (1976); the Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale which was created using items from the J. R. Rizzo, R. J. House, and S. I. Lirtzman scale as well as items created by this researcher; the Caretaking Scale, created by this researcher; and a demographics questionnaire also created by this researcher. This
study did not find significant differences between single and two parent families on levels of role conflict and role ambiguity. As predicted, a significant difference was found between participants from single and two parent families on levels of self-esteem. Birth order did not present as a significant predictor of levels of caretaking; however, gender did. The number of elapsed years since the adolescents entered a single parent family was not found to correlate significantly with levels of role conflict or role ambiguity.

Implications of the results of this study and future areas of research are discussed.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Single parent families are becoming an accepted part of today's society. These families often operate differently than traditional two parent families. How they operate is of great concern to many researchers and practitioners. Specifically, dramatic changes in family structure may place new pressures on the children of separated or divorced parents. During the separation and divorce, as well as for some time afterward, children may be asked to play roles within the family that are unfamiliar and that conflict with other roles. Behavioral and emotional problems related to changing roles may arise in school, at home, and in community or social settings. Empirical examinations of family role structure within the household (Gardner, 1976) have revealed that, with parental separation, new family responsibilities are often assumed by the children. Families appear to go through a restructuring phase where role assignments of family members, adults and children alike, are re-assigned. For example, children in single parent families may assume the role of the absent parent. Through this re-assignment, problems such as role conflict and role ambiguity may arise, possibly causing a disturbance in the adolescent’s development, sense of self, or social competence.

It is important for those interacting with and serving children of divorce and permanent separation to accurately understand the new roles that children may play within
single parent families and how these roles impact a child’s attitudes and behaviors. The following literature review begins with an examination of role theory. It discusses the people involved as well as the expectations of particular roles. The discussion then proceeds to the problems of role conflict and role ambiguity. This leads into a discussion of family roles which include parental, wage earner, caretaker, and spousal roles. The nature of these roles and reasons for role adoption are then discussed.

The literature review continues by examining various issues related to single parent families, including the reasons for parental separation, the child’s age at the time of separation, elapsed time since the separation, and the gender of the child. Finally, the developmental period of adolescence is reviewed in order to provide a context for discussions of other problems adolescent children may be facing in conjunction with the separation of their parents. It is the adolescent period that is the focus of the proposed study.

This study attempted to support five hypotheses regarding adolescent children’s roles within single parent families. First, research suggests that adolescents in single parent families may experience higher levels of role conflict than adolescents from two parent families. Second, adolescents in single parent families may experience higher levels of role ambiguity than adolescents from two parent families. Third, adolescents in single parent families will experience lower levels of self-esteem than adolescents in two parent families. Fourth, research suggests that, in single parent families, female adolescent children will be more likely than male adolescents to assume the caretaker role immediately following their entry into the single parent family. Finally, the present study
proposed that, as the time since the divorce increases, the amount of role conflict and role ambiguity experienced by adolescent children would decrease.

Role Theory

Roles exist in many social settings. According to Thomas and Biddle (1979), who have outlined role theory, a role is a set of prescriptions that defines the desired behavior of a position. Thus we have roles such as parental and child roles or male and female roles. The person who behaves according to the role's expectations is commonly referred to as the actor. An actor may perform simultaneously in many roles. Thomas and Biddle (1979) refer to this as a role set.

The role a person plays is dependent on several factors. One contributing factor is the roles of others in the system (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). Any interaction between two or more people will entail the portrayal of certain roles such as perpetrator and victim, wage earner and child care provider. When people take on a particular role, there are certain associated expectations. Thomas and Biddle (1979) defined role expectations as beliefs held by others regarding the appropriate behavior of a person in a particular role. They termed the actual behaviors exhibited by the actor in a particular role as role performance. Arguably, role performance is determined by social norms, demands, rules, the role performance of others, the reactions of observers, and by the person’s personality and capabilities.

When involved in a system of multiple roles, problems may arise. Individuals may fail to behave according to role expectations or may be forced to take on roles with conflicting expectations. These situations create problems such as role conflict and role ambiguity. Baron and Byrne (1991) state that role conflict is a result of the pressure of
having to play two or more roles simultaneously. Shaw and Costanzo (1982) define role conflict as occurring when the expectations of several roles are incompatible with each other. Thomas and Biddle (1979) see role conflict as inconsistent role expectations between the actor and others. For the purposes of the present study, role conflict was defined as occurring when a person plays two or more roles which include incompatible and conflicting expectations. There are several sources of conflicting expectations. The source could be the actors, their role partners, or society (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). An example of conflicting expectations in a family system is when children are required to stay at home to watch a sibling but are also required or expected to participate in extracurricular school activities.

A related construct is role ambiguity. According to Baron and Byrne (1991), role ambiguity is the uncertainty about precisely what is expected of the actors. It is a lack of clarity about the expectations associated with a single role to be carried out by a single actor (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). Actors experiencing role ambiguity are uncertain as to what is expected of them in a particular role. This may occur in single parent families when children are uncertain of what is expected of them as they find themselves in a role traditionally filled by an adult. Ambiguity concerning roles may lead to unclear boundaries between members of the family which could increase stress during an already stressful time (Burr, 1973).

These problems of role conflict and ambiguity, if they surface, may be of particular concern in a single parent family. This study attempted to determine whether a difference in frequency existed in the occurrence of role conflict and role ambiguity between single parent and two parent families.
Family Roles

As previously mentioned, roles exist in many social systems. One area of particular interest is family roles. Hetherington, Law, and O’Connor (1993) defined family roles as repetitive patterns of behavior by which family members fulfill family functions. They list five functions that family members often serve: 1) the provision of resources, 2) nurturing and support, 3) adult sexual gratification, 4) personal development and 5) maintenance and management of the family system. This study concerned itself with roles typically associated with these functions, specifically the wage earner, caretaker, spousal, and child roles.

Parental Roles

Parental roles are most often filled by the parent and may include, among others, the wage earner and caretaker roles.

The wage earner role. The wage earner role includes the expectation that the actor will provide resources such as financial support, shelter, food, and clothing to the family. Traditionally the father in the nuclear family held this role. However, with the emergence of women in the workforce, many nuclear families now include dual wage earners. With the transition to a single parent family, some women who did not previously fill this role have been forced into this position. Other women who had shared this role found themselves as the sole provider of resources for their children. This, in turn, may cause turmoil in the newly restructured household. If young children are involved, a new caretaker will need to be found to fill the role that the mother vacated. This caretaker role may fall to one of the older children in the household, causing that child to play both a parental and child role.
The caretaker role. The second role, that of nurturer and supporter of the children, which this study will call the caretaker role, was traditionally filled by the mother in the family. Males were typically the wage earners while the females stayed at home and cared for the children. In the single parent household, a mother may find herself filling both the role of wage earner and the role of the caretaker. It is at this point in the restructuring of the household that role conflict and role ambiguity may be expected. This expectation may be due to the multiple roles and lack of clarity that a child may feel at the time the mother enters the work force. The oldest child may begin to fill the caretaker role while the mother fills the role of the wage earner. A child may share responsibility for the management of the household by assuming responsibility for younger children even though the child is still quite young (Weiss, 1979). While children fill these adult roles, they are most likely simultaneously filling the role of the child.

Spousal Role

A third role this study considered was the spousal role. In two parent families, a husband and wife turn to each other in times of need. They are able to provide advice and suggestions to each other. In a single parent family, those means of support no longer exist. This may lead single parents to turn to their oldest child as a confidant and someone to look to for advice or suggestions. In two parent families there is little opportunity for a child to participate in household decision making. Mealtimes, chores, and family vacations are usually decided on by the parents, possibly after some consultation with the children. The maintenance and direction of the family is solely the responsibility of the parents (Weiss, 1979). In a well-functioning two parent home, each parent provides support for the other. This mutual support is not available in the single parent family. For example,
the single parent may ask a child to be a hostess for a party or to do work around the house. In a single parent family the parent may have no one else to turn to except the children, thus the parent confides in or turns to the child for advice, especially regarding household and family problems (Weiss, 1979).

Child Role

This study concentrated specifically on children filling parental roles rather than an actual role reversal where children and parents switch roles. This role reversal does occur, but its duration is typically brief (Weiss, 1979). The incongruity between the roles and the actors is apparently recognized quickly and felt to be uncomfortable for both the parent and the child. One such example would be if the child asked the single parent what time they were going to be in that evening and then waited for them to arrive before going to sleep. Since this role reversal occurs only briefly, it was not one of the foci of this study.

Children Functioning in Parental Roles

When children assume a parental role, expectations for that role may differ since a child, rather than an adult, is now performing it. Often children do not play the same roles as adults. However, there are those occasions when children are required to take on adult roles. On these occasions a child will be unable to perform the role as an adult would (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). For example, when children perform in the role of the caretaker, role expectations may be slightly lowered since they are misplaced in the role. When a child is forced to take an adult role, the child’s affective needs for nurturing and freedom from stresses of adulthood may not be met (Weiss, 1979).

On what occasions would one find a child in an adult role? According to Gardner (1976), when parents separate, children generally are required to assume new
responsibilities. This can occur whenever parents are unable to perform their roles or are neglecting the responsibility of performing what is expected from a person in that particular role. The term “parental child” is defined as an over-reliance on a child to make decisions and to perform parental tasks such as caring for younger siblings (Kissman, 1992). This may lead to the sacrifice of peer relations and other developmental needs. It is usually the oldest or opposite gender child that takes on the identity of the absentee parent (Kissman, 1992). This may lead to parental anger being taken out on the child as he fills the absent parental or spousal role. The present study focused specifically on single parent mothers who, for whatever reason, did not carry out their roles, but rather let their children perform them. When single parents are asked what differentiates their family from two parent families, they list the changes in their children’s roles and responsibilities as the greatest differentiating factor (Weiss, 1979). In order to explore this occurrence of children assuming parental and spousal roles, one needs to examine the single parent family.

To summarize, a family system contains many roles. Parental roles include the wage earner and the caretaker. In single parent families a restructuring of roles may occur when parents separate or divorce. The mother may find herself filling the wage earner role leaving the caretaker role to be filled by one of the children. When one parent leaves, he or she vacates a spousal role. Once again children in the family might be called upon to fill this role, providing the single parent with a confidant. Children in single parent families are often called upon to fill vacated parental and spousal roles. When this occurs, role expectations may collide, leading to role conflict and ambiguity.
The Single Parent Family

Many variables may contribute to or moderate the effects of parental separation on a child’s level of role conflict and role ambiguity. These variables may include the reason for parental separation, the child’s age at the time of separation, the time since the separation, and the gender of the child.

Reason for single parent family. Single parent families exist for a number of different reasons. They can be a result of divorce, death, or the decision of parents never to marry. In the study of single parent families, it may be necessary to limit the type of family with which one works in order to eliminate confounding variables associated with the cause of the separation. Research is inconclusive whether most single parent families experience similar situations and feelings, regardless of the cause for an absent parent. Amato and Keith (1991), in a meta-analysis, found support for their hypothesis that children who experience the death of a parent will exhibit problems similar to those children who experience parental divorce. They found that both parental death and divorce were associated with decrements in children’s well-being. However, children who experienced parental death had fewer decrements than those who had not experienced a parental death. This led Amato and Keith to suggest that an additional mechanism must be at work other than the impact of losing a parent. Silverman (1988), on the other hand, found that, with both divorce and death, there was a loss of everyday family patterns of interaction or a loss of a way of life. Since evidence appears to be conflicting, this study concentrated only on those single parent families that are the result of divorce or permanent marital separation. This was due to the greater availability of adolescents who have experienced the divorce or separation of their parents rather than death.
**Child’s age.** Another variable contributing to the effects of separation or divorce on children is their age at the time of separation. In a study by Allison and Furstenberg (1989), there was a tendency for the strongest effects of divorce to be exhibited by younger children. However, it is difficult to study the effects of age because it is often confounded with the time since the separation (Hetherington, Law, & O’Connor, 1993, Allison & Furstenberg, 1989). Allison and Furstenberg (1989) suggest that, since young children are more dependent on their parents, they are less protected by outside supports (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989). They may also suggest that, since young children are in a formative stage of development, they are less resilient when confronted with a traumatic event. They may also have less social supports, are unable to attach words to their feelings, or they may not possess the coping skills needed to deal with such a situation as divorce or permanent separation.

**Time since divorce.** The amount of time since the separation may account for a great deal of the variability in children’s responses to divorce. According to Hetherington, Law, and O’Connor (1993), the first two years after divorce are characterized by poor parenting since the custodial parent is preoccupied with the changes occurring within the family. For the parent, these early years after the divorce are also characterized by noncompliance to the changes in parental roles, anger, and dependent behaviors as well as serious emotional insecurity, anxiety, feelings of loss, emotional rejection, betrayal, and depression. This is a period of great adjustment for these families. After two years, the family members have presumably adapted to their new status and their new roles. Amato and Keith (1991) supported this finding when their study suggested that children’s conduct problems became less severe over time.
Smetana, Yau, Restrepo, and Braeges (1991) suggested that the timing of divorce may impact the parent-child relationship during adolescence. They stated that if the divorce or separation occurred as the child entered adolescence, then the normal developmental conflict of adolescence will intensify due to the stress and conflict of the separation. However, if the divorce or separation occurred prior to the onset of adolescence, then the family may have time to stabilize before entering the adolescent conflict years. Anderson, Hetherington, and Clingempeel (1989) suggested that since these families went through one round of conflict and adjustment (the divorce), there was no need to go through another during adolescence.

Since most studies concentrate on the effects of divorce on young children, this researcher felt it was important to study the effects on adolescents. Although the effects on adolescents may not be as great when compared to younger children, they still may exist. These effects need to be examined and compared to adolescents from two parent families. According to Frost and Pakiz (1990), research on the effects of divorce on adolescents is scarce. Zaslow (1988) also states that extensive divorce research has been conducted on pre-adolescents but not on adolescents. They suggest that research be conducted that considers the length of time since the separation and the age of the child at that time.

**Gender differences.** There is often discussion about the different effects of divorce on boys and girls. Allison and Furstenberg (1988) found that the effects of divorce were more severe for boys than girls. Amato and Keith (1991) found that boys differed significantly from girls only in that they had greater difficulty adjusting socially. Other researchers, such as Chang and Deinard (as cited in Amato & Keith, 1991), have found no
significant differences in adjustment. Frost and Pakiz (1990) have found that adolescent girls are more affected than adolescent males. They exhibited more behavior problems, lower self-esteem, and increased anxiety and depression. One suggested reason for this finding is that negative effects on girls may not be evident until adolescence. Other researchers have studied how this alleged gender effect interacts with the gender of the single parent. Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1979) found that divorce had a greater impact on boys than girls in mother-led families. One interpretation was that fathers presented strong male models that kept the boys under control. Another explanation suggested that these mothers often feel greater stress and depression when required to exercise parental authority and are thus unable to carry through with what has traditionally been the father’s role.

To summarize, this study examined mother-led single parent families that are the direct result of a divorce or permanent separation and the effects of that separation on adolescent children. It is argued that the first two years after divorce are the most difficult for adolescents (Hetherington, Law, & O’Connor, 1993).

Parent Becomes Peer Family

The above variables as well as the personality of the single parent may interact to create a family where the parent is unable to maintain the parental role and instead begins to assume more child typical roles. It is at this point that household routines and roles break down and the single parent experiences task overload (Hetherington, Law, & O’Connor, 1993). Task overload occurs when a single parent has too many roles or jobs to perform. At this point, the parent may call on the adolescent child to perform either the spousal or caretaker role. Glenwick and Mowrey (1986) refer to this type of relationship,
where intergenerational boundaries have become blurred, as the “Parent Becomes Peer” family. Characteristics of this family include: a parent raising one or more children alone with the oldest child between the ages of nine and thirteen, little contact between the child and the noncustodial parent, and a child who is often bright and verbal. This blurring of the boundaries may be due to the fact that the child is bright and the mother feels the child is more mature than the child actually is. In this type of family the hierarchy of authority has been lost; the relationship between parent and child begins to resemble that of a peer relationship. The mother abdicates her maternal responsibilities and begins to rely on her child for emotional support and fulfillment of the role expectations of the absent parent (Hetherington, 1979). According to Weiss (1979) the child could end up providing support and comfort to the parent. Thus, the child is assuming the spousal role. The mother may then stop fulfilling her role as mother leaving the oldest child to play the caregiver role to younger siblings. In such families, daughters usually assume responsibility for household tasks as well as child care and the role of supporter for the mother. One also finds that mothers and daughters share a close, compassionate, intensive relationship which has both positive and negative effects (Hetherington, Law, and O'Connor, 1993). Carter and McGoldrick (1980) discuss the scenario of the oldest daughter taking the parental and spousal role. She cares for the younger siblings and becomes closer to her mother. However, when the mother begins to date, and adults replace the daughter in the spousal role, problems may occur.

Pais and White (1979) stated that a family needs to redefine itself after a divorce. Much of the role restructuring and problems that occur are due to the failure of the family to redefine itself. They believe that a co-parental redefinition must take place. This refers
to the redefining of the rights, duties, and responsibilities of each parent and child after the 
divorce. Ambiguity plays a part, since there are unclear boundaries between family 
members which adds to the stress already being felt.

Studies have been inconsistent as to whether younger children or adolescents are 
more affected by divorce. Allison and Furstenberg (1989) found that young children were 
more adversely affected whereas Frost and Pakiz (1990) found that adolescents were 
affected to a greater degree than younger children. Either of these findings could be due 
to the fact that adolescents are better able to understand the reasons for divorce than 
young children (Hetherington, Law, and O'Connor, 1993). This could cause them to act 
out more because they realize and are hurt by the changes in their parents' relationship. 
On the other hand, they could behave better because they understand the divorce was not 
their fault. Due to these conflicting findings it may be important to examine adolescents 
further to determine what other factors may be affecting their reactions to parental 
divorce.

Adolescence: The Developmental Period

The adolescent period may be quite tumultuous for a teenager. Physical and 
emotional changes occur at a rapid rate, which may be confusing as well as scary for an 
adolescent. Divorce may play a large role in adolescents' lives as they struggle through 
the growth and turmoil already associated with the adolescent years.

According to Mutchler, Hunt, Koopman, and Mutchler (1992), adolescence is 
marked by the struggle for independence from the parents and the establishment of new 
relationships with people outside the family circle. Adolescence is a time of many changes 
in all areas of development. According to Fuhrman (1990), physical, intellectual,
emotional, and social changes occur. An individual increases in body size and strength and begins to develop adult sex characteristics. Adolescents develop new cognitive capabilities, start to look toward the future, and begin to question the beliefs and values of their parents. Emotionally they become self-conscious and develop an increased sensitivity to criticism. Socially they develop new needs concerning privacy, autonomy, independence, and peer interaction.

These physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes, coupled with family changes, may affect the adolescent in a way researchers have not yet discovered. Adolescents from all families go through a time of change with respect to their place in the family. They struggle for independence but at the same time depend on their parents. The family is responsible for providing protection for the adolescent and passing on values and traditions (Fuhrman, 1990). An adolescent who feels his or her family is lacking in any of these areas may become quite angry and upset. This adds to the confusion of the adolescent period. During this period of development, divorce may likely exacerbate the friction between parent and adolescent, thus increasing the likelihood that the adolescent will engage in antisocial behavior (Santrock, 1987). Adolescents whose families go through a divorce or separation may feel that their family is incapable of meeting their needs, causing the rebellion that is seen by many researchers (Smetana, et al., 1991).

Research has suggested that divorce during adolescence does create additional problems for adolescents and their families. Studies have found that children from divorced and stepparent families have higher deviance rates, report greater susceptibility to peer pressure to engage in deviant behavior, report lower levels of self-esteem, are reported to be more difficult to manage, and present to clinics with more severe behavior
problems (Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988). However, in addition to the problems, positive changes have been noted. Adolescents in single parent families are often more independent, have increased power, and more responsibility in decision making because their mothers are often more permissive and less controlling than mothers in two parent families (Smetana et. al., 1991). Single parents also report that their children appear more mature than children in the same age range in two parent homes (Weiss, 1979).

Adolescence is a difficult time for teenagers. They are simultaneously struggling for independence as they experience physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes within their bodies and their lives. Divorce at this time may disrupt an already tumultuous relationship between teenagers and their parents.

Summary

Through the discussion of role theory and the specific roles adults and children play, one begins to see where problems may arise, particularly in the single parent household. Problems such as role conflict and role ambiguity may present themselves as parents ask children to take on the responsibilities of the absent parent. The extent to which a child reacts to this possible change in responsibilities may be affected by several factors including: the reason for the single parent family, the child’s age at the time of separation, the time since divorce or permanent separation, and the child’s gender. Adolescents may have a particularly difficult time with divorce or permanent separation since they are already going through a tumultuous time in their own lives as they mature and grow toward adulthood. For this reason, this study examined adolescents and their reactions to divorce or permanent separation in their family.
Hypotheses

The first hypothesis of this study was that adolescent children from single parent families would have higher amounts of role conflict than adolescents from two parent families. This was believed to be the case since children are often forced into roles usually held by the parent. The child was then expected to fulfill those roles as well as their accepted child roles. Thus, these roles would come into conflict with one another. If role conflict occurred during the adjustment period of adolescence, then that stage would be more tumultuous than normal.

Second, this researcher hypothesized that adolescent children from single parent families would experience higher levels of role ambiguity than adolescents from two parent families. This difference may also occur because of the blurred boundaries between parent and child. There may be no clear lines or rules regarding what is expected from children in the roles they have either chosen or have been forced to play. This lack of definitive boundaries could be due to the turmoil caused by changes in family structure.

The third hypothesis proposed by this researcher was that adolescents from single parent families will have lower self-esteem than adolescents from two parent families. If adolescents from single parent families were experiencing high levels of role conflict and role ambiguity, their self-esteem may suffer as a result.

The remaining hypotheses dealt specifically with single parent families. Single parent families exist for a number of reasons, some of which include death, permanent separation, or divorce. Whatever the reason, the roles children play in these families may deviate from the roles of children in two parent families. Children in two parent families appear to be able to assume child roles, whereas in single parent families, children may
often assume the role of the absent parent. Glenwick and Mowrey (1986) suggest that single parents and their children often experience a blurring of the boundaries between themselves. The mother begins to act like a peer which requires the child to pick up some of the parental responsibilities. The fourth hypothesis was that there was a gender difference in which child assumes a parental role. It is believed that female children in single parent families would take on the responsibility of child care to younger siblings immediately after their entry into a single parent family. They would play the role of caretaker. This may be due to the fact that children may be more willing to accept roles which are associated with their gender. Thus, since child care roles are traditionally associated with females, daughters rather than sons would be more likely to assume this role.

The extent to which a child may assume the caretaker role is believed to be related to the elapsed time since the divorce or permanent separation. According to Hetherington et al. (1993), the first couple of years after the divorce are filled with problems centering around the changing family structure and uncertainty regarding who will now fill the vacated roles. The final hypothesis of this study proposed that the greater the elapsed time since the divorce or permanent separation, the lower the amounts of role conflict and role ambiguity.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 72 ninth to twelfth grade high school students from a suburban high school in southwestern Ohio, ranging in age from 14 to 18. One individual was removed from the analysis due to a living arrangement not measured in the current study. Unless otherwise stated, the single parent family category included single mother and father led households and reconstituted households (step-father and natural mother or step-mother and natural father). Of the 71 participants, 39 were from single parent families, including 31 females and 8 males, and 32 were from two parent families, including 17 females and 15 males. Of the participants from single parent families, approximately 83% were Caucasian, 3% were African-American, 3% were Hispanic, and 13% of the participants listed other (Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding). Of participants from two parent families, approximately 84% were Caucasian, 6% African-American, 3% were Hispanic, and 6% listed other. For participants from single parent families, approximately 46% were the oldest child of their family, 26% were the middle child, and 26% were the youngest. In two parent families, approximately 25% were the oldest, 25% were the middle child, and 44% were the youngest. Approximately 35% of the participants from single parent families had an older female sibling while 44% of
participants from two parent families had an older female sibling. Due to the fact that only two thirds of the participants completed the item regarding their family’s income, it was excluded from analysis.

**Materials**

**Role Ambiguity Scale.** This instrument combines questions from two separate scales. Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) created a scale to measure role conflict and role ambiguity in complex organizations. Their scale consisted of 30 items that were responded to on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (very false) to 7 (very true). The items in the original scale included two types of role ambiguity items. One set dealt with the predictability of the outcome of one’s behavior and the other dealt with the existence or clarity of behavioral requirements that guide role behavior. The present study used a modified version of seven role ambiguity sub-scale items included in the second set only. Items were altered to reflect situations in a home rather than in an industrial organization.

Beehr, Walsh, and Taber (1976) created the second scale from which came four of the current role ambiguity items. Their original scale was developed to measure role overload and role ambiguity. The original scale consisted of three role overload and four role ambiguity items. These items were responded to on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Separate scores were derived for the two concepts by averaging the responses of the corresponding items. The reliability coefficient for the items reflecting role overload was .56. The reliability coefficient for the items reflecting role ambiguity was .71 (Beehr et. al.). The present study utilized only those four items that measured role ambiguity. They were altered slightly to reflect situations involving the home and the family instead of a business situation.
These two scales in combination composed the role ambiguity scale utilized in the present study (see Appendix A). Participants responded to these items on a 7-point scale with the anchor words strongly agree (1) and strongly disagree (7) as used in the Beehr et al. (1976) scale. Four items in the new scale were reversed scored (i.e. items 3, 6, 9, 11) and then all responses were summed. Possible scores ranged from 11 to 77. The higher scores indicated the greater the amount of perceived role ambiguity that exists in the family. Reliability analysis conducted by this experimenter yielded a reliability coefficient of .70.

Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale. The role conflict measure utilized in this study consisted of a portion of the role conflict subscale of the Rizzo et al. (1990) measure along with 5 additional items created by this researcher (see Appendix B). The Rizzo et al. scale looked at four different types of role conflict, 1) conflict between internal standards and the defined role behavior, 2) conflict between time and resources and the defined role behaviors, 3) conflict between several roles for the same person which require different or incompatible behaviors, 4) conflicting expectations and organizational demands. The modified scale utilized in the present study included only the items from the original scale that dealt with conflict between several roles for the same person. These items were modified to reflect conflict between family and peers rather than in an industrial organization.

Subjects responded to the items on a 7-point scale with the anchor words very false (1) and very true (7). Item one was reversed scored. The responses were summed to achieve a total score for the scale. Scores ranged from 7 to 49. The higher scores
indicated a greater amount of perceived role conflict that exists in the family. Reliability analysis yielded a reliability coefficient of .73.

Caretaking Scale. This scale was developed by this researcher to measure the level of caretaking in families (see Appendix C). The scale consists of 7 items to which participants responded on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating strongly agree and 7 indicating strongly disagree. Item one was reversed scored. The responses were then summed. Possible scores ranged from 7 to 49. The lower scores indicated that adolescents were performing more caretaking in their family. Reliability analysis by this experimenter yielded a reliability coefficient of .70.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (see Appendix D) was originally designed to measure self-esteem of high-school students (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale consists of ten items which are rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating strongly agree and 5 indicating strongly disagree. Total scores range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. Five items are reversed scored (items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10). Robinson and Shaver (1975) report test-retest reliability in the high .80’s. Reliability analysis by this experimenter yielded a reliability coefficient of .63.

Demographics/Family Structure Questionnaire. The final questionnaire utilized in this study was developed by this author (see Appendix E). It gathered information on family structure as well as demographic information. This questionnaire asked the participants for their date of birth, gender, race, and family income. Participants were given the choice of male or female for gender, Caucasian, Hispanic, African-American, or other for race, and under $20,000, $20,000-$50,000, and over $50,000 for family income.
The participants were then asked to best describe their current living situation. They were given the choice of single parent/mother, single parent/father, two natural parents, stepfather and natural mother, stepmother and natural father, or other which required an explanation. They were also asked to write in the number of their natural, half, and step siblings they have which reside both in and out of the home. If the respondents had siblings, they were asked if they themselves were the oldest, middle, or youngest sibling. Participants were then asked to list the gender and age of their siblings. Those who currently resided in a stepfamily were asked to respond with the number of years and months they had lived in a single parent family. Those participants who currently lived in two parent families were then finished with this questionnaire. Participants currently residing in single parent families were asked to respond to five remaining questions.

These five questions requested the following information. Participants were asked to choose the reason for the single-family arrangement. They were given the response options of divorce, death, permanent separation, or other which required an explanation. The next item asked participants how many years and months they have lived in a single parent family. The next item asked for a description of their living arrangement immediately following their entry into a single parent living arrangement. Participants then chose from the same options given for the description of their current living situation earlier in the questionnaire, single parent/mother, single parent/father, two natural parents, stepfather and natural mother, stepmother and natural father, or other which required an explanation. They were then asked how much contact they currently had with their non-custodial parent. Their response options included: once a week, more than once a week, once a month, twice a month, and never. Finally, they were asked to reply, with the same
response options from the previous question, to how much contact they had had with their non-custodial parent immediately following their entry into the single parent family.

**Prescreening**

This study was completed in two steps. The first step entailed a mass mailing to the parents of students in a southwestern Ohio high school. Included in this mailing was a letter briefly explaining this study (Appendix F), a consent form (Appendix G), a six item pre-screening questionnaire (Appendix H), and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Parents were asked to complete the pre-screening questionnaire which contained items regarding such topics as: (1) does their child live in a single or two parent family, (2) if their child lives in single parent family, is it a result of a divorce or permanent separation, and, if so, how long ago did it occur, (3) if their child is an only child; the number of siblings in their family; and (4) if their child was the oldest, middle, or youngest child in their family. The parents then filled in their name, phone number, and address indicated whether they were interested in having their child contacted to participate in the study.

**Procedure**

Once responses were received, this researcher contacted the children who were living in single parent homes and scheduled them for participation in this study, during free periods in their school day or immediately after school. Once these participants were finished this researcher then matched them with adolescent children from two parent families according to gender and the number of siblings they had. Most participants were scheduled alone but groups as large as nine were run. After obtaining the participants’ informed consent, experimenters administered a packet of questionnaires which included the Role Ambiguity Scale, Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale, Caretaking Scale, Rosenberg
Self-Esteem Inventory and the Demographics/Family Structure questionnaire. The individual questionnaires within the packet (except for the Demographics/Family Structure questionnaire which was always first and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Inventory which was always last) were arranged in six different orders (see Table 1). Following the completion of the questionnaire packet, each participant was read a debriefing statement (see Appendix I). A gift certificate to a local restaurant was given to each participant in the study as a token of appreciation for their participation.
Table 1

Ordered Sequences of the Questionnaires Within the Packets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Dem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>RA</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>CS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>RA</td>
<td>RA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>RA</td>
<td>RA</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>RC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The abbreviations and their corresponding questionnaires are as follows: Dem - Demographics/Family Structure Questionnaire, RA - Role Ambiguity Scale, RC - Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale, CS - Caretaking Scale, SE - Rosenberg Self Esteem Inventory
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

Overview

In this section, unless otherwise noted, single parent families are comprised of current single parent families as well as step-families. In all analyses which looked at intact and single parent families, two sets of analyses were run, one involving single and step-families and one involving only single parent families (excluding step-families). Unless otherwise noted, the second set of analyses did not produce significantly different results.

Data collection for this study yielded few males who were part of a single parent family. This created some difficulty in analyzing Hypothesis 4. As a result, gender differences related to Hypothesis 4 were not explored. Instead, only females were included in these analyses.

An additional difficulty in the collection of data that impacted the findings of this study was the lack of adolescents who had experienced divorce or permanent separation within the past two years. A slightly higher number of participants had experienced divorce or permanent separation within the past five years. These frequencies can be found in Table 2.

Means and standard deviations for all variables were computed and can be found in Table 3. Intercorrelations among the measures are presented in Table 4.
Table 2

Number of Years Since Divorce/Permanent Separation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 - 5.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 - 7.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 - 10.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1 - 12.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6 - 15.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total N = 21*

*The other 18 participants from single parent families were from reconstituted families and did not respond to this question on the Demographics/Family Structure Questionnaire.
Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of all Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity Scale (RA)</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>32.25</td>
<td>9.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale (RC)</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>8.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaking Scale (CS)</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>35.99</td>
<td>8.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem Inventory (SE)</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>39.16</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N ranged from 70 to 71 for all variables. Possible ranges of scores for each variable are as follows: RA = 11 to 77; RC = 7 to 49; CS = 7 to 49; SE = 10 to 50.
Table 4

Correlations Between Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>RA</th>
<th>RC</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.40*</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01

**p < .05
Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis proposed that adolescent children from single parent families would have higher amounts of role conflict than adolescents from two parent families. An independent samples t-test was used to compare adolescents from single parent families (N = 39) with adolescents from intact families (N = 32) on levels of role conflict. No significant difference was found, t (69) = -.03, p = .973. Means are presented in Table 5. The same analysis was conducted again, this time excluding those single parent families that were a result of death. This analysis did not produce significant results. An item-by-item analysis of the Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale revealed no significant difference between intact and single parent families on individual items.

Hypothesis 2

This experimenter proposed in the second hypothesis that adolescent children from single parent families would experience higher levels of role ambiguity than adolescents from two parent families. An independent samples t-test was used to compare adolescents from single parent families with adolescents from intact families on levels of role ambiguity. No significant difference was found, t (69) = -.36, p = .721. Means are presented in Table 5. The same analysis was conducted again, this time excluding those single parent families that were a result of death. This analysis did not produce significant results. An item-by-item analysis found a significant difference between intact (Mean = 2.34, SD = 2.01) and single parent families (Mean = 1.56, SD = .55) on Item 2, which dealt with adolescents' knowledge of their responsibilities within the family, t (69) = -2.32, p = .023.
Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Participants from Single Parent Families (SPF) and Two Parent Families (TPF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SPF</th>
<th>TPF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity Scale (RA)</td>
<td>31.90</td>
<td>32.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>7.68</td>
<td>10.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale (RC)</td>
<td>23.46</td>
<td>23.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td>6.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaking Scale (CS)</td>
<td>33.59</td>
<td>39.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>7.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem Inventory (SE)</td>
<td>37.41</td>
<td>41.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>9.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N was 39 for SPF and ranged from 31 to 32 for TPF for all variables. Possible ranges of scores for each variable are as follows: RA = 11 to 77; RC = 7 to 49; CS = 7 to 49; SE = 10 to 50.
Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis proposed by this researcher was that adolescents from single parent families would have lower self-esteem than adolescents from two parent families. An independent samples t-test was used to compare adolescents from single parent families with adolescents from two parent families on levels of self-esteem. No significant difference was found, $t(68) = -1.84, p = .07$. Means can be found in Table 5.

An analysis was also performed using only those single parent families that were a result of divorce or permanent separation, excluding those due to death. An independent samples t-test compared this sample with two parent families on levels of self-esteem. This analysis found that adolescents from single parent families reported significantly lower self-esteem than did adolescents from two parent families, $t(65) = -2.05, p = .045$ (see Table 6). An analysis was also conducted comparing intact families with current single parent families (step-families were removed from this analysis). An independent samples t-test found a similar significant difference, $t(49) = -2.45, p = .02$ (see Table 7).

Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis proposed that female children in single parent families would take on the responsibility of childcare to younger siblings immediately after their entry into a single parent family. Data collection yielded too small a number of male participants from single parent families to make this analysis meaningful and thus they were excluded from this analysis (see Table 8). An independent samples t-test using birth order as the independent variable was conducted on adolescent females from single parent families on
Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Participants from Single Parent Families (SPF, with those due to death removed) and Two Parent Families (TPF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SPF</th>
<th>TPF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity Scale (RA)</td>
<td>32.17</td>
<td>7.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale (RC)</td>
<td>23.97</td>
<td>10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaking Scale (CS)</td>
<td>34.00</td>
<td>8.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem Inventory (SE)</td>
<td>36.86</td>
<td>8.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N was 36 for SPF and ranged from 31 to 32 for TPF for all variables. Possible ranges of scores for each variable are as follows: RA = 11 to 77; RC = 7 to 49; CS = 7 to 49; SE = 10 to 50.
### Table 7

**Means and Standard Deviations of Participants from Single Parent Families (SPF, excluding step families) and Two Parent Families (TPF)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SPF</th>
<th>TPF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity Scale (RA)</td>
<td>33.90</td>
<td>8.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale (RC)</td>
<td>23.81</td>
<td>10.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaking Scale (CS)</td>
<td>33.95</td>
<td>8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem Inventory (SE)</td>
<td>36.05</td>
<td>8.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N was 21 for SPF and ranged from 30 to 31 for TPF for all variables. Possible ranges of scores for each variable are as follows: RA = 11 to 77; RC = 7 to 49; CS = 7 to 49; SE = 10 to 50.
Table 8

Levels of Caretaking Based on Gender and Birth Order of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males (N = 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest (N = 3)</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldest (N = 4)</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>9.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females (N = 21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest (N = 7)</td>
<td>35.14</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldest (N = 14)</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>8.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible range on the Caretaking Scales is 7 to 49
levels of caretaking. Birth order consisted of two levels, the participant as the oldest with younger siblings and the participant as a younger child with older siblings. No significant difference was found, $t(19) = .96, p = .351$.

**Hypothesis 5**

The fifth hypothesis proposed that greater elapsed time since the divorce or permanent separation would result in lower amounts of role conflict and role ambiguity. No significant relationship was found between the number of elapsed years since the adolescents had entered a single parent family and scores on the Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale ($r = -.22, p = .34$) or the Role Ambiguity Scale ($r = .19, p = .40$). However, the correlation involving the Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale was in the hypothesized direction with the greater the elapsed time since the divorce or permanent separation the lower the amount of role conflict.

**Additional Analyses**

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory**

In further analyses involving the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory, a $2 \times 2$ analysis of variance, with gender and living condition as independent variables, found a main effect for gender. Adolescent males reported significantly lower levels of self-esteem than did adolescent females, $F(1, 66) = 6.02, p = .02$. This same analysis found that adolescents in single parent families reported lower levels of self-esteem than did adolescents living in two parent families, $F(1, 66) = 6.86, p = .01$. This analysis was conducted by first extracting those participants who were part of a single parent family due to death. No significant interaction was found, $F(1, 66) = .12, p = .73$. Means are presented in Table 9.
Table 9

Levels of Self-Esteem of Participants by Gender and Living Condition (excluding those participants who are in single families as a result of death)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males (N = 21)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent Families (N = 7)</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>10.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent Families (N = 14)</td>
<td>38.57</td>
<td>10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females (N = 47)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent Families (N = 30)</td>
<td>38.23</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent Families (N = 17)</td>
<td>43.65</td>
<td>9.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible range of Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory is 10 to 50.
Caretaking Scale

In further analyses involving the Caretaking Scale, a 2 x 2 analysis of variance, with gender and living condition as independent variables, found a main effect for living condition, \( F(1, 69) = 5.01, p = .03 \). Adolescents in single parent families scored lower on the Caretaking Scale than did adolescents in two parent families, indicating they were more likely performing in the caretaking role in their family. Means can be found in Table 10. No main effect was found for gender, \( F(1, 69) = 1.89, p = .17 \). No significant interaction between gender and living condition was found, \( F(3, 69) = 3.32, p = .92 \).

Role Ambiguity

Further analyses were conducted comparing single parent families and step-parent families on levels of role ambiguity. This sample did not use participants who were in single parent homes due to death. An independent t-test found a significant difference, \( t(34) = 2.04, p = .05 \), indicating that adolescents from single parent families had higher levels of perceived role ambiguity than adolescents from step-parent families (see Table 11).
Table 10

Levels of Caretaking of Participants by Gender and Living Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males (N = 22)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent Families (N = 8)</td>
<td>35.75</td>
<td>7.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent Families (N = 14)</td>
<td>40.71</td>
<td>5.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females (N = 48)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent Families (N = 31)</td>
<td>33.03</td>
<td>8.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent Families (N = 17)</td>
<td>37.59</td>
<td>8.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible range of scores for the Caretaking Scale is 7 to 49.
Table 11

Means and Standard Deviations of Participants from Single Parent Families (SPF) and Step-Parent Families (STEP)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SPF Mean</th>
<th>SPF SD</th>
<th>STEP Mean</th>
<th>STEP SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity Scale (RA)</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>29.31</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale (RC)</td>
<td>24.20</td>
<td>10.62</td>
<td>23.69</td>
<td>9.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caretaking Scale (CS)</td>
<td>33.95</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>33.71</td>
<td>8.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem Inventory (SE)</td>
<td>35.45</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>38.63</td>
<td>8.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N was 20 for SPF and 16 for STEP for all variables. Possible ranges of scores for each variable are as follows: RA = 11 to 77; RC = 7 to 49; CS = 7 to 49; SE = 10 to 50.

*All single and step-families who were due to death were excluded from this analysis.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Overview

The present study was conducted in an attempt to test five hypothesis: (1) adolescents from single parent families experience higher levels of role conflict than adolescents from two parent families; (2) adolescents from single parent families experience higher levels of role ambiguity than adolescents from two parent families; (3) adolescents from single parent families have lower self esteem than adolescents from two parent families; (4) female adolescent children are more likely than male adolescents to assume the caretaker role immediately following their entry into a single parent family; and (5) greater elapsed time since the divorce or permanent separation will be related to lower amounts of role conflict and role ambiguity. A discussion of the findings of this study follows.

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

The first two hypotheses of this study, which dealt with levels of role conflict and role ambiguity within single parent and two parent families were unsupported. This may be due to several reasons, including time since divorce/permanent separation, the role of the single parent child, measurement problems, and the nature of the concepts themselves.

Time since divorce/permanent separation. The current sample included few participants who had entered single parent families during their adolescent years. Thus, by
the time of the study, they all had emerged from the two-year adaptation or restructuring period that researchers have found often occurs in single parent families (Hetherington, Law, and O'Connor, 1993). The highest levels of role conflict and role ambiguity may exist during those first two years following the entrance into the single parent family. Since this study yielded only three participants who had experienced divorce/permanent separation in the last two and a half years, it is possible that many had already adjusted to life in a single parent or stepfamily household, resulting in relatively low levels of role conflict and ambiguity.

It is important to note that the fifth hypothesis of this study proposed that greater elapsed time since the divorce or permanent separation is related to lower the amounts of role conflict and role ambiguity. No significant relationship was found. This may again be due to the fact that few participants had entered a single parent family within the last few years.

**Role of the single parent child.** Adolescents who have been a part of a single parent family for many years may have grown accustomed to their dual roles, the child role and the parental or spousal role. These dual roles may have, over the years, grown into one role, that of the child of the single parent family. In the past, the child role has been based on the child in the two parent family. However, due to a changing society, this may need to be re-evaluated. Children in single parent families assume aspects of parental and spousal roles, such as the caretaking of children, participating in family decisions that were once reserved for the parents, and acting as a confidant for the single parent. As discussed in Shaw and Costanzo (1982), a child will be unable to perform these adult roles as an adult would. Thus the child adapts them to fit into a new role, the single parent child.
The finding of the item-by-item analysis of the Role Ambiguity Scale suggests there is some support for this new child role. Adolescents’ acknowledgement of their roles within the family was found to be a distinguishing item between adolescents from single and two parent families. Children fulfilling this new role may participate in extra curricular activities at school but may also need to share some of the caretaking responsibilities of younger siblings. For example, a child would need to come home immediately at five o’clock instead of spending extra time at school gossiping with friends, in order to prepare dinner for the family since their mother does not arrive home until seven o’clock. Children fulfilling this role would not experience role conflict nor role ambiguity since they now only have one role and that role is clearly defined to them by the single parent.

The concepts of role conflict and role ambiguity. As discussed in the introduction of this paper, role conflict and role ambiguity were defined as two separate concepts. The correlation between the Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale and the Role Ambiguity Scale (.02) suggests that these concepts are indeed separate. Role conflict occurs when a person plays two or more roles that include incompatible and conflicting expectations. Role ambiguity is a lack of clarity about the expectations associated with a role. Further research into these concepts as well as a stricter definition of the differences between them may aid researchers as they study these concepts in the family environment.

This study attempted to modify scales that were originally designed to be used in an industrial setting. With the modified versions, some of the distinction between the concepts of role conflict and role ambiguity may have been lost. As researchers adapt these scales for use in other settings, such as the family, these concepts may take on slightly different connotations. In business the roles in conflict center around the place of
employment of the individual. The conflict arises in business when the employees needs to decide where their loyalties lie, with their client or the third party who is funding the business venture. Role ambiguity may arise as the employees attempt to clearly define their role. In this situation, role conflict and role ambiguity are concerned with only one area, that of business. However, in the family, role conflict and role ambiguity may exist as a child struggles between family, friends, and school. Future research may need to focus on the differences between these two social settings and how this difference can be addressed when developing or adapting scales that will measure these concepts within the family setting.

**Self-Esteem**

As proposed by this researcher in the third hypothesis of this study, self-esteem was significantly lower in adolescents from intact and single parent families (step and single parent families) as well as between adolescents from single parent families (excluding step families) than adolescents from two parent families. These lower levels could have a great impact on adolescents from single parent families as they move through adolescence and face the trials of that developmental period. It could affect such areas as their establishment of new relationships with people outside the family circle, their ideas about their changing bodies, their outlook on the future, and their peer interactions in and out of school. Parents, teachers, and others associated with these adolescents during this time need to be aware of this impact so that it can be addressed before significant problems develop.

It is important to note that male adolescents from single parent families reported the lowest levels of self-esteem. This may be explained by the lack of a male role model in
many single parent families. A male role model is presumably critical to a male adolescent as he enters and continues through puberty. As a male adolescent experiences the physical and emotional changes of adolescence, he may feel uncomfortable discussing these feelings with his mother, who is often the only available parent in a single parent family. Although he may not discuss specific feelings with a male role model, he would have a same gender companion with whom to discuss adolescent situations with or to spend time. The effects of the previously mentioned characteristics of adolescence, such as physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes, may be compounded when the probable gender role model is absent. Determining the point in adolescence at which it is most critical to have an appropriate male role model may be an area of future research.

Caretaking

The fourth hypothesis of this study proposed that female children in single parent families would take on the responsibility of childcare to younger siblings immediately after their entry into a single parent family. Results suggested that the birth order of the participant did not significantly effect their level of caretaking. This finding suggests that caretaking may be inherent in females regardless of whether they are the oldest or the youngest. For example, in a family with two children, the oldest a male, the youngest a female, the female, by nature would assume the caretaking role.

Analysis also found that female adolescents were more likely to take the caretaking role not only in single parent families but in two parent families as well. This result may suggest that caretaking is a female role in society and not a role that develops due to an absent parent.
Additional Points of Discussion

Sample

The current study had a low response rate from the prescreening mailing (17%). The low number of adolescents from single parent families may be explained by this response rate and the difficulty in scheduling participants. First, in single parent families, tasks (e.g., paying the bills) need to be divided and prioritized since there is only one adult in the home who can take on these responsibilities. Thus when the pre-screening questionnaire arrived in the mail it may have been quickly passed over due to the lack of time the single parent had to complete it. Those single parent families who completed it may have already been able to divide the responsibilities of the absent parent. In a two parent home, parents may have more opportunity to divide these tasks, thus one of the two parents probably had the time to complete the questionnaire.

A second problem was the difficulty scheduling those who had responded to the pre-screening questionnaire. Thirty-five percent of the prescreening participants were able to be scheduled. Respondents who were living in single parent families were particularly difficult to schedule for two reasons. First, they often were unable to have a parent pick them up after school, thus they needed to take a bus and could not meet with this researcher after school. The second reason centers on children in single parent families who have jobs. Many of the participants came from single parent homes where the single parent was employed. Depending on the financial support of the absent parent, money may be in short supply in the single parent family. Thus, adolescents in single parent families may need to work after school in order to provide themselves with some of the extras, items that the single parent is not in a financial position to provide. These extras
could range from clothing, to a car, or to extra spending money for a date. These are all items that in a two parent family, are probably provided by the parents. Adolescents in single parent families will most likely need to pay for their college tuition, thus a job may be a necessity. For this reason, they may have been unable to participate in the study because they were not available after school.

Correlation of Scales

The large standard deviations of these scales also deserves some discussion. The variability among scores in both the Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale (SD = 8.65) and the Role Ambiguity Scale (SD = 9.18) suggest that the participants’ scores were fluctuating greatly on scales where the range was relatively small (11 to 77 on the Role Ambiguity Scale and 7 to 49 on the Peer-Family Role Conflict Scale). This high variability indicates that future research should use a higher number of participants. As previously mentioned, researchers cannot make any inferences regarding the ability of these scales to accurately measure the levels of role ambiguity and role conflict in the family. This further supports this researcher’s suggestion that further research needs to be conducted regarding these concepts as well as into scales that can accurately measure them.

Future Research

This study raises several questions that may be answered in future studies. First, as mentioned above, more studies should investigate the low self-esteem issue found in adolescents from single parent families, particularly adolescents males so that it can be addressed appropriately by families and school personnel. Also, studying adolescents as they enter the single parent family may give researchers better information on the effects of divorce on adolescents. Future studies may involve further investigation into the Peer-
Family Role Conflict Scale, the Role Ambiguity Scale, and the Caretaking Scale since there are few instruments that measure role conflict and role ambiguity and none that specifically measure caretaking.
APPENDIX A

Role Ambiguity Scale

Please respond to the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree) in reference to your family.

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = slightly agree
4 = neither agree nor disagree
5 = slightly disagree
6 = disagree
7 = strongly disagree

1. ____ I have clear, well-defined behaviors I am expected to exhibit in my family.
2. ____ I know what my responsibilities are within my family.
3. ____ I have to "feel my way" in performing household tasks.*
4. ____ I know exactly what is expected of me within my family.
5. ____ My parent(s) make(s) sure I have clear goals to achieve.
6. ____ There are few rules within my family telling me what I should be doing.*
7. ____ My parent(s) make(s) it clear how I should do my work.
8. ____ I know I have divided my time properly among several roles within my family.
9. ____ I don’t know what performance standards are expected of me.*
10. ____ It is clear what is expected of me in my family.
11. ____ I have to perform household tasks with vague directions or orders.*

* These items are reversed scored
APPENDIX B

Peer -Family Role Conflict Scale

Please respond to the following statements on a scale from 1 (very false) to 7 (very true) in reference to your family.

1 = very false
2 = somewhat false
3 = more false than true
4 = neither true nor false
5 = more true than false
6 = somewhat true
7 = very true

1. ____ I am able to act the same regardless of whether I am in my house or at school.*

2. ____ The way my family and friends solve problems/handle issues is quite different.

3. ____ I have too many demands at home that cause problems at school and with my friends.

4. ____ I feel tension when the different responsibilities I have at home and at school with my friends do not match.

5. ____ I have more responsibilities in my family than other kids my age.

6. ____ I am unable to participate in extra-curricular activities at school due obligations I have at home and with my family.

7. ____ People become upset with me when I am unable to fulfill obligations to them due to my obligations to others.

* This item is reversed scored
APPENDIX C

Caretaking Scale

Please respond to the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree) in reference to your family.

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = slightly agree
4 = neither agree nor disagree
5 = slightly disagree
6 = disagree
7 = strongly disagree

1. ____ My mother and I spent a lot of time together while I was growing up.*
2. ____ A sibling took care of me a majority of the time because my mother was not me.
3. ____ I felt I had more responsibility in the home because my mother worked.
4. ____ I often had to watch younger siblings because my parents were not home.
5. ____ The children in my family often helped each other with their homework because our parents were not home.
6. ____ The oldest sibling in my family often cooked dinner.
7. ____ Children in my family had to help with the household chores more than in other families.

*This item is reversed scored
APPENDIX D

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

Please respond to the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = neutral
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

1. _____ On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.*
2. _____ At times I think I am no good at all.
3. _____ I feel that I have a number of good qualities.*
4. _____ I am able to do things as well as most other people.*
5. _____ I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. _____ I certainly feel useless at times.
7. _____ I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.*
8. _____ I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. _____ All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
10. _____ I take a positive attitude toward myself.*

*These items are reversed scored.
APPENDIX E

Demographics/Family Structure

Please respond to the following statements regarding yourself.

Birthdate: ____________ (ex. 6-04-80)

Gender: ___ male ___ female

Race: ___ Caucasian ___ Hispanic ___ African-American ___ Other

Family Income: ___ under $20,000 ___ $20,000-$50,000 ___ over $50,000

1. Please mark below the choice that best describes your current living arrangement.

___ Single parent mother
___ Single parent father
___ Two natural parents
___ Stepfather and natural mother
___ Stepmother and natural father
___ Other (explain) ____________________________________________

2. List the number of siblings that reside both in and out of your home

Natural siblings: ___
Half-siblings: ___
Step-siblings: ___
3. If you have siblings, are you the:

   ___ oldest
   ___ youngest
   ___ middle

4. If you currently live in a step-family, how long did you live in a single parent family?

   ___ years and ___ months

5. Please list the gender and age of your siblings.

   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________

Answer the following questions if you currently live in a single family home. If you currently live in a two parent home you are finished with this questionnaire.

6. Your single family home is due to which of the following?

   ___ Divorce
   ___ Death
   ___ Permanent separation
   ___ Other (explain) ___________________________________________________

7. If your single parent household is due to divorce or permanent separation, how long have you lived in a single parent family?

   ___ years and ___ months

8. Which best describes your living arrangement immediately following your entry into a single parent living arrangement?

   ___ Single parent mother
   ___ Single parent father
   ___ Two natural parents
   ___ Stepfather and natural mother
   ___ Stepmother and natural father
   ___ Other (explain) ___________________________________________________
9. How much contact do you *currently* have with your non-custodial parent?

- _____ once a week
- _____ more than once a week
- _____ once a month
- _____ twice a month
- _____ never

10. *Immediately* following your entry into the single parent family, how much contact did you have with your non-custodial parent?

- _____ once a week
- _____ more than once a week
- _____ once a month
- _____ twice a month
- _____ never
Appendix F

Cover Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

With this letter, I am requesting your permission to administer a brief survey to your son/daughter regarding the roles and responsibilities he/she may take on at home and at school and whether or not these roles conflict. Questions focus on the extent to which the teenagers participate in family decisions, do chores around the house, and take care of younger siblings. This survey would be administered at school, during a free period in your child’s schedule. No personal or embarrassing questions will be asked. Their participation will be completely voluntary and they will be free to refuse to participate or to answer any of the questions. The survey will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete and all of the information will be absolutely confidential and anonymous. The survey has been approved for use by the University of Dayton Internal Review Board (229-2171) and by Miamisburg High School administrators. You are obviously free to discuss the survey and his/her willingness to participate with your child. To show our appreciation, each person who participates in the survey will receive a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

This study is part of an ongoing effort by the Department of Psychology at The University of Dayton, to understand the tensions and stresses that many adolescents experience. As you know, today’s teenagers face many new challenges when attempting to balance their home and school lives. Understanding how adolescents cope in these areas will help both teachers and parents interact with teenagers. In this particular project, we are interested in comparing children from one-parent and two parent families.

If you consent to allow your son/daughter to participate in this survey, please do the following:

- Please sign and date the Parental Consent Form
- Please complete the Pre-Screening Form
- Please place both the Parental Consent Form and the Pre-Screening Form in the pre-addressed, stamped envelope and mail

Signing the consent form does not obligate your child to participate in the survey. It simply indicates a willingness to participate if contacted. If you have any questions about the survey, feel free to call me @ 229-2168.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Graetz, Ph.D.  Stephanie L. Derr
Assistant Professor  Graduate Researcher
Department of Psychology
APPENDIX G

Parental Consent Form

We are asking for your permission to allow your child, ______________, to participate in a research project we are conducting at the University of Dayton’s Psychology Department. The population that we are focusing on includes high school students such as your child.

The first step is for you to complete the enclosed Pre-Screening Questionnaire after you have read and signed this form. This shows your agreement and your child’s interest in being contacted to participate further in the study.

The second step of participation involves the completion of several questionnaires, each of which has its own set of instructions, involving questions about your family and roles which your child may have assumed in your family. Completion of the questionnaire packet will take approximately 20 minutes. Your child is free to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. Your child is also free to choose not to answer certain questions if he/she so desires. If you decide to allow your child to participate, please mail this letter to Dr. Kenneth Graetz in the enclosed self addressed stamped envelope. Researchers will then contact your child to schedule a time when they can meet to complete the packet. Completion of the packet will be done during a free period at school and in a group setting.

The information that you and your child provide will remain completely confidential, will be securely stored, and will only be viewed by the researchers involved in this study. Your child’s name and address will be viewed only by the primary researcher and will be destroyed at the completion of the study. In addition, your child’s data will not be used alone, but collectively with all other participants’ data.

Your child’s participation or nonparticipation will have no effect upon their high school or the University of Dayton. In addition, there are no risks associated with your child’s participation in this study. If you wish to receive a summary of the results of this study, please check the box at the bottom of this consent form and include your name and address. Thank you very much for your cooperation and allowing your child to participate.

Signature _______________________________  Date ______________________

_____ Please send me a summary of the results of this study.

Name __________________________________

Address ____________________________________
APPENDIX H

Pre-Screening Questionnaire

Completing this questionnaire does not commit your child to participate in this study. It only displays your interest in allowing your child to participate in this study. Please respond to the following questions regarding your family. You may choose not to answer these questions or choose to answer only specific questions. At a later date your child may be contacted at home to see if he/she is still interested in being a participant in the present study. As a participant in the study your child will earn a free gift once the study is completed.

Does your child currently live in a single parent or two parent family?

____ single parent family
____ two parent family

If your child currently live in a single parent family was it a result of divorce or permanent separation?

____ yes    ______ no

If you answered yes to the previous question; how long since the divorce or permanent separation occurred?

____ years and _____ months

Is your child an only child?    ______ yes    ______ no

If your child has siblings, how many siblings are currently in your household? _____

If your child has siblings, is your child the oldest, youngest, or a middle sibling in your family?

____ oldest
____ youngest
____ middle
If you agree to allow your child to be contacted to participate in this study, please list your child’s name, address, and phone number below.

Name: ______________________________

Phone: ______________________________

Address: ______________________________
APPENDIX I

Debriefing Form

Your participation has helped this author to attempt to assess the influence of living in single parent families on the roles children play in them as well as their level of role conflict and role ambiguity.

Four main hypotheses will be tested with the collected data. The first hypothesis is that adolescent children from single parent families will have higher amounts of role conflict than adolescents from two parent families. The second hypothesis is that adolescent children from single parent families will experience higher levels of role ambiguity than adolescents from two parent families. The third hypothesis is that female children in single parent families will take on the responsibility of child care to younger siblings immediately after their entry into a single parent family. The fourth hypothesis proposes that the closer the single parent family is to the divorce or permanent separation the higher their amounts of role conflict and role ambiguity will be.

This researcher asks that you not tell anyone who may be participating in this study what it is about. Prior knowledge may cause people to answer in a way they would not have if they did not know the nature of the study. This researcher appreciates the time you spent completing these questionnaires.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Kenneth Graetz, at 229-2168. You may also contact me, Stephanie Derr, through the mail at the University of Dayton, Department of Psychology, 300 College Park, Dayton, Ohio 45469-1430.
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