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Role conflict among urban single black mothers

Carr, Ellen Lillard, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1993

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ROLE CONFLICT AMONG URBAN SINGLE BLACK MOTHERS

by

ELLEN LILLARD CARR

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1993

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this dissertation is the description and analysis of the life styles of a sample of single black mothers. It will assess how being single relates to problems at work, school and home. Special emphasis is given to specific activities in planning the execution of job functions and academic endeavors. As unmarried heads of household, single working mothers must often simultaneously perform multiple duties while also arbitrating tense predicaments at home. Considerable effort has been expended to see what can be learned concerning the process by which they develop adequate coping mechanisms.¹ Essentially, this construct denotes the "ways and means" women use to manage difficulties derived from efforts to maintain and improve themselves and their households.

The research interest in this topic will be focused to look at specific factors that play a part in the single mother's decision to seek employment, or continue her education and/or be exclusively involved in homemaking duties. It will, therefore, be necessary to consider certain pertinent questions such as: What factors were implicated in their decision to enter the labor force? What influenced the seeking and/or the acceptance of the jobs or positions they held or hold? What obstacles did they meet in their job searches and in holding down the job or jobs? Did family needs and functions conflict with employment? How do dependents and other family members react or cooperate with working mother? Who assumes household responsibilities, especially in absence of the providing parent?

¹. Coping Mechanisms: Is a construct normally used by psychologist and edited for sociological usage in this study to mean strategies evolved by black single mothers to help them implement alternative responses, they must make in order to deal with the perplexities, frustrations and/or depressions caused by conflict which seem to accompany multiple social roles, characteristic of the motherhood role-set.

Optimization Of Research

Data for this research is based upon information gathered from a rather comprehensive questionnaire which was distributed among ninety five black single mothers living in four of the five boroughs that comprise New York City. A smaller sample of twenty women was collected from Providence, Rhode Island, in order to furnish a comparative field of reference. Both groups were observed from the standpoint of understanding the impact of size and intensity of urban environment upon respondents' abilities to accommodate the pressures caused by role conflict.² The indispensable part which women play in the process of carrying out maternal duties requires that they constantly adjust and readjust to a variety of stimuli in order to meet the competing demands of performing multiple social obligations. Thus the shifting of total responsibility of rearing and nurturing children alone places single provider mothers in situations fraught with distress and discomfort. Recently both laymen and professional scholars have shown an avid interest in exploring the causes of discord in the motherhood role-set. It seems equally pertinent for the sociologist to examine adaptive behavior of unmarried heads of households. According to behaviorist and interactionist theories single parents may be expected to make one of the following responses to role strain:

- a) They can take flight. (Some are seeking escape through drugs)

². Ralph Turner, "Role-Taking: Proces Versus Conformity," in Arnold M. Rose, ed., Human Behavior and Social Processes (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p.37. "Role conflict exists when there is no immediately apparent way of simultaneously coping effectively with two different relevant other-roles, whether coping is by conformity to expectation or by some other type of response." Discord in the motherhood role-set usually occurs when conventional guidelines for playing the part of female parent does not produce a harmonious relationship between the multiple and sometime competing demands of maternal obligations. The daily pressures of life may induce parents, especially those without partners, to improvise or deviate from normal patterns of behavior in order alleviate the discomforts of stress or learn to manage it. However, any such unusual or unanticipated actions may or may not meet with societal expectations of an acceptable response for the ideal type good mother.

- b) They can try to modify their approach to mothering.
- c) They can develop strategies to help them alleviate or manage the tensions and anxieties created by competing demands and or conflicting cultural expectations.

Inasmuch as the research here sought to construct a set of scales by which to measure role strain, the sample was heavily weighted to include single parents who were involved with a combination of activities both within and outside the household. Therefore, unemployed students and non-working mothers make up a very small percentage of this sample. The reactions of the randomly selected subjects were coded according to these arbitrary guidelines. Any and all analysis of this data was made on the basis of the working hypothesis - i.e., that there is a definable relationship between minority females' low levels of perceived role conflict and consequential approach and performance in the execution of multiple duties at work and at home. This postulate is largely based on the presumption that:

Black women are very likely to say that they work for economic reasons, since many black men have a hard time supporting their families because of unemployment and low incomes.

Whereas having very young children lessens the labor force participation of black as well as white women, the rate for black women is much higher across the board. Well educated black women tend to have even higher rates of employment.

Black women have been conditioned to accept the heavy responsibilities of reversed roles. Adaptions, therefore, are made with less ado than among unwed white mothers from similar SES status.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that black working mothers may be able to tolerate more role strain than their white counterparts, therefore, they are more likely to enter the marriage or family contract with the assumption or expectation that they will work. A suggested expectation in the above is that there are differences in the socialization of black and white young girls, particularly differences in the types of role models they see in their mothers and in other women during their upbringing.³ Economic factors also seem to play a significant part in indirect influence in black women's work motivation and stoical outlook on life.

Rising Numbers of Births Out of Wedlock

The reasons for current changes in family composition can be attributed to widespread divorce, desertion and removal of male figures through an early death due to aids or drugs, which usually effects women's participation in the work force. Consequently, single parent families are more likely to be headed by women. Nine out of ten of all single parent families are headed by mothers. Further, the growth rate of single parent families justly exceeds the growth of two parent families. The great portion of divorces and separations occur among the young adult population. More than one half of all females heads of households with one or more dependent children are headed by women under thirty five years of age.⁴ Some additional facts are important to note:

Most single mothers work.

³ Lenore J. Weitzman, "Sex-Role Socialization," in Jo Freeman, ed., Women: A Feminist Perspective (Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 115-125.

⁴ Geoffrey Carliner, "Determinants of Household Headship," Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 37, (February 1975), Joseph Berger, "Unwed Mothers Accounting for Third of N.Y. Births," The New York Times, Monday Issue (August 13, 1984), pp. 1 & B4; Robert Pear, "Earnings Gap is Narrowing Slightly for Women," The New York Times, Monday Issue (October 3, 1984), p. B15.

Black women are disproportionately represented among single mothers, and among women participants in the "feminization of poverty."

Many employed single parents suffer from task overload and head house holds that exhibit a relatively high degree of disorganization and instability.

Employed single mothers as well as non-employed single mothers are likely to experience acute senses of anxiety and isolation.

Much public concern and debate has been kindled by the rising rates of births out of wedlock. Not only are there alarming increments among the younger generation, but also among older single mothers as well. "The National Center for Health Statistics of the Department of Health and Human Services said that of the 3,756,547 live births in the United States in 1986, 106,492 came from single women in their 30's and 40's; in 1985; there were 3,760,561 births, of which 95,477 came from single women in their 30's and 40's.⁵ Some people would argue that our present dilemma is partly an unanticipated outcome of an over relaxation of restraining norms against casual sex between men and women, regardless of marital status. Until recently, society had invoked strong taboos and frowned upon women who became mothers without the sanctity and benefit of holy matrimony, consequently rates of live births of out of wedlock rose more slowly in the past, than in the present.

Only a couple of decades ago, sociologists like Prudence Mors Rains were still examining the subject of unwed motherhood from the standpoint of being a moral issue. In her study, this author notes that: a) Premarital sex as a career involved changes in attitude which would allow women "to view as acceptable what was previously viewed as unacceptable." Deviant behavior is not experienced so much "in the sense that cultural standards are violated, but ... participants ... violating their own standards, therefore, put

⁵. Susan Hartman, "Single Mothers: Making It Their Way," The New York Times, Thursday Issue (January 12, 1989), p.C1 and p.C10.

themselves in the position of having to agree with potential criticism." b) That most of the young black girls in her study, "regardless of the standard they hold upon marriage, will have experienced some guilt, some sense of moral vulnerability by virtue of acting in ways which they ... have only recently regarded as unacceptable."⁶

Since societal sanctions have been lifted, incremental birth rates seem to be mounting fastest among unmarried women. Among both races, from the 1960's throughout the 1970's "the probability that a never married woman is living with her own child under 18 has risen, but the level for blacks is much higher and the increase is much steeper. In 1980, 15 percent of never married black women were raising children compared with 1 percent of White women." Similar differences in increasing numbers of blacks vs. whites also prevailed in incidences of rates of African Americans who were divorced, separated or widowed. "In 1960, 35 percent of White women and 48 percent of Black women above the age of 14 were unmarried. By 1980, these percentages had risen to 42 and 64 percent, respectively."⁷ The reasons for this state of affairs can be attributed to several key factors:

- 1) Imbalance in the ratio of marriageable men to women.
- 2) Persistent high rates of unemployment among Black men which limits their ability to become good providers.
- 3) Consequential effects of racial discrimination and general economic deprivation derived from vicissitudes of ghetto life.⁸

Although this issue now crosses racial and class lines, the perplexities and contradictions experienced by minority females are often accentuated by the inequalities of

⁶. Prudence Mors Rains, Becoming an Unwed Mother (Chicago, New York: Aldine, Atherton Publishers, 1970), p. 13.

⁷. Suzanne M. Bianchi and Daphne Spain, American Women In Transition (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1986), pp. 107-108.

⁸. Robert Staples, The Black Woman in America. Sex, Marriage and the Family. (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1978), pp.19-26. William J. Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 112-113.

ethnic as well as sexual bias. Growing rates of unemployment and underemployment are foremost among the social ills that create considerable hardship for young unattached black citizens. Subsequently, "the frequency of broken marriages, female-headed families, births out of wedlock, and dependence on public assistance are much higher among Negroes than among whites." Lee Rainwater also notes that these problems "are more acute in cities than in rural areas and thus are more intensified by continuing urbanization."⁹ The reasons for this state of affairs can be attributed to:

- a) Loss of income.
- b) Loss of support.
- c) The decline of the extended family.

Thus, it is easy to see why many more black households are headed by females as compared to white conjugal units. Indeed, the historical precedence of father absence in the subculture places one parent families at a decided economic and personal disadvantage, particularly with regards to the women and children involved in these so-called female-headed households.¹⁰

An increasing number of young women (who) become single mothers, must support not only themselves but also very young children. The effects of racial discrimination and poverty force many to drop out of the educational system before graduating from high school. Among those who do graduate, many are illiterate, or have inadequate coping skills.¹¹

⁹. Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), p.345.

¹⁰. Robert Staples, Op. Cit., p.47. Female-Headed Household - refers to one of three categories of family structures, where the woman is chiefly responsible for organization and provision of household, but the father is absent.

¹¹. The Women's Coalition of Nairobi, The Effects of Racism and Militarization on Women's Equity (United Nations NG, Forum Conference, July 1985), p.28.

In the absence of a male figure at home, the mother must work doubly hard or seek funds from other sources in order to support her household. Since divorce, separation and desertion appear to occur more frequently in the subculture, minority female labor force participation has always surpassed those of their white counterparts. Black mothers are, therefore, more likely to be employed for economic and/or family reasons than whites. For these reasons the female provider role is not only familiar but acceptable to most members of the subculture.

Implications and Consequences of Single Parenting

The unanticipated loss of a mate through death, divorce or desertion often results in some rather terrible consequences for the abandoned family. This point has been well illustrated not only in books, but on the television screen as well. On Monday evening, March 21, 1988, Channel 7 (WABC) presented, "God Bless the Child," a play which dramatized a young divorcee's struggle to escape the vicious cycle of poverty. Although the plot was fictional, the story is one familiarly told about the uphill battle of a single mother who found herself homeless, unemployed and unable to maintain her household under these hapless circumstances.

In instances where women are totally unprepared to act alone they may expect to experience more difficulty in adjusting to the impending alterations in life styles, than for mothers who never married. Contrary to popular opinion, most single parent households are not created by births out of wedlock but instead by divorce. These units said Michael Lamb "are most clearly at risk. Economic discrimination ensures that single mothers have great difficulty finding jobs that pay them adequately, particularly, when they

have been out of the work force for several years, and so do not have recent experience and skills."¹² One parent households created through divorce or separation usually experience a great deal of trauma in interpersonal relations during the initial break up of marriage. In such cases female parents are more dependent than those in never married situations. Divorcees and mothers separated through desertion may continue to look to estranged spouse for some emotional as well as monetary support. The law is more likely to uphold their claim and right of financial assistance. By contrast never married respondents usually did not expect, nor did they receive help from unwed fathers who sired their offsprings. Subsequently, the families' financial status can be adversely effected by the absence of a male partner.

Since men generally earn more than women, the standard of living for the average female headed household is almost always lower that the two parent unit. Life sustained on welfare or minimal wages tends to become depressing while also reducing overall existence to a level of privation and quiet desperation. The current and now unsettling syndrome of impoverishment and urban related distress which is most closely associated with these types of households can no longer be treated as a minor social disorder. "Fatherless families constitute an important segment of the poor. About one-quarter of the poor families in the United States are fatherless, and about 30 percent of the children living in poverty are in fatherless families."¹³ Under these circumstances the survival of "mother provider homes" often depends upon the great ingenuity and personal sacrifices of the lone female parent.

¹². Michael Lamb, Nontraditional Families: Parenting and Child Development (Hillside New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1982), p.9.

¹³. Louis Kreisbert, Mothers in Poverty. A Study of Fatherless Families (Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishers, 1979), p. 5.

Methods of Resolving Role Conflict

To begin with, the single female working mother must handle alone a full range of the functions carried out by the two parent unit.¹⁴ In most instances where couples are involved, there is a division of labor that enables them to share the demands of maintenance and perpetuation of the nuclear conjugal unit. Therefore, whether married or living together, they usually agree to act in unison much like a partnership. Since the exact opposite circumstances can be observed in one parent households, it is not surprising that the motherhood role-set within this context may become a constrictive, strained fight for existence, frequently accompanied by a considerable amount of conflict. By these standards it seems plausible to presume that this segment of the population will be highly representative as the best examples of "situational copers."

The validity of 'situational copers' is contingent upon a precise definition of this postulate. Inasmuch as fear, frustration, and depression are normally the resultant outcomes of such episodes, the adjusted response of any organism or individual is often triggered by a threatening, challenging or otherwise disturbing stimuli. Quite often, fear, frustration and depression are normally the resultant outcomes of such episodes.¹⁵ And so likewise, the personal accommodative maneuvers (sometimes sacrificial) reported by respondents in the sample population could be viewed as adaptive behavior "called" out by the need to fashion some means of coping with pressures of multiple social roles. In other words, the assumption of the sole guardianship for her own offspring places the unmarried woman in a new and somewhat awkward juxtaposition via the social system which has

¹⁴. Range-running functions- may be denoted as scales indicative of the purposes served by key parental roles. These family obligations can encompass an ordinal spread from simple dish washing chores and progress toward complex responsibilities of buying or selling a home.

¹⁵. Alan Monat and Richard Lazarus, Stress and coping. An Anthology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 4-5.

reluctantly given approval but not its total support. From this stance, the present dilemma has been created not so much by deviance, derangement or incompetency on the part of individual participants, but by the "event of single parentage"

Thus, if we take for granted or hold stable factors such as: personality, SES education, etc. for unattached females who are involved in these problematic situations, social scientists should logically place emphasis on studying the selective changes in their patterns of action -- specifically looking at the consequences arising from choices entailed, and the necessity of deciding to act or not to act upon the competing obligations often held or balanced off against the mother's own personal needs. Such parents at some stage have had to make major life decisions affecting the family and themselves -- for example, whether or not to relocate, to seek assistance, to maintain or to seek employment, to return to school or to remain in school. In this respect, the research being undertaken seeks to unravel the basic questions that have to do with how working mothers define and redefine situations and develop and/or modify coping mechanisms in the process. An in-depth inquiry may possibly also shed a more objective light on the process by which some women are able to deal successfully with the discord in their role-sets and still have careers while other females are not able to cope well with either circumstances. While there are probably several good explanations for the wide range of adaptive abilities among women, the two basic propositions of the dissertation are;

- 1) That there is a strong association between single black mothers' view of their role and their performance.
- 2) That positive as opposed to negative attitudes enhance single parents' ability to make proper adjustments in order to evolve adequate coping mechanisms.

Steps in Research Procedure

Prior steps will be taken in order to optimize the research project. Several important factors must be considered:

First: Individual variations in methods of resolving problems of performing multiple roles will be subsumed under the general consensus of group responses. In other words, personal remarks of remedies are relevant only in so far as these particulars can be related to the overall reactions of the entire sample. Subsequently, the major focus here is being placed on exploring and defining problem solving skills of a percentage of women who answered the questionnaire. My research will also deal with social concerns of black women who are managing: 1) Incompatible and sometimes competing role obligations. 2) Stressful situations more frequently associated with raising a family alone in an urban setting.

Second: The sample population was divided according to two basic precepts: 1) Individual approaches to parenting were aligned from the standpoint of being either a) Traditional Mother or Transitional Mother. b) Attitudes toward Motherhood 2) All respondents were classified in reference to their Status. Participant were placed in one of the four categories: Group III: Non Working Mothers: Comprised exclusively of homemaker careerist; Group IV: Working Mother: Both keeps house and goes out to the office or shop; Group V: Student Working Parent: Typically assumes triple duties, additional to other responsibilities; and Group VI: Unemployed Student Mother, goes to school and heads household, but she is not gainfully employed.

Third: Analysis and interpretation of results of cross tabulated tables; Statistical test of collected data included: cross tabulations of Perception of Role Conflict by Reaction to Roles Strain by the following set of Coping Mechanisms: a) Setting Priorities [D-1]; b) Establish a routine [D-2]; c) Planning Time [D-3]; d) Lower Standards of Performance at Home [D-4]; e) Lower Standards of Performance at Work [D-5]; f)

Delegation of Authority [D-6]. This method of research, made it possible to establish viable scales of measurements. Thus, the investigator was able to clarify and describe both the distress and resolution of role conflict by converting these concepts into quantitative indexes.

These six techniques are most often used to handle competing obligations in more or less effective or satisfactory ways. For example, black working mothers attending school might seek to accomplish the resolution of role conflicts or ease role strains by establishing non-conventional networks for the care of their children. Thus, the adjusted behavior of a mother who delegates the supervision of youngsters to other older youth, or a landlord with whom she resides, might be interpreted as a necessary modification of parental obligations. This might enable a respondent to work and/or to attend school while raising a family and thus avoid possible negligence or child abuse. Such modifications of prescribed or idealized roles may be thought of as mechanisms which minority female parents employ to help them cope with the management of multiple responsibilities.

Inasmuch as coping takes place on both the tangible and intangible planes, an accurate evaluation of this concept must seriously consider its' dual nature. With this objective in mind, coping mechanism was broken down into two basic locations:

Type I: Coping on the structural level

Type II Coping on the internal level

"Type I coping, structural role redefinition, involves altering ... structurally imposed expectations relative to a person's position."¹⁶ Since non-complementary responsibilities in this instance may be a function of role overload and time conflicts." Therefore, strategies evolved to alleviate or reduce strain might entail "behavior such as planning,

¹⁶ Virginia E. O'Leary, "Some Attitudinal Barriers to Occupational Aspirations in Women," in Alexandra Kadan and Joan Bean, ed., Beyond Sex Role Stereotypes. Readings Toward a Psychology of Androgyny (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1976), p.327.

scheduling, organizing better and working harder." ¹⁷ External coping may also be denoted as strategies used to coordinate multiple duties and develop support systems. The first or instrumental form of coping mechanism can be visualized through family and social networks. In her article of "Sex Roles and Survival Strategies in Urban Black Community" Carol Stack noted that this approach was used among "urban poor more ... than the nuclear or matrifocal" units. In the big cities, especially in the areas of poverty, "loyalties and dependencies toward kinsmen offset the ordeals of unemployment and racism. To cope with the everyday demands of ghetto life, these networks have evolved patterns of co-residence elastic household boundaries." ¹⁸

Type II Coping, involves "a personal role redefinition, changing one's expectations and one's own behavior in a given Position rather than attempting to change the environment." Essentially, modification of conduct in this event would include adjustments in "self-image, satisfaction and happiness ... a function of age, life stage and number of life roles. Life stage was measured in terms of ages and number of children in family." ¹⁹ More specifically, coping on the internal level might refer to the social and psychological buffers used by females in general and black women in particular, in their efforts to combat or neutralize negative attitudes concerning the employment of women, especially those with families.

¹⁷. *Ibid.*, p.328.

¹⁸. Robert Staples, *Op. Cit.*: pp.132-133.

¹⁹. Virginia E. O'Leary, *Op. Cit.*, p.327.

CHAPTER II
AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF ROLE CONFLICT

New Objectives For Modern Women

In the 1980s, feminism was no longer incompatible with career, or outwardly aggressive behavior, or independence. Although The ideals of full liberation of the second sex has not quite become a "fait accompli," much of the conventional norms which constrained and opposed the notions of women "going it alone," have all but disappeared. The new objectives of modern Miss America now include "having it all:" a good job, a couple of kids, and if necessary rearing them and running the household all by herself. "The traditional model of the two parent family has been challenged by the variety of ways and patterns of parenting in the new generation. Single women who find themselves pregnant,¹ even if they are very young, have more options today. ... They are freer to make choices and are exercising that freedom."²

The mere fact that writers and journalists are now publishing data showing the growing numbers of one parent units, headed by females in all classes, further attest to the significance of this trend. However, in spite of all the progressive talk and ultra feminism, the prevailing norms are still governed by traditional role models. A majority of citizens in the U.S.A. today continues to believe in the need for a mother's constant presence and personal supervision of her own offspring. Strong adherence to these archaic ideas has greatly hampered female parent's participation in the labor force. However, this rule of thumb has never really been endorsed by most members of the subculture. The widespread and higher rates of divorce, separation and desertion among non-white

¹. Helen L. Friedman, "Notes for Practice; Why Are They Keeping Their Babies, " Social Work [July 1975], p. 322.

². Ibid., Helen Friedman, p. 322.

minorities are perhaps the best explanation for this phenomenon. Although perfectly typecast for minority females, "The Mother-Provider," is a role prescribed by economic necessity. For this reason, not only do black women anticipate being gainfully employed, but their men expect them to work regardless of marital status.

Chronicle of the Working Mother:

On the other hand, surveys made by leading researchers in the 50's revealed that many white women suffered some doubts and distress about being considered unfeminine if they worked. Rossi and Astin's studies recorded young ladies they sampled as having professed: "they were afraid to choose a profession that might conflict with their own and their peers' definition of femininity."³ By contrast, and up until the 60's, there was no such qualms among blacks; the image of working mothers and wives was received positively and more or less taken for granted. In fact, the general mores of the subculture very much condoned the employment of women, married ones as well as those with children.

It would be prudent to note here that these restrictive norms governing the domesticity of women were observed more according to class lines than racial indentification. The luxury of refraining from gainful employment is and has always been a privilege of the rich. Economic dependency of women became the prevailing standard from the 1840's until 1914. "The practice of female idleness spread through the middle class until work for women became a misfortune and a disgrace. Working-class women were not restricted in this way."⁴ Only a very few select black women were able to exclusively devote themselves to homemaking duties, while also abstaining from working

³. Ann Oakley, Woman's Work, The Housewife, Past and Present. (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1974), P. 43.

⁴. Ibid., P. 43.

outside the house. "From 1914 until the 1950's, when there is a discernible though uneven tendency toward the growing employment of women, coupled with a retention of housewifery as the primary role expected of all women."⁵

During the postwar era and throughout World War II, the rising GNP, ascending supply and demand, not to mention the dramatic advances in developing technology of labor saving devices were all factors which helped to encourage women with children to return or enter the work force. The desirability of cheaper and more malleable female labor was also enhanced by modernization of the industrial system through the introduction of automation and the pervasive shifting "from a predominantly blue-collar to a white-collar economy in which there were greater opportunities for women."⁶ Within the space of two decades (1970-1990), female L.F.P. was transformed. Not only were more married women employed, but the new recruits were educated middle class and highly skilled. The ranks of these new additions were constantly rising. In 1970 this segment of the populous made up forty-one (41%) percent of all female laborers. By 1984 this figure rose to fifty-three (53%) percent. Married working women also increased their participation by four percent to a total of fifty-seven (57%) percent by 1988. During this same period of time sixty (60%) percent of all mothers separated from their spouses, as well as seventy-four (74%) percent of all divorcees were also employed full time.⁷

In almost every city and state in the country, employment patterns of the past were made obsolete by rapid transitions in several significant areas. The following changes have been cited among the more relevant occurrences recorded: Foremost in the current chain of events is the decline in average number of children born to each household,

⁵ Ibid., P. 34.

⁶ The Time of Change 1983 Handbook on Women Workers, (U.S..Department of Labor Office of the Secretary Women's Bureau Bulletin, 1983), P. 7.

⁷ United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, (January 1989), Bulletin 2307, p.393.

which stands in glaring contradiction to the prolific bounty being procreated among teenagers, the poor and recently immigrated groups. Another turnabout in labor force trends has taken place in ages of typical female workers. Previously, single women dominated the job market; now young married couples with preschool dependents have become their main replacements and chief competitors. There was also an equally unprecedented increment in employment of older women who formerly remained at home. Subsequently, the median age range for the average female in the labor force has moved upward from 26 years to a high of nearly 40 years by 1960. "Over the past decade-and-a-half, women under age 45, particularly those 20 to 34 years, have had the highest rates of labor force participation." Census for 1981 shows close to "70 percent of all women 20 to 24 years of age, followed by 68 percent of those 25 to 29 and 66 percent of those 30 to 34 year, were working or looking for work. About 59 percent of the mothers in this age group had to juggle the responsibilities of home and child care with those of a job."⁸

On the other side of this picture of evolution toward a more equal society are the counter forces of regression. First: There was little improvement in broadening of occupational categories that women participate in. In this aspect of female employment, there was in fact no decline in the concentration of women in the traditional female occupation. If anything, the concentration may even be greater. For example, the proportion of employed women who were clerical workers rose from 2,844 (per 1,000) employees in 1983 to a grand total of 3,085 (per 1000) members of administrative aids, and other support personnel by the year 1989.⁹

When the Congressional Hearing on Equality of Opportunity for Women began its sessions in 1973, the issue of sex typing in classified newspaper ads was still a common practice. The discrepancies in pay scales between men and women were

⁸. Time for Change 1983 Handbook on Women Workers, Op. Cit., p.10.

⁹. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Op. Cit., p.415.

uppermost on the agenda of this august assembly. Nowhere was the fact of discrimination more clearly evident than in the contrast in median incomes of families maintained by women as opposed to those headed by never married or divorced males or households supported from wages of two working parents. The U.S. Labor Department published figures (1980) for percentages of wage earners according to sex. These tables illustrate the wide margins of difference between the two groups of laborers. The average provider/mother earned between \$5,000 to \$10,000 annually, while unmarried or divorced men heading their own households, received between \$15,600 and \$17,700 dollars per year. Both of these tallies were surpassed by combined salaries of two breadwinners with a range of \$23,800 to \$27,700 per year.¹⁰ The disparities in wages between men and women was consistent and persistent over the past quarter of a century. This trend seems to be continuing even in inflated salaries for the 1980s. For example, an article published by the New York Times, in the Monday edition, October 3, 1983, graphically illustrates this point. The journalist highlights Census Bureau records which state that regardless of race "Women working full time last year had median annual earnings of \$13,014., as against a median of \$21,077 for men." Current Statistical Abstracts of the United States for 1991 published reports for 1988 which upgraded these figures to \$17,000 yearly income for the average employed female and \$25,300 for most working men.¹¹

Second: Not only are the foregoing facts an index to the current state of affairs, but the implications of such data do serve notice that the United States is no closer to establishing economic parity between the sexes than it was at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the inequities of sexual bias in employment becomes more pronounced when racial discrimination is added to the list of societal transgressions.

¹¹ New York Times, October 3, 1983, p. B15; Barbara Everitt Bryant, Director, the Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1991, The National Data Book, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor Press, 1991), 111the Edition, p. 162.

Again reports printed by the United States Department of Labor can be presented to substantiate this evaluation. These documents show that:

The annual income for year-round full-time (50 to 52 weeks) employed black women rose from \$14,450 in 1986 to \$15,700 in 1988; similar income for white women was \$16,380 to 17,888 over the same period. Despite black women's near parity of income with white women, black family income (\$23,600) in 1989 was considerably less than that of white families (\$39,000).¹²

It is not just a question of earning less that intensifies the context of struggle for black women, but that unlike black men they must support themselves and their offspring on one quarter of the income that everyone is living better on. The consequences of minimal wages are usually spelled out in substandard living conditions, which in turn subjects the trapped victims to undue and unjustifiable distress and frustration. From all indications, the limitation of employment opportunities, monetary resources, as well as the tense social atmosphere and generalized deterioration in most urban black neighborhoods will continue to be the cause of concern for African American women who live in these areas, and especially among those rearing families without a mate or relatives present. Undoubtedly, the most prominent factor which distinguishes their tenuous circumstances is the economical disadvantageous position from which they must operate their embattled households.

The foregoing accounts of employment and social trends will help delineate and objectively assess the sources of role conflict that most single black mothers experience. These factors also play an essential part in making an empirical determination of the exact relationships between causative variables and their choices of coping tools. Subsequently, all of the preceding references were cited in order to achieve three main goals:

¹². *Ibid.*, p. 162.

First: Present social facts that will both carefully document and define the context of struggle as a concept delineating the external boundaries of the social forces which influence and shape the plight (yesterday and today) of many minority females living in the U.S.A. today. The adoption of such connotations would make allowances for weight being properly placed upon the true genesis of current social dilemmas that are attributable to flaws in the social system rather than resting total blame on personal mistakes or misconduct. While the act of giving birth out of so-called wedlock is a very private affair, much of the ensuing hardship and discord can be alluded to the inequities of sexual and racial discrimination as to individual error. "Since the 1960s, Blacks have experienced many external negative pressures. Social changes in the larger society filter out and affect ... Blacks, as well. The sexual revolution, a climbing divorce rate, and a return to conservatism and subtle racism have brought new challenges for many Black families. Although many Black families surmounted these pressures," Chapman notes that "many others still anguish in the hopelessness of the situation."¹³ Consequently many more African Americans have been thrown into a single status as a result of death, divorce, desertion or other forces over which they have no control.

Second: Review the historical chronicle of minority females in order to understand variations in individual responses to situations of conflict, which appear to be inherent within the infrastructure of their motherhood roles. Besides, it would be presumptuous, if not short sighted to initiate an in-depth study of adaptation to role conflict within a subgroup like black single mothers without properly setting the stage. Inasmuch as social disorders of the larger world do impinge so heavily upon the one parent unit, understanding and demarcating the exact outer limits of their problems, is a preclusion before undertaking this research. In the past, the provider/mother has been and continues

¹³. Audrey B. Chapman, "Male-Female Relations, How the Past Affects the Present," Black Families, Harriette P. McAdoo, ed., (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publication, 1991), p.191.

to be an essential role for survival of the black family. This is especially true in cases where the estranged spouse or unwed father is unwilling to pay alimony and/or child support or the runaway legal daddy cannot be located or ended up in jail or addicted to drugs, or the unemployment line.

Third objectives are twofold: a) To isolate and examine factors like the multiplicity of maternal duties, the current changes in feminine roles and family structure, as significant sources of role conflict. b) To describe and assess the impact of urban residency upon the coping strategies of (115) single black mothers. Indeed, current transitions have seriously challenged traditional two parent family models. Furthermore, prevailing epidemics of drug abuse, crime, violence and AIDS permeate black neighborhood tend to intensify strife and economic hardship for everyone, but especially for the "Truly Disadvantaged" members of the black subculture. Undoubtedly minority female heads of household and their children have been first to feel the debilitating and negative effects of these urban trends. Many leading theorists like Lee Rainwater and William Yancey in fact contend that current disorganization of the family has very little to do with the legacy of slavery. Furthermore, both scientists state the "present family forms and functions and ... behavior patterns ... are distinctly urban products with a dynamic history of their own. The forms, as in the case of the family headed by the female, may be the same but the context in which they fit and function has probably changed in important details."¹⁴

Lower socio-economic levels and critical deficiency left by the void of missing male figures are two of the most common themes publicized in newspapers, magazine, books, journals and all other forms of written matter. Poverty and disorganization were factors also often repeated and consistently associated with the female

¹⁴. Lee Rainwater and William Yancey, The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), p.318.

headed household. Many writers substitute terms like -- husbandless homes, fatherless families or husbandless mother, father absent units. This small but cogent point was recognized by Robert Staples, who commented: "Most contemporary research on the black family has been concerned, not with the issue of household structure, but with that of family membership. In particular researchers have been preoccupied with the question of who heads the family unit."¹⁵ Their descriptions of these households tends to paint similar attributes of being poor and/or lower working class. There seems to be some slight agreement among some well known sociologists, like Joyce Ladner and Robert Staples, who see a strong link between class, tenuous economic circumstances and the proclivity toward higher rates of female headed households.¹⁶ Staples does not cite migration of black women to cities as contributing to family disorganization, but he emphasizes instead slavery as the key causative variable. Rainwater and Yancey's findings come closer into accordance with the premises upon which this study is based.

Evolution From Traditional to Transitional

Obviously much of the literature cited here does tend to overemphasize the impact of the loss or absence of the male figure. However, little or no serious inquires have been made into understanding the full import or role conflict upon the values, attitudes and life styles of the women themselves. If the female parent was considered as an object of study, she has usually been treated only as an integral part of the family rather than as a separate and independent individual, with her own aspirations, hopes, fears and dreams.

¹⁵ Robert Staples, The Black Family: Essays and Studies (2d ed. rev.; Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1976), p.47 and pp. 145-148.

¹⁶ Joyce A. Ladner, Tomorrow's Tomorrow The Black Woman (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), pp.131-136 and pp. 175-181.

which may extend beyond the immediate fold of the consanguine circle.¹⁷ Yesterday's mother was expected to stay home, rear the children, attend dutifully to her spouse's needs and above all be a good spotless housewife. Women of this era were also socialized to accept secondary positions to men, to be well groomed if not prettified, shy or a little retiring and preferably nonaggressive and selfless, all giving, forgiving and totally sacrificial beings.¹⁸

Although a bit critical, the foregoing statements do constitute a fairly accurate caricature delineating some of the guidelines for what social scientists refer to as Traditional Feminine Role Models*. Supposedly, along with these regulations came certain unspoken assurances that adherence to these rules of normality entitled Mrs. Average America to share in the Great American Dream.i.e., A providing mate and a house in the suburbs.¹⁹ Unfortunately, these notions have remained largely idealizations of the grand democratic scheme which many whites and most blacks will never be able to realize or achieve by any legal means. Neither have millions of single females been able to find the prince of their dreams who would make all things possible.

Autobiographies and biographies of hundreds of women clearly attest to the arduousness of their uphill struggles. These books and articles both document and concretely depict the actual matter and essence of gradual changes in feminine behavior. Indeed, the driving forces behind the slow progression from traditional to transitional role models took place years ago over a long period of time. These revisions can be easily visualized through the accounts of individual mothers' recorded reactions to all sorts of routine occurrences such as: time pressures, uncertainties, illness, work load, financial

17. Diana Scully, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Office: Women in Gynecology Textbooks, Changing Women in a Changing Society, Joan Huber, ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp.283-286.

18. Simone deBeauvoir, The Second Sex, (15d ed.; New York: Bantam Books, 1970), pp.1-28.

19. Sandra Hevey, "Down with Myth America," The Other Half, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, In., 1971), pp.62-64.

crisis, etc., etc. The foregoing list of parental responsibilities are almost never ending and never complete, but for the unwed mother, the weight of these obligations is generally compounded by the normal predicaments seen and felt by everyone else.

The year 2000 plus is only a little more than a decade away, but social expectations of women have lagged far behind, caught up somewhere in the memoirs of the nineteenth century. And yet, many women of today continue to emulate old fashioned images of outmoded mores. Why, with all the progress and material growth, should women in the U.S.A. be experiencing Ogden's proverbial "cultural lag?" Because "old myths die hard," says Barbara Greenleaf. "And one of the country's oldest and most strongly held beliefs is that the "real mother" is the one who stays home. Operating in splendid isolation, she alone is supposedly capable of doing a good job of raising her children. Any mother who ignores this myth by taking a job is supposedly courting disaster.²⁰ Of course such sentiments are either ignored or not endorsed by millions of female workers who go out to man the nation's offices, factories, schools, social services, etc., etc. Unfortunately, many mothers in the labor market do still feel perhaps a bit guilty about leaving their offspring to the care of others. And it is true that this quandary may pose a conflict of interest since they cannot be in two places at once. It is also true that some women feel inadequate because they are not able to give one hundred percent to career and equally one hundred percent to hearth and home.

Summary

While Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements agitated for overall social change and equality for everyone, economic progress, coupled with technological advancement supplied the real catalyst for revisions in feminine role models. Traditional

²⁰ Barbara Greenleaf, and Lewis A. Schaffer, M.D., HELP A Handbook for Working Mothers, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers, 1978), p. 2.

norms, governing the behavior of women, would not allow them the personal freedom, individual latitude in family relations and/or proper mind-set for mothers to be active and viable members of the Labor Force. Furthermore, the general public has been reluctant to reform the previously endorsed expectations. Consequently, a great deal of friction can be observed between the new modes and more conventional life styles of the past. Thus, it is easy to understand why the circumstances under which single mothers must perform dual roles are sometimes fraught with frustration, anxiety and conflict.

CHAPTER III
A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS
PART I
"THE CONTEXT OF STRUGGLE"

Black and White Women in The Labor Force

While black women do not have a monopoly on single parenting, they have set a historical precedent in dealing "with the problems of maintaining a job and having children long before it became a major concern to white women."¹ A review of the literature will also confirm the fact that there has always been a definite difference between racial groups, especially in terms of attitudes toward proper feminine role playing. These distinctions were clearly outlined by Andrew Slaby and Joan Sealy's study of college students' perceptions of sexual and parental roles. White subjects described "mothers as flamboyant or less practical than their fathers," while black respondents portrayed "their mothers in terms suggesting a more practical and less flamboyant."²

In the past, white women do appear to have suffered some doubts and distress about being considered unfeminine if they worked, especially in male typed occupations. Rossi and Astin's studies recorded young ladies they sampled as having professed; "they were afraid to choose a profession that might conflict with their own and their peers' definition of femininity." Until the 1960's, there was no such qualm among blacks and the image of working mothers and wives was positive and more or less taken for granted. In fact, the general mores of the subculture very much condoned the

¹. Audrey Johnson, "Familial Patterns - from footnote 1 of Professional Women," Trenton State College: Unpublished Paper presented at the annual meeting - from footnote 1 of Eastern Sociological Society; Boston, Mas., March 21, 1980, p.1.

². Robert Staples, The Black Family: Essays and Studies (Blemont, California: Wordsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1978), p.137.

employment of women, married ones, as well as those alone with children.³ According to Scanzoni, this classic schismatic and fractured role image of working mothers in white families does not occur in black households.⁴

Long before the advent of the new liberalism, a strong sense of independence was not only a required expectation but an impulse, born of necessity and thoroughly socialized into the character of every young girl who grew up in the ghetto. Autonomy is one of those givens in the subculture that any ambitious black woman knows she must possess and emulate in order to be self-sufficient. For her, survival is synonymous with the realities of becoming a self-supporting adult. Not just "Having It All," but being able to stand-up all by oneself, and to confront the system "all by one's-self." For these reasons, it is not an overstatement to describe the situation of single black motherhood in terms of a 'context of struggle.' Because, in truth, the historic effort to maintain and perpetuate the black family is in fact a chronicle of the lone female parent's personal sacrifice and devotion to her primal function. This accomplishment frequently required black women to not only provide for their young, but to do so under the most exacting circumstances. According to Paula Giddings it was the search for more money and better paying jobs that enticed greater numbers of women than men to move from the South; she writes that, "In 1918 a Bureau of Labor Statistics report noted that in 150 plants in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina, no less than 40 percent of the 28,520 workers were black women."⁵

Relocation of whole families across the Mason-Dixon Line was also prompted by maternal desires to protect the virginity of their daughters. These mothers

³. Robert Staples, The Black Woman in America (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1978), pp.15-16.

⁴. John Scanzoni, The Black Family in Modern Society (Boston: Published by Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971), pp.228-231.

⁵. Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), pp.142-43.

quickly recognized and seized the opportunity to benefit from the heavy demand for laborers created by nationwide war time industrial expansion. In writing about workers in Harlem, Ms. Giddings cited a post script from journalist and teacher, Elise McDougald, whose commentary read: "They were finally free from the cruder handicaps of primitive household hardships and the grosser forms of sex and race subjugation." The cities also offered them a better chance to measure their powers in "intellectual and industrial fields." In urban centers of commerce "these fields included more than teaching for significant numbers of black women."⁶ While they made considerable headway in raising the standard of living, their movements upward on the employment ladder tended to follow the lines of least resistance. In keeping with this pattern, "black women found jobs primarily in those places left vacant by the shifting of Hungarian, Italian, and Jewish girls to the munitions plants where higher pay was available." Consequently, any satisfaction they might have received from "working in the main stream of labor was tempered by their having to perform the dirtiest and most difficult tasks."⁷ Often there was little or no choice and so they have habitually stepped outside prescribed societal boundaries which govern the terms of acceptable behavior for members of the weaker sex. Furthermore, black women could seldom afford to be limited by conventionality, and traditional feminine models were really never applicable to a large portion of them.

Marriage, for instance used to be such a familiar and basic pattern of life for most white women that author Ralph LaRossa says his respondents just took it for granted.⁸ While affluent white females in the majority group usually "marry men in comparable social classes," their black counterparts from similar socio-economic status were generally observed by Scanzoni as having the tendency to marry downward.⁹ It is

⁶. *Ibid.*, p.143

⁷. *Ibid.*, p.143.

⁸. Ralph LaRossa, *Conflict and Power in Marriage: Expecting the First Child* (California: Sage Publications, 1977), p.106.

⁹. John Scanzoni, *Op. Cit.*, p.170.

perhaps the anticipation of the foregoing prospect, along with the higher incidence of divorce, separation and desertion that ultimately instills the desire to become economically independent. For this reason, most minority families feel compelled to educate their daughters as well as their sons. The preceding statements can be verified by Dr. Pauli Murray's testimony given before the Congressional Hearings on Sexual Inequalities in the U.S. In her words, "There is a special incentive for the Negro girl to go to school, it is more likely that she will be self-supporting or that she will carry a heavier economic responsibility in her family than a white girl."¹⁰

Educational and Occupational Status of Sample

Overall, in this study's sample aspirations to continue schooling and/or technical training are often most closely associated with career goals. No where does this tendency become evident than in the fact that ninety-two (92%) percent of women in this sample profess to have some determination to complete or further their formal education. In view of the high value African Americans place upon getting a good education, considerable tests were made to detect an empirical connection between these two factors and the key independent variables in this study. Any number of case histories can be cited to show how hard black single mothers have struggled and sacrificed to put children through high school and college in order to improve their life chances.

Indeed, leading theorists and writers unanimously emphasize the importance of an education as being one of black women's main routes to success. The reduction from forty-eight (48%) to thirty-one (31%) percent (1970-1981) in employment of minority females in service and menial occupations may be largely attributed to the

¹⁰ Pauli Murray's Report, United States Congress, Special Committee Hearings on Education, Discrimination Against Women, Congressional Hearings on Equal Rights in Education and Employment (New York: Bowker, 1973), pp. 358-360.

increasing numbers of enrollees in and graduates from secondary institutions of higher learning, especially among this segment of the population.¹¹ Some social scientists noted the decrease in percentages of black females employed in private households which continued to drop as low as twenty-two (22%) to twenty-three (23%) between 1987 and 1988. They attributed these descending rates to the growing percentages of "younger better-educated black women [in the labor force who] looked for and found higher-paying jobs."¹² Additional indicators regarding the significance of these trends are recorded by historians like Paula Giddings. In writing about the period between 1960-1970, Ms. Giddings made several cogent observations about work, training and social habits of African Americans. She states:

"[Black] parents ... encouraged their daughters to go to school ... not just [as] as a racial phenomenon but a class one. They went to school, to prepare for traditional female occupations.... The 1960 percentage of black female labor force in professional occupations was 7.2%, compared to 3.1% percent of black men.

Historically when black women were allowed or needed in occupations like nursing, teaching and government work, they moved into them in disproportionate numbers. In 1965, for example, in the Department of Labor, 70% percent of black employed compared to 40% percent of whites were women.¹³

Like their predecessors, many women in this sample work to support their households. Only two percent of them are non-working mothers. Sixty (60%) percent list income as the key motivation for working. The remaining forty (40%) percent said they are gainfully employed outside the home for family reasons. But, unlike their forbearers, the respondents' work histories differ in several respects:

11. United States Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary, Women's Bureau, Time of Change, Handbook - from footnote 11 on Women Workers, (1983), p. 29.

12. Ibid., p. 29. See also Statistical Abstracts of The National Data Book, edited by Barbara Everett Bryant, (United States Government Printing Office, 1991), p.106.

13. Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), pp. 329-330.

- a) A majority of this sample's single black working mothers are not located in menial or domestic occupational categories.
- b) While seventy-two (72%) percent of their forbearers worked as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers, at least sixty-five (65%) to seventy (70%) percent of this sample are employed as secretaries, teachers, nurses, social workers or in semi skilled slots as technicians, dental assistants, computer operators, and support personnel, and so on, in public and private industry.

Selected occupational categories for the sample compared favorably with national vital statistics. This finding is consistent with a report of the United States Department of Labor's Office of the Secretary Women's Bureau that found: "The proportion of black women in white collar work increased sharply between 1981 and 1989 from 51 to 74% percent." According to this document these improved conditions in the employment status of minority females reflected "their strong and continued labor experience and increasing educational attainment." By 1987 black women also made up sixty-six percent of all personnel in education, but they regressed to sixty-five percent by 1987.¹⁴

White collar and semi-skilled positions require either an extensive amount of technical training or a college degree. Obviously, it is difficult for the average American to further their formal education past the acquisition of a high school diploma. A decided break and interruption of schooling is one of the immediate consequences of early or unplanned pregnancies. While most single parents must work to support their households, pregnancies and family obligations are frequently considered to be serious obstacles for continuous employment in the lives of twenty-seven (27%) percent of all women in this survey. When asked about the main causes for interruption of their education, forty-five

¹⁴. United States Labor Department, Op. Cit., p.29. See also Barbara Bryant, Op. Cit., p.107.

(45%) percent sighted problems with family and child care as the most compelling reasons for dropping out of school.

In most instances, the single black mothers interviewed were not economically unstable. In fact, a majority of them lived at or above the levels of poverty. Their overall financial condition compared favorably with the standard of living index for one parent units in the rest of the country. They also mirrored to other national statistics; for example, ninety-eight (98%) percent of the sample were working mothers. This data is significant because it underscores the axiomatic presumption that black women usually form a larger portion of the labor force than white females.

Census reports for all employed black women in the U.S.A. show that "over 50 percent were in white-collar jobs in 1981 compared with more than 68 percent of white women." However, "in each white-collar occupation group there was also a smaller proportion of minority women than of white women."¹⁵ Even in this field their numbers remained static, with a slight decrease from thirty-six point four (36.4%) percent in 1970 to 35.9 percent in 1977. In this same study of "Occupational Distribution of Women," Alexis Herman noted that the only "significant, positive trend" could be seen in "the portion of black women in private household work, (generally a low-paying occupation), declined by one half over the seven-year period."¹⁶ For most African Americans these discouraging tendencies have persisted throughout the 1980s.

The employment outlook for African American females was also not enhanced either by the recession or the retrenchment in occupational categories where they had traditionally found work. They have been adversely affected by certain developments in the 1980's labor market. First: "New York had the unhappy distinction of being the only state in the nation to register zero job growth throughout the decade of the 1970's."¹⁷

¹⁵. Occupational Manual - from footnote 15, (U.S. Government Press, 1982), p.64.

¹⁶. MS. Magazine, Op. Cit., pp. 96-98. - from footnote 16.

¹⁷. The New York Sunday Times, (May 1, 1988), p.25.

Second: recovery in the Northeast, and more specifically in the New York Metropolitan area, has occurred almost exclusively in sectors of high technology. Although this area benefited substantially from expansion in such activities as finance, services, wholesale, retail and government posts, the enlargement of old firms and establishments of new ones have generally followed the ongoing pattern of relocation to the suburban or less industrialized parts of the state. Only a very few members of the black subculture are affluent enough to own cars to commute to work; alternative public transportation is expensive, usually not conveniently available, or nonexistent for workers living in the inner city. It is not surprising that the jobless among this group are more easily trapped within the urban confines with a hundred thousand other non-white immigrants who will accept below minimum wages. To make bad matters worse, "the city lost 62,000 blue-collar jobs, which amounts to one out of every seven jobs in 1979." These collapsed occupational slots were "for machine operators, assemblers and inspectors [that] ... have increased nationwide by 3.2 percent from 1983 to 1987. In New York City, the same category has dropped sharply by 14.4 percent."¹⁸ Thus, a vanishing stock of unskilled and domestic jobs in service industries in which as many as nine percent of minority female laborers no longer participated, were not being replaced (replenished) by assignments in other fields of employment.

Unfortunately, statistical data do not say anything about the human aspects of declining status of already disadvantaged groups. What about the responses of provider-mothers who must nurture and rear children under these distressing conditions? With the exception of black writers like Paula Giddings and Tony Morrison, little or no effort has been made to answer this question or look at the consequences in patterns of adaptive behavior among minority heads of household who live and work in embattled black neighborhoods like those in Providence and New York City. The research here is,

¹⁸. Ibid. p.74.

therefore, focused to show the empirical connection between these situational factors and the role performance of 115 black single women who must daily confront the stress of being city dwellers workers and mothers at one of the nation's most crucial points of social change and upheaval. .

Minority Females in Today's labor Force

Most single mothers in this sample do manage to cope with limited resources and routine pressures typical of urban non-white minorities, who live in metropolitan areas like New York City and Providence, Rhode Island. With the exception of a small portion of low income employees and welfare clients, a majority of them work and live above the levels of poverty. Attitudes toward work and finances are being used as indicators of the sample's expressed reactions to the distress and pressures of performing multiple and sometimes competing social obligations. Each mother's perspective about sources of her income; money/ work incentive; financial satisfaction were seriously considered as factors, more cogently related to role conflict than knowing how much she earns.

For these reasons, respondents were quizzed about the level of satisfaction with their jobs and their finances. Over half of the sample is recorded as being happy with present employment. It is of equal importance to note the figures in Table No. 3.0 which illustrates the negatively biased relationship between depression and role performance. Emotional responses to critical changes or heavy disagreements at home and at the work place can be triggered by a sense of loss or melancholia, which in turn augments weight of playing dual-mother/ provider roles. This outcome is clearly evident in the data displayed in Table No. 3.1. Here, half (53%) of single mothers who exhibited lower levels of depression also said they are "very happy with their employment."

**Table 3.0 - SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE BY
SELF REPORTED LEVEL OF DEPRESSION**

SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE	SELF EVALUATED LEVEL OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
POOR ASSESSMENT	79 % (34)	47 % (29)
GOOD ASSESSMENT	21 % (9)	53 % (32)
	100 % (40)	100 % (60)

PHI: 0.31772 :

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0012

Table 3.1 - JOB SATISFACTION BY DEGREE OF DEPRESSION (EXPRESSED)

JOB SATISFACTION	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
VERY HAPPY	14%	53%
A LITTLE HAPPY TO NEUTRAL	70%	30%
NOT HAPPY COMPLETELY DISENCHANTED	16%	17%
	100 %	100 %

CRAMER'S V : 0.424 :

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0001

However three-fourths (3/4) of the entire sample reports being "a little happy to neutral," but they are highly depressed. Sometimes pressures on the job are created merely by being the only token black worker, or the first African American female to be hired as a policewoman or supervisor.

Subsequently, both the manner and the ways a woman chooses to play the role of unwed or divorced mother or secretary at the office may be greatly impaired by depression coupled with disaffection with co-workers, or a biased supervisor. Bearing on this point is the interaction between job satisfaction and the respondent's self estimated job performance as seen in Table No. 3.2. Thirty-nine (39%) percent of working mothers who are "very pleased with the job," are also more likely to feel confident about themselves and their performance in the office or on the assembly line. Being assured and secure in executing the various roles they play does help these women keep a healthier balance and outlook on life.

Certainly, an uplifted and happier head of household would improve nurturing and rearing of children, and discourage mom from coming home in a bad mood, the way pop used to. Seemingly, many more women than men find it hard to separate their "fields of operation." Like their counterparts in the larger society, single parents in the sample also tend to bring problems from home to office and vice versa; they return to the household with all the troubles of the job. Worse still, they chatter on and on about the bad news from work, rehashing the painful incidences over and over, and then serving it all up with every portion of left overs at dinner time. In some cases, the absence of male company may encourage unattached mothers to confide in children, even young ones. Sublimation and the building of more adequate coping techniques can help to alleviate some symptoms of this tendency. However, the removal of the extended family or the loosening of ties with relatives is a more difficult replacement for the lone female who heads her own household, without a sufficient support system.

**Table 3.2 - JOB SATISFACTION BY
JOB PERFORMANCE**

DEGREE OF JOB SATISFACTION	SELF EVALUATED JOB PERFORMANCE	
	HIGH	LOW
1.00 VERY HAPPY	14%	53%
2.00 A LITTLE HAPPY TO NEUTRAL	70%	30%
3.00 NOT HAPPY COMPLETELY DISENCHANTED	16%	17%
	100 %	100 %

CRAMER'S V : 0.424 :

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0001

Since much of their personal and household difficulties stem from economic problems, specific questions were asked about how they supported themselves and their families. And whether they were satisfied with their finances? Sixty-five (65%) percent of these single black mothers responded affirmatively. Data on job satisfaction was consolidated into the following categories:

Group X = Value 1.00 (Very happy with job)

Group Y = Value 2.00 (Little happy to neutral)

Group Z = Value 3.00 (Not happy to completely disenchanting)

Forty-three (43%) percent of employed mothers in Group X are recorded as being happy with their jobs, but many say that they feel depressed. They also expressed doubts about their capabilities in dual mother/provider roles. According to frequency distribution of sample, forty-eight (48%) percent of respondents falling into the second Group Y, describe themselves as being "a little happy to neutral." Over seven eights suffer from melancholia and they too are unable to meet all of the maternal demands, while completing household duties.

The fact that both X and Y Groups comprise seventy-four (74%) percent of women who are satisfied with work does not contradict previous findings. This anticipated outcome merely reinforces earlier disclosures about the inverse relationship between improved role performance and depression reaction to role conflict. This relationship is also made slightly stronger when controlling for job satisfaction. Three way cross tabulated Table No. 3.3 shows that scores of associations rose from previous figures of .3177 to PHI's of .3936. This outcome seems to be consistent with the results of other cross tabulated tables which showed how negative attitudes about the execution of parental obligations help to augment melancholia among this group of women, who might otherwise be content with their financial and working conditions. Analysis of results seen in Table No. 3.3 and Table No. 3.4 also appear to suggest that job satisfaction has an

**Table 3.3 - SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE BY
SELF REPORTED LEVEL OF DEPRESSION**

APPRAISED ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
POOR	80 % (24)	41 % (7)
GOOD	20 % (06)	59 % (10)
	100 % (30)	100 % (17)

PHI: 0.3936 :

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0070

**Table 3.4 - PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT
BY ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION:
CONTROLLING FOR APPRAISED
ROLE PERFORMANCE**

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
HIGH LEVEL	67 %	28 %
LOW LEVEL	33 %	72 %
	100 % (40)	100 % (60)

PHI: 0.3312 :

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0339

appreciable and direct impact upon single mothers overall visions of herself, her career and her ability to adapt to the pressures of role conflict. Although a smaller percentage of mothers who view themselves as being totally disenchanted are less depressed, they too felt inadequate in meeting all of the multiple duties of mothering without a male partner.

PART II

SAMPLE POPULATION; A SOCIO/CULTURAL DESCRIPTION

"A Profile in Race and Gender"

The Color of The Black Experience

Despite difficulties on the job, provider-mothers prefer to work to support their households rather than to become welfare recipients. Since the **black experience** is inextricably bound to self-sufficiency, minority females still constitute a sizeable portion of the labor force. Indeed, a recent poll taken by *Ebony Magazine*, indicates that "those Black women who are fortunate enough to find jobs usually don't mind working. And that has nothing to do with Women's Liberation. Black women, for the most part, have always worked and contributed to the financial well-being of their families."¹⁹ On the whole, African American females have maintained a disdainful, respectable distance from the National Organization for Women's Liberation. The most outspoken critics denounced this sexual protest as nothing more than "a family quarrel between white women and white men. And on general principle, it's not good to get involved in family disputes."²⁰

Although they found the more extremist views of radical feminism most objectionable, some of the more broad-minded black women recognize the generalized social benefits accrued from N.O.W.'s agitation for sexual parity. This is especially true, particularly with regards to the passage of ERA. However, it was not for the lack of commitment to the mutually held goals of equality, but short sighted vision of black female participants in Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who were too immersed and preoccupied with the fight for civil rights, to the exclusion of all other causes. In her historical review of this period, Paula Giddings notes the slight attention given toward

¹⁹. Lynn Norment, "What Every Black Man Should Know About Black Women," *Ebony Magazine* (August 1983), pp.136-138.

²⁰. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), p.309.

addressing the issues raised by the machismo image of black men, and the growing dissension between black women and men.²¹ Nevertheless, since warring factions held similar ideologies about liberty and justice, they were able to occasionally work together across class and racial barriers. "But there is not only the question of color," wrote, Toni Morrison, there is also "the question of the color of the experience"²² As a well known writer and social activist, Ms. Morrison could be considered a spokeswoman. For this reason, her words, perhaps voice the sentiments of other members of the Afro-American subculture. "Black women are not convinced that Women's Liberation Movement serves their best interest or that it can cope with the uniqueness of their experience, which is itself an alienating factor."²³

Whether their refusal to join feminist groups in any significant numbers was a tactical error, is pure conjecture at this point, and must remain an open question until judged and critically examined by tomorrow's student of history. However, there are doubts about the wisdom of black women's failure to follow the successful example of white females in forming their own **united black fronts**. Even more serious considerations should be given to their negligence in shifting gears from an individualistic and altruistic approach to a universalistic stand in order to establish workable coalitions. Unfortunately, most of the interaction between minority females is usually social in nature, particularistic in type and circumscribed to short term goals. Thus, as the **civil rights movement** began to dissolve, so did all the intra-group actions. Consequently, there was no routinization of new enlightened ideologies and futuristic awareness wrought by the momentous events of the 1960's.

²¹. *Ibid.*, pp. 302-303.

²². Toni Morrison, "What Black Women Think about Women's Liberation," The New York Times Magazine, (August 22, 1971), p.15.

²³. *Ibid.*, p.15.

If examined more closely, there are good and just reasons why so few minority females become affiliated with national based groups, and the basic rationale is very simple. As a subordinated people, they have no familiarity with group affiliation. However, being products of an oppressive system, they have never been taught or encouraged to become politicized. By contrast, the instigators of the **liberation movement** were white women, already well versed in the management and manipulation of the "body politic." Even though they had been excluded from the decision making process, they are still members of the superordinate group. Therefore, in no way could their circumstance, past, future or present be identical to that of females of African decent, because:

- a) They were never stigmatized as black women have been.
- b) They were never subjected to total and complete debasement or public persecution, purely on the basis of their sex or color.
- c) They were never denounced by the 'body politic,' as a group of fornicating, domineering matriarches," raising delinquent children.
- d) They were never labeled in dirty spurious terms, nor negatively typecast, lynched, spit upon or treated as less than human.
- e) They were never psychologically brutalized, demoralized or utterly terrorized and tyrannized by racism and jim crowism.

Leading black writers and journalists were quick to pick up on this cue. Their position was well taken and precisely drawn out to show how and where the distinction between the hard predicament of Black women and the special status of Caucasian females did not match: "It is time that the definitions be made clear ... Blacks are oppressed ... white women are suppressed ... and there is a difference."²⁴ In the aftermath of a failed march toward freedom and the demise of Dr. King and his dream, black women were again

²⁴. Paula Giddings, Op Cit., p.309.

isolated and left all alone to stand or fall by the weight of their own personal resolve. It was only too natural for them to single-handedly attempt to continue the war against oppression. In fact, this display of rugged individualism by Frantz Fanon's standards is not unusual but quite common among subjugated people around the world. He hypothesized that, "The colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, whose only wealth is individual thought."²⁵ Actually the same principle was applied by Max Webber when he noted that the basic tenants of Capitalism rested securely upon free association of independent parties, who engage mainly in competitive exchanges.²⁶ In a neo-colonialistic system, solitary actions among members of a subordinated group may augment alienation and increase estrangement from their ethnic roots. Subsequently, in retreating backward into the stronghold of their private existences, minority females have also calmly reverted to an old, old pattern of defensive coping.

The end results of such splendid isolationism is often manifest in exaggerated pluralism and polarization which are twin forces at the center of pervasive division within the subculture to day.²⁷ It is, therefore, easy to understand why the prevailing spirit of non-cooperation and poor communication between Black women is all too apparent. Added to pettiness and distrust so typical of the outsider groups, they seem hopelessly divided. While these destructive tendencies are widespread, there are also positive sides to this paradox. One in particular is observable in the stoic manner in which African American females have individually dealt with adversities inherent within the context of their struggle for survival. On the whole, they have shown considerable ingenuity in overcoming current and outstanding social and drug related problems that are

²⁵. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of The Earth (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), p.47.

²⁶. Max Webber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p.139.

²⁷. Joyce Purnic, "Protests, Politics and Deep Emotions, Mix as New York Honors Dr. King, "The New York Times: Metropolitan News, (Tues., January 19, 1988), pp.B1-B3.

literally devouring their families. Because of sexism and racism, a large number of them are locked into hard, dead-end jobs at the bottom of N.Y.City's computerized back offices. When questioned about how the typical Black female laborer felt, one reporter answered by recapping the situation in the following terms: "Yes, we work hard all day too. We must contend with the pressures of Corporate America or the tensions of the life on the assembly line. We are just as physically and mentally exhausted as any man at the end of the day, and we don't welcome additional pressures at home."²⁸

Hassles at the office can be a source of stress and conflict which usually generate anxiety. Pressures in the business world often become more strained and intensified by the variations in cultural, racial and sexual mixtures representative of office/or administration staff and support personnel in both private and public industry today. In fact, these attributes embody characteristics of an unwritten superficial ascriptive scale "assigned to individual [employees] without reference to their innate differences and abilities." According to Audrey Johnson, the occupational structure of Corporate America "is reflective of the powerful influence of ascriptive upon the selection and placement of individuals in certain positions."²⁹ In her research on "Professional Black Women," she used Edward's Personality Scales to measure and assess differences between black and white workers, in terms of their socially acquired traits and values. One of the main postulates of this study is based upon the following premise:

From the perspective of business management principles, and more importantly, practices, it is important that certain types of individuals are placed in certain positions, i.e., salesmen are predominantly white, corporate presidents and officials are white, etc. As this rationale goes, it is

²⁸. Lynn Norment, *Op. Cit.*, p.138.

²⁹. Audrey Johnson, Professional Black Women. (New York: New School For Social Research Press, 1976), p.129.

socially created dictum that precludes blacks from these [higher/or better] kinds of occupational careers.³⁰

This information is pertinent, not so much for the important details about the national employment status of African Americans but because this same state of affairs is applicable to a large portion of this study's sample. And almost one third of these respondents said that being female and being black does present obstacles to their occupational goals and their opportunity for career advancement. On the whole, most of these women are preoccupied with immediate concerns of family care, pregnancies and money problems as being more essential to their economic survival. While working conditions, interpersonal relationships, as well as intra-group conflict on the job are cited here, they will not enter the statistical analysis, but merely be acknowledged as a 'relevant social fact.' Nevertheless, considerable energies were spent in an effort to fully understand where each single parent places her emphasis in balancing the work versus home equation. From this perspective some select incidences of bias on the job will be cited in Chapter IV.

Positive Approach to Role Reversal

'Alone' is a graphic truism, which expresses the singular status of urban female heads of household, for whom "having it all: equates to "doing it all," --"doing it all by one's-self." Shouldering the full responsibilities of provider role means also coming home to take on an equally heavy load of housekeeping duties while also handling family squabbles and other difficulties at the end of a trying work day. The tenuous position of solo parenting has been accentuated by the erosion of extended family ties. Unfortunately, urbanization has accelerated the breakdown of communication among members of the larger consanguine circle. Consequently, there is little support or protection from the embrace of the strong kinship group of past years.

³⁰.Ibid., p.129.

In the absence of an uncle or brother to help bring up fatherless children, black single mothers are frequently drawn into personal confrontations with wayward teenage offspring, (especially boys), some of whom really do need strong male guidance and masculine role models. Therefore, many single mothers must patiently forbear with the revolt of a generation of misfits. Even youngsters from 'good homes.' are often spun out on crack or regularly abuse other chemical substances. The daily newspapers are filled with stories dramatizing youthful inclination toward self-annihilation and outwardly aggressive actions that are carried out in total disregard for the rights of others. Who's to blame? The larger society would say, why of course, the single parents, higher divorce rates and broken homes, or better still lazy black women who have all those children out of wedlock and live comfortably on welfare.

In reality, an objective assessment might reveal that the generalized irresponsible behavior of their offspring is largely the outcome of a poor and ineffectual education, as well as being symptomatic of an era of violence and corruption. Not only have defunct, defacto integrated public schools made bad matters worse, but upon graduation, single mother's children are prone to become prime candidates for failure. About half the graduates and half the dropouts alike, may expect to remain unemployed, underemployed, or loitering on the block and live at home and continue to be supported by the female head of household. Here is where the loss of jobs and industry is being personally felt by millions of single parents, especially urban dwellers. Any number of older mothers in the sample complained of "having to put up with," grown children who should be maintaining their own independent residence. The prolonged adolescence of adult offspring, remaining at home past the legal of age of consent, has become a fairly common problem.

Instead of being crushed by these almost overwhelming odds, they individually fight back and the mere existence, growth and continuation of the Black family

attests to the single mother's staying prowess. According to Cynthia Epstein, the most successful achievers have been required to overcome a derogatory "status set ... [of] being Black and being a woman." Both ascriptive castes are "one of the most cumulatively limiting." Yet, she notes that despite these sets of "immutable negatively evaluated statuses-- the sex status of female and the race status of Black --did not result in negative consequences but formed a positive matrix for a meaningful career."³¹ In examining this same issue, other social scientist concur with her in viewing these attributes as stigmas of "double jeopardy." In denoting what Frances Beale saw as the dual problem of Black women, "she stresses the impact of economic exploitation and its relation to both sex and race."³²

Both writers call our attention to the staunchness exhibited by many Black women who daily confront their oppressors and in so doing adroitly overcome twin debilities. Ms. Epstein is essentially correct in having sensed that African American females seem to possess an indomitable quality of resilience that has enabled them to survive slavery and the cruelty of Jim Crowism. Her study focused specifically in two respects: First: "This is a report on a set of ... deviants." All of these Black women were professional and exceptional achievers. "Most women interviewed ... came from families which stressed middle-class values, whether or not their in- comes permitted middle-class amenities."³³ Second: The main objective here revolved around an attempt to analyze the reasons why these thirty-one respondents were successful in subduing the dual detractions of possessing the wrong ethnic and sexual rankings.

It is of particular interest to this study that Ms. Epstein's observations also took notice of the outstanding abilities which the individual Black woman has shown in

³¹. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, "Positive Effects of the Multiple Negative Explaining the Success of Black Professional Women," from the *Changing Women in a Changing Society*, Joan Huber, editor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p.151.

³². Robert Staples, Op. Cit., p.118.

³³. Cynthia Epstein, Op. Cit., pp.150-157.

developing strategies to effectively deal with conflicting family, social and business roles at the same time. In referring to the "unique situation of the Black women," she states, that although other groups of women had faced similar experiences "with negatively evaluated statuses," few of them have been the maligned "subject of myths and misinterpretations often applied to behavior or minority group members." Nor had they been forced to create the types of "mechanisms [which African Americans] use to cope with strains ... mirrored in their experiences."³⁴ However, she paid little or no attention to answering questions about how non-white minorities were able to succeed in attaining all of these marvelous accomplishments. For in truth, perhaps it may be just as important to know exactly what strategies are evolved by some women, especially single Black mothers, to assist them with the management of multiple and competing obligations. In fact, very few researchers have given any serious considerations toward empirically deciphering the true nature and consequences of role strain. On the other hand there does seem to be an abundance of literature verifying the presence of role conflict, as well as the real trauma endured by mothers suffering from the effects of such tensions. Furthermore even less interest has been shown in objectively assessing the ways and means in which problem solving techniques are employed by the average Black woman.

Other Notations About the Sample:

Many social scientists are inclined to select subjects either from groups of professional or middle class Black women or from lower working classes or teenagers. However, if role conflict is judged purely on the bases of data gathered solely from such groups, both analysis and results are more likely to be skewed. In this inquiry, therefore, a wider range of ages (17-50+) and a broader spread from various classes and divergent life styles were explored. Information on socio-economic background, occupational and

³⁴. *Ibid.*, p.156.

educational statuses was collected in order to encompass a full schedule of categories from unskilled, domestic laborers to highly skilled technicians and professionals. Subsequently, the sample does, in most respects, reflect the profiles of very ordinary unattached women who are mothers living in urban areas who work and keep house, or combine duties of school, homemaking and parenting. From this perspective, the one hundred fifteen (115) single Black mothers in this sample all meet the following stipulations:

- 1) They were single mothers, either never married, divorced, widowed or separated,
- 2) The majority of them headed their own households.
- 3) They lived in a city of 5,000 or more people.
- 4) They were all members of a non-white minority group.
- 5) They were available, willing and ready to cooperate in answering the questionnaire.

The fact that sixty (60%) percent of these respondents were installed in white collar positions may be attributed to the higher mean age of sample. The average age of participants ranged from 33 to 39 years of age. Subsequently, most of them had completed a minimal amount of schooling, and a large number of other subjects were already accomplished or versed in business, office management and various technical skills. Inasmuch as this group of mothers had attained an acceptable educational and occupational status, they could be described as a relatively stable aggregate. In other words, they possessed at least the rudimentary qualities needed for survival in the U.S.A. today.

A Brief Forwarding Note

Details in Chapter III have presented materials especially designed to show the relations between changes in feminine roles and current socio-economic trends. Since the struggle of today's black single parent is so tied to the past, it seems wise to examine

cogent points in the chronicle of working provider-mothers. A comparison of the conditions of minority heads of household with that of their white counterparts is intended to clearly delineate the predicament of most African American women as separate and different from Caucasian females. The extensive documentation of transitions in occupational categories will be used as a historical backdrop for future discussion in Chapter V and Chapter VI.

Considerable effort has also been expended to outline the situational factors that are most likely to produce "bad stress" among members of the subculture. Statistical analysis has led to the selection of perception of role conflict as being the most reliable index of role strain. Because discord in the motherhood role set is not always visible, the sample's overall reactions to pressures of multiple social obligations are expressed through their recorded levels of frustration, depression and guilt. Both Chapter IV and Chapter V contain fuller and more in-depth descriptions of the causes of Role Conflict.

CHAPTER IV

PART I

A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW OF ROLE CONFLICT

Delineating the Conflicting Motherhood Role-Set

Like millions of other females in the larger society, many women in this sample must execute a variety of different responsibilities. Most mothers, and especially single ones, are forced to wear many hats at the same time. For this reason, the female head of one parent families may typically be a guardian, a custodian, a maid, or an office worker, who could also be a storyteller, gardener and community organizer, girl scout leader as well as "chief cook and bottle washer." Robert Merton was one of the first sociologists to recognize the importance of actors' concurrent role enactment of several social parts. In introducing the concept of 'Multiple Roles,' he defines this term as a complex of roles associated, not with a single social status, but with the various statuses (often, in differing institutional spheres) in which individuals find themselves.¹

Since the various obligations of motherhood must be performed simultaneously, it is necessary to rank them properly. Under the Traditional Models, conflicts between competing tasks were held at a minimum because all of woman's work was centered in the home. Prior to the 60's, female employment was frowned upon, and women, especially those with families, only worked in cases of necessity. However, with the advent of Women's Liberation, this common place practice became the focal point of imminent changes in Traditional Role Models. "Whether or not the feminist movement caused, catalyzed, or simply articulated previously unspoken desires, the reality is that

¹ Robert Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (New York, London: The Free Press, 1968), Pp. 223-224.

many women today want to be employed."² It is also true that ultrafeminism of the 1980's does seem to have encouraged more women to get out of the house and to seek and establish careers for themselves.

The broadening of occupational choices has required considerable adjustment in order to balance the ratio between energies a single mom expends in the office as opposed to those which she imputes into household duties. Indeed Michael Lamb contends that equality of employment opportunities between the sexes cannot be achieved "until men relieve women of some traditional responsibilities for home and child care."³ His cross cultural analysis of family forms reaffirms the need for reapportioning the work load carried by all mothers, regardless of their marital status. Conventional approaches to mothering are often dated and extremely hard to apply in the resolution of current social problems. On the other hand, transitional models give today's` women both freedom and flexibility required to meet the demands of modern single parenting..

Coping with change and multiple roles may call for creative and innovative behavior. Thus, a lone mother's unanticipated reactions to critical situations often force her to step outside the boundaries of conventional mores. Networking and self help groups have reappeared, particularly among progressive whites. Many of these collectives became good copy material for articles on human interest stories. One such group was cited, May 27, 1984 in the New York Sunday Times. On that date, the journalist noted that "the 57th Street Study Club was founded three years ago to serve as a network of support for women in the professions who are between the ages of 25 and 40."⁴ Cooperative child care is one of the most important services offered by this circle of neighbors.

². Michael E. Lamb, Nontraditional Families: Parenting and Child Development, (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1982), p.49.

³. Ibid., p.110.

⁴. Judy Klemesrud, "A Support Network for Young Women in Dentistry," The New York Times/Style=Sunday Issue, (May 27, 1984): p.65.

While a large portion of minority females have set a precedence for being single working parents, their approaches to mothering and to securing day care were usually more conventional and individualized. Subsequently, they were more often reported as using almost any means or any one available to look after minor dependents in their absence. These practices were observed and documented by Joyce Ladner's research. She noted that in the black community parents frequently left children in the hands of older sisters and brothers, neighborhood children, or alone, because they are unable to afford regular baby sitters or nursery school.⁵ Many women in our sample confessed to implementing some rather unorthodox methods of nurturing and homemaking. One respondent recalls taking a furnished room with a female landlord who acted as a baby sitter during nine to five week days. Both distance and other complications made it difficult for her mother and/or relatives to travel to the city in order to help her with the two year old toddler.

Indeed, the decline in extended family ties does raise doubts about the strengths of black single mother's support system. This issue was addressed by several different types of questions, regarding the amount of contact and frequency of consultation with relatives and friends. Question No.18 asked: "How often have you and your family discussed your educational and occupational plans.?" Seventy-eight (78%) percent of participants do maintain lines of communication with other members of their kinship circle. The sample was evenly divided, when asked: "How much do your children help you?" Seventy-three (73%) percent of them seek aid from specific sources, such as close kin within the nuclear household: their mothers , their sisters and brothers, their ex-spouses or boyfriends, their offspring (especially older children) or a combination of all these. About nineteen (19%)percent receive support from friendship networks and/or member of the

⁵ Joyce Ladner, Tomorrow's Tomorrow, The Black Woman, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), Pp.70-71.

extended family. Only ten (10%) percent of this subgroup could afford to hire outside help.

Undoubtedly, child development, rearing practices, and sibling rivalry are all topics of grave importance, especially in the life of black provider/mothers, but interaction between parent and child will not be underscored in this thesis. Only limited treatment of family and social relations are being examined from the narrow perspective of cooperation, expectations and demands which other family members place upon their unmarried head of household.. A large number of women stated that aid from the consanguine circle played a vital part in the quality and delivery of maternal services. The aid and comfort of offsprings, male companion or estranged spouses, or grandmothers are required in order to meet the emergencies, and carry out the daily routine. No support system can function well without the assistance and cooperation of every member of the household.

For this reason, the black single mother's self-estimated role performance can be influenced by the amount of household responsibilities which 'the other' assumes, especially in her absence. This observation is reflected in Table No.4.1. In this particular analysis, the responses of sample were divided into two basic categories: 1) Group -A: Includes participants who receive most assistance from members of the immediate nuclear unit. 2) Group -B: Encompasses participants receiving aid mostly from extended family members. Respondents falling in latter category constituted less than one quarter of the entire sample of unmarried parents. They used hired help, relatives, close friends, services of professionals, and/or agencies. Only twenty nine (29%) percent of the entire sample could afford to hire help to obtain relief from the distress and discomfort of being pulled in many different directions, by a number of competing demands. Subsequently, cross tabulations for this group elicited no significant relations between depression reaction and role performance, when controlling for the effect of hiring help. This outcome, contrasted

Table 4.1 - DEPRESSION REACTION BY PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT WHEN CONTROLLING FOR AMOUNT OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY = VALUE OF 1

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	DEGREE OF EXPRESSED DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
HIGH LEVEL	59 %	33 %
LOW LEVEL	41 %	67 %
	100 % (22)	100 % (33)

PHI: 0.25444:

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0592

NOTE: Value 1:00 = Group A represents those single mothers who are dependent upon members of nuclear family to share or take over the household responsibilities in their absence.

sharply with the higher rates of depression reported by ninety-two (92%) percent (shown in table No.4.2) of the remaining three-fourths (3/4) of the mothers who could not afford to pay for outside helpers.

Although their assistance is obtained from family members within the nuclear unit, respondents in Group -A may not have fewer problems or less anxiety. In many instances, they often get more negative feedback from non-paid helpers who are obliged to share the workload or they respond out of guilt which often makes them feel obligated to do so. Sometimes, single minority heads of household are frequently at odds with their own mothers and fathers, due to divergent views or methods of child rearing. Grandparents may be inclined to overstep their bounds or "spare the rod and spoil the brat." According to responses to questionnaires, thirty (30%) percent of their older offspring "pitch in occasionally," but they do not wish to be held totally responsible for younger sisters and brothers, at least not on a regular basis.

Of course hired help can also present a few headaches. However, if carefully chosen and well screened, a good domestic employee is more manageable and willing to follow orders. Outsiders are certainly less likely to get into the provider/mother's family affairs or become a part of her personal upsets. Since the average single black parent faces a great deal of difficulty and trauma in the streets and on the job, they need more compatibility, concern and understanding from their supporters at home. Otherwise, these women will not only continue to suffer more episodes of melancholia but over half of them shall go on feeling inadequate in the execution of their maternal duties.

For these reasons, three quarters (3/4) of that portion (40%) of the sample experiencing both higher degrees of depression and higher levels of perceived role conflict are usually found among full time working single mother's whose children (regardless of age) expect them to continue nurturing and homemaking task on a full time basis and also hold down a full time job which pays the bills. The data in table No.4.2 seems to suggest

**Table 4.2 - SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE
BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING
FOR ABILITY TO HIRE HELP**

APPRAISED ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
POOR	92 %	41 %
GOOD	8 %	59 %
	100 % (24)	100 % (32)

PHI: 0.52175 :

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0003

that when feedback is positive, respondents are more likely to adopt a correct and healthy response toward pressures of multiple and competing obligations. This, outcome helps to substantiate the close association between perception of role conflict and depression as illustrated by the figures in the preceding Table No.4.1. No statistical significance could be found through cross tabulation of these same variables for Group (B). (See Tables in the Appendix). The variable, 'Household responsibility,' demonstrates reliability as a controlling factor; thus enabling the researcher to evaluate the relationships among key variables, while also testing the impact of negative versus positive attitudes, especially in regards to an improved role performance. The introduction of black single mother's self-evaluated role performance also has a direct but negative impact upon mother's attitude toward the execution of her maternal obligations. Using 'Household responsibility' as the controlling factor does reaffirm the existence of a viable relationship between role performance and perceived role conflict, and also between role performance and depression reaction to the pressures of performing multiple tasks. The results of cross tabulations seen in Tables No.4.3 and No.4.4 also underscore the decidedly strong association between higher levels of depression and conflict among unmarried single parents who do not feel they can complete household duties and fulfill other maternal obligations at the same time. However, the higher correlations do not explain or clarify the increased sense of strain among respondents who are assisted by members of the nuclear family.

What can be stated emphatically here? Answer: Simply that the outstanding facts indicate some eighty-six (86%) percent of participants shown in Table No.4.3 do register higher levels of perceived role conflict than mothers who rely on outsiders or hire domestic labor for auxiliary help. They also appear to be less prepared to deal with pressures of other responsibilities in addition to mothering. Furthermore, the foregoing disclosures might be interpreted as viable indexes of negatively biased relationships in households where the matriarch's support system is inadequate or not well defined.

**Table 4.3 - PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT
BY ROLE PERFORMANCE; CONTROLLING
FOR AMOUNT OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY**

APPRAISED ROLE PERFORMANCE	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH LEVEL	LOW LEVEL
POOR	86%	50 %
GOOD	14 %	50 %
	100 % (22)	100 % (32)

PHI: 0.37415 :

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.00597

**Table 4.4 - DEPRESSION REACTION BY
ROLE PERFORMANCE; CONTROLLING
FOR AMOUNT OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY**

APPRAISED ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF EXPRESSED DEPRESSION	
	HIGH LEVEL	LOW LEVEL
POOR	86%	52 %
GOOD	14 %	48 %
	100 % (21)	100 % (33)

PHI: 0.34912

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.01030

Seemingly, the assistance from the respondent's mother (or mother-in-law), father-mother, spouse, children, dyads may be helpful, but these arrangements may or may not reduce stress or ease the distress of normal melancholia. In this instance, the reality of discord is less pertinent than the single parent's perspective toward her particular predicament. Certainly, adequate assistance is essential in avoiding work overload.

In a majority of cases, respondents do have someone or some agency to back them up. In New York City, the accessibility of Day Care Programs vary from borough to borough. These facilities are easier to reach in the northern section of Providence, Rhode Island, where interviewers spoke with twenty single Black mothers. There are no comprehensive Day Care or Medical-Health Plans specifically geared for relief of unmarried female parents in either of these cities. In New York City, publicly supported Agencies are generally filled to capacity with long waiting lists. However, seeking and maintaining some type of substitute child supervision makes up only one step in the process of building coping mechanisms. Consequently, no complete assessment of single black mother's support system can be obtained without probing beyond the issue of Day Care. For, indeed, to become adequate copers, these women must also accomplish several other feats:

- 1) Come to terms both with themselves and their situations of conflict.
- 2) Overcome internal strife within their own homes.
- 3) Support and maintain their families, while trying to survive the rigors posed by a hazardous, impersonal and bitterly divided urban community.

Importance of Workload as Related To Role Conflict

From the 1960's through the 1980's more extensive opportunities to work appeared to have improved woman's options to expand their role-sets. These developments brought about widespread changes in feminine roles. However, the increase of mother/ provider roles largely effected more white than black women. Among those most prone to be involved were predictably from the ranks of younger Caucasians and the true believers of radical feminisms. However, so far as millions of Afro American females were concerned, they had already been freed and long since been handed the privilege of leaving home and children behind to hold down a nine to five job. Earning a living is neither a novelty nor a statement of independence, but rather a fact of life.

Indeed, eighty-five (85%) to ninety (90%) percent of respondents answering the questionnaire worked to support their households. Only fourteen to twenty percent of this group said they derived personal satisfaction or enjoyment from working. Perhaps these are some of the most plausible reasons why a large number of black women were never excited about The N.O.W. proposal to liberate them to go out and join the labor force. Most of the grandparents and mothers of today's black single mothers were breadwinners. Ninety six percent of the sample worked and ninety five percent of their mothers were employed; seventy two percent list themselves as being either semi-skilled or white collar workers. Only ten to twelve percent are professionals.

Today most women, regardless of color, work, and the majority of them do so out of necessity. Upon becoming a parent without the male partner, or through loss of a mate, "society, with it's double image encourages only two choices: motherhood as a career or motherhood as a six-week 'disability' leave to recover from childbirth."⁶ The authors' assessments are fairly complete, with the exception that they failed to elaborate upon the consequences involved . Only a welfare or alimony check can cover the first

⁶ Lucy Scott and Meredith Joan Angwin, Time Out For Motherhood. (New York: Jeremy Tarcher, Inc., Distributed by St. Martins Press, 1986), p.15.

choice. And the second event is tantamount to being or becoming a Mother Provider. In both instances, the inevitable outcome equates to playing dual parts of mother and father. In essence, the lone female parent must undertake the burdens of 'reversed roles.' But this condition may not always be accompanied by sufficient financial resources or adequate support systems. It is, therefore, necessary for unmarried mothers to make personal sacrifices. They often put in prolonged hours of work and also endure the drudgery of performing repetitive tasks. The deadening effects of routinized chores and an infinity of pressures are all sources of role strain. Naturally, work overload is a common complaint and even some of the most positive respondents felt equivocal about motherhood. Any queries about their performance seem to elicit an emphatic agreement with other mothers who also express feelings of being overburdened.

Reflections on Traditional vs. Transitional Feminist Images

The unsettled debates about the transitional models are still clouded by a great deal of contradictions, both within the minds of individual females and the general public. The new imperatives of the 'now generation' place considerable emphasis upon helping women upgrade their activities outside the home. Current trends seem to popularize the all-round female as a stylish career woman who is characterized as being smart, well groomed, assertive and independent. In addition to all of these qualities, the "now" prototype of success must also be ultrafashionable and somewhat maternal or at least project a Madonna image. Life styles of modern working women, especially single heads of household, may also reflectively mirror other aspects of feminist modification. For example, many of today's mothers have begun to assume a more self-serving attitude toward the conflicting demands of single parenting.

In this sample, younger African Americans were more prone to voice their dissatisfactions about multiple and competing social and family obligations. They express little or no guilt about leaving their offspring to better themselves or go out to hold down a full time job. One twenty year old student mother, whom we interviewed at City College campus, appeared to be genuinely concerned about her son. Yet, she also confessed to spending only a minimal amount of time with him. Her exact words were: "Here's my home number, you can try reaching me there, when and if you can catch me in. My mom keeps the kid." Besides being a parent and full time enrollee at CCNY, she also worked a regular job and enjoyed some social life as well. Now, the frank discussion about these subjects is not meant to be a judgmental dictum but merely presented as the recorded remarks of unattached mothers, verbalizing their innermost reactions to stressful situations. There are no perfect mothers, either today or yesterday. Nevertheless, the expression of such sentiments do serve as an indicator of changing values among single Black women, who are raising families without male partners. Indeed, such revised attitudes toward mothering are all the more significant when compared with contrasting comments of older mothers in this sample.

Mothers over thirty-five years tend to speak in terms of family, first. A larger portion of women in this category are other oriented and less involved in gratifying their own personal needs and ambitions. While mature respondents say they are able and willing to give more of themselves, they also appear to feel more sensitivity and culpability about neglecting children and household duties. Inasmuch as sixty percent of the sample is 33.5 years or older, it is not surprising to find that close to seventy (70%) percent say they "had given up other activities which they enjoyed" in order to fulfill their parental obligations. Most of those in the over forty category had been socialized into giving first considerations to their primal functions. Many of them had been brought up according to conventional custom, which instilled service and sacrifice as a natural and inalienable

attribute of the female parent. Such blind acceptance cannot be fully appreciated except in retrospect, or perhaps fully understood through the reminiscent reflections of one Adrienne Rich: She states: "Typically, under patriarchy, the mother's life is exchanged for the child, her autonomy as a separate being seems fated to conflict with the infant she will bear. The self denying, self-annihilative role of the Good Mother (linked implicitly with suffering and with the repression of anger) will spell the death of the woman or girl who once had hopes, expectations, fantasies for herself."⁷

In the past, society only expected the average young lady to keep up with her spouse, her house, and her offspring. Now, she must not only do these things well, but also excel in the business and professional world. Pressures to achieve have been heightened by the media and feminist ideologies which raised expectations for all groups concerned, especially minority factions. While the new order 'pointed the way to a forward motion,' neither public institutions nor the private sector supplied the financial, physical means or psychological buttress required to help women obtain all of the proposed avant-garde objectives. Both the Civil Rights Movement and ERA wetted the ambitions of millions of poor whites and African Americans, but their actual progress did not quite equal the career advancement of upper middle class white feminists. In fact, minority females lost ground in the labor market between 1975 and 1982 (See statistics on employment status of minority females shown in Chapter III and in the Appendix). Although the more mobile members of the subculture wanted to be a part of the Modern American Dream, they lacked the monetary resource, educational background and support system to do so. Consequently, single Black mothers who do wish to join the mainstream must balance off their aspirations against the immediate needs of their families.

⁷. Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born. Motherhood As Experience and Institution (New York London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), p.166.

PART II

COPING WITH DISCORD IN TRANSITIONAL MODELS

There are no simple answers to questions facing unattached parents like the twenty year old black student attending C.C.N.Y. She merely wanted to succeed, perhaps even at the cost of spending time with her child. Parental judgment to remain absent must be weighed against the investment in her talents which would make it possible for her to become a more trained and secure provider in the near future. This is not a critique of the mother's actions here, but rather an attempt to illuminate the importance of time management and selection of priorities as two essential aspects encountered in the course of resolving role conflict.

The quandary around the simultaneous performance of concurrent statuses, can and does pose problems even for the most competent administrators and workers. In the course of their study, Dr. Lucy Scott and Ms. Meredith Angwin also found that the amount and quality of time by energy expended may be a perplexing equation even for older women and seasoned professionals whom they interviewed. Obviously, each mother must learn to balance this imputation in order to mediate her level of stress and frustration. This point was particularly well illustrated in a few of the complaints which they heard over and over again. Phyllis Mack had received counseling to help her learn to cope with generalized panic. she experienced during two hour periods when the baby sitter picked up her daughter. So overwrought was this client, that she didn't know whether she should "wash [her] hair or write a lecture or go shopping or try to sleep," or just relax and muse blankly, in order to best utilize this brief moment of respite. "This is how ... a professor, describes her life as a single mother in an article in Ms. magazine."⁸ Her lamentations were

⁸. Lucy Scott and Merdith Angwin, *Op. cit.*, p.77.

all too familiar as they are universal outcries of work-overload, i.e. "I have too much to do and to little time to do it."

Such are the paraphrased words typically expressed by subjects participating in the doctoral research. Similar cliches were also presented in Dr. Scott's book; Time Out For Motherhood. The following quotes from "Debby MacIntosh, another single mother," who noted, "They say that when you have the time, you don't have the money, and when you have the money, you don't have the time. When you're a single parent it's not one or the other, it's neither."⁹ It is not surprising or hard to understand why many women feel trapped, frustrated, and depressed about being good mothers, or for that matter even pondering the question of becoming parents or remaining childless. The myths and contradictions about modern motherhood are alive and well; certainly, they have not been banished by the ideology of "Having it All." Under the present circumstances, however, stress and discomfort of conflicting demands are often heightened by excessive striving to reach impossible goals. Seemingly, the transformation of feminine roles is a rather complex matter, still in a state of flux, and whose consequences are often felt before their effects can be seen or fully assessed. Barbara Greenleaf's commentary comes closest to unraveling the mystification of our modern dilemma. "In every era most mothers have worked very hard, [but] they did not seem to be under as great an emotional strain as the mothers who work in America today." According to this authority, the contrast has become so obvious, "that working mothers fared so much better in earlier times and in other cultures because they got far more support from their family and society than their modern American counterparts."¹⁰

With or without help, the expenditure of time and energy is a finite matter, and there are severe limitations upon the ultimate manipulation and deployment of these two

⁹. Ibid., p.77.

¹⁰. Barbara Kaye Greenleaf and Dr. Lewis A. Schaffer, HELP A Handbook for Working Mothers (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Publishers, 1978), Introduction, p.xi.

factors. At best, single mother's expert usage of these variables can assist women in developing more adequate coping mechanisms. However, on each and every occasion that individual female parent does try a new way of overcoming some little difficulty, she creates revised plans of actions for the control and coordination of multiple and often incompatible obligations. And it is their repeated enactment of adjusted responses that become the basis upon which women have modified old patterns of interaction and also laid fertile grounds upon which to build transitional roles and role models. While not quite a fait accompli, the transformation of feminine roles is now a part of our current history. Now, the issue is not whether we should accept transitional images but rather to decide how to deal with them.

In making appraisals of present day changes, it is important to remember that the new feminist models are largely the unanticipated outcome of adaptive behavior which women implemented to meet the accelerated demands of providing and mothering. Today's working female head of household is naturally confronted with a wider variety of activities than her forerunner of yesteryear. According to The National Family Opinion Poll of 1985, "Motherhood is rewarding but difficult. It is [also] a lifetime commitment even ... when [your] children are grown and independent." For a majority of mothers in the U.S.A. today the full meaning of this role goes even deeper: It is being a parent for all times: It's "love, joy, sorrow, frustration, sacrifice, and heartache all rolled into one."¹¹ Although all of these are mere words, they do reflect profound sentiments which help to clarify the dialectics, (refers to the pros and cons involved in developing approaches to mothering), of an all consuming obligation.

The propositions cited in preceding paragraphs were presented because they exemplify mothers who frequently suffer some doubts and confusion about setting

¹¹ Louis Genevie and Eva Margolies, The Motherhood Report: How Women Feel about Being Mothers (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1989), pp. 410-411.

priorities. The increasing complexities of life in the 70's and 80's also made it harder to properly rank various tasks according to their order of significance. Eighty-two percent of the sample of black single mothers do set priorities. For teenagers and youthful Afro-American adults, parenting must be deferred until their schooling is completed first. Predictably, student mothers in the sample complained most about being pressured by the burdens of role conflict. All mothers in the clustered grouping were forced to grapple with the hard choice of deciding where to place emphasis, i.e., whether to give preference to work first and home secondly, or regard home as their primary duty and subordinate their career goals.

Unfortunately, the revision of norms governing female behavior has not helped to resolve the riddle of "work values vs home values." In his study of *Nontraditional Families*, Michael Lamb reasserted the importance of balancing the ratio of these two values. He notes that time is infinitely bound up with careers and the degree of orientation to an occupation. But commitment "is apt to be thought of as a undimensional, fixed quantity variable, with high work involvement on one end of the continuum and high family involvement at the other."¹² While some advisories counsel women to separate the job from their personal lives, In , the minds of female workers there are no set lines of cleavage between the two.

Indeed, many employed respondents seem to have difficulty in making distinctions between the things that should be kept at the office and those private matters that belong strictly in the bosom of the kinship circle. "It is not easy to correct instinctive habits;" so say any number of the women in this sample. And many of them recall dragging their children, or grand children along to the office. LaRoach devoted a whole chapter of her book in an effort to fully address this matter. She pointed out the negative impact of such faux pas, labeling them as being not only extremely unprofessional, but

¹². Michael Lamb, *Op. Cit.*, p.21.

detrimental to career advancement, many parents in this survey recall bringing minors to work on more than one occasion. Others admitted to being preoccupied with mentally engrossing projections about household problems and/or schedules to pick up children at the end of the working day. Their concerns and fears in this area are shared equally by employees in general. "Psychologists, educators and personnel managers say that as the discussion of family issues becomes common at large corporations and small businesses working overtime has joined the care of sick child as one of the most stressful conflicts for parents, trying to coordinate their work and family responsibilities."¹³ In similar instances, unattached black working mothers reported that they were genuinely harried by the prospect of being asked to remain at work after 5:00 p.m, because refusal to do so would cast dispersion upon them or be interpreted as a hostile or non cooperative act. Quite often, the need to secure or maintain a job, forces black female laborers to impute a disproportionate amount of time into the work place. A good illustration of these statements can be seen in one such incident where a West Indian nurse declined to work another back-to-back eight hour shift. This stout rebuff led to an altercation between the nurse and her Irish Supervisor. Mrs. X was soundly reprimanded, but she felt justified inasmuch as sixteen hours of duty added unreasonable pressure and kept her away from her teenage daughter too long.

The foregoing cases more than substantiate Michael Lamb's postulate, i.e. that "parents highly committed to to their work" will be the one most likely "to experience frequent conflict in relation to their family responsi- bilities."¹⁴ Apparently, the ideal of combining career and household has become an assumed standard of achievement. However, even acclaimed, newsworthy Feminists have begun to speak out about the high price of climbing the ladder of success. Take for example, Ms. Felice Schwartz, executive

¹³. Janet Elder, The New York Times, (January 17, 1989), p.C1.

¹⁴. Michael Lamb, *Op. Cit.*, p.21.

administrator par excellent, who wrote an article entitled: "Management Women and the New Facts of Life," which was published in *The Harvard Business Review*. "The author ... declared flatly that women in management cost corporations more than men do." Ms. Schwartz, therefore, advised employers to make the most of the situation "by identifying two groups early: the 'career primary' woman, who can be worked long hours, promoted, relocated and generally treated like a man; and the career and family women, who is valuable to the company for her willingness to accept lower pay and little advancement in return for a flexible schedule." On March 8, 1989, Tamar Lewin reviewed this piece and recaptioned the re- print: "'Mommy Career Track' Sets Off a Furor."¹⁵ Of course, this type of journalism always draws criticism, from both the pro and con side of the issue.

Despite all the adverse effects of Ms. Schwartz's assertions, the real danger lies in the possible corporate backlash. On the positive side, Mr. Lewin notes, "it could also encourage a coming of age for working women and a new flexibility among employers in dealing with maternity and child care."¹⁶ . Debates about maternity leaves are not just a good topic for public forums, but quite often become the substance of civil suits at the municipal, state and national level. Where racism and sexism are concerned, even the right to bear children may be used by a biased supervisor or employer as an excuse to dismiss unwanted minority personnel. Just recently, the New York City Corrections Department received notice of a pending case. It seems the city has been taken to court, because several Afro-American policewomen "say the department officials pressured them to terminate their pregnancies or face the loss of their jobs."¹⁷ At any rate, the preceding situations are clearly demonstrative of the high prices some working women have paid in order to maintain both home and career at the same time.

¹⁵ Tamar Lewin, "'Mommy Career Track' Sets Off a Furor." *The New York Times*, (March 8, 1989), p.A18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.A18.

¹⁷ Evelyn Hernandez, *The New York Newsday* (May 24, 1989), p.19.

If there are no simple answers to the aforementioned paradoxes, then there are probably no uniform nor uncomplicated solutions either. Certainly, a majority of the sample population seem to feel that their survival involves more than grit, sweat and tears. And it's not just juggling chores or keeping up with the harsh pace of running between home and office and back again. It's more a matter of having sufficient resources, help and energy to carry out a good strategy. Most of these mothers had fashioned some scheme to help them order their existence and sort out the most troubled areas of difficulty. A review of surveys revealed that their conflicts did not stem so much from combining dual and triple duties, as mastering the hard choices of setting priorities, securing and maintaining a stable support system, and managing time pressures.

Critical Areas of Distress

Inasmuch as cognition is the initial step in any procedure, a considerable amount of emphasis was placed upon deciphering black single mothers views about role conflict. As minority heads of household, almost everyone in this sample spoke about shared experiences which they have in common. Here are some principle types of difficulties these mothers identify as frequent sources of trouble:

- a) Limitations on time and energy
- b) Financial problems
- c) Disaffection with home environment
- d) Dissatisfaction with employment
- e) Inadequate or non-existent Support Systems (Refers to more than Day Care Services)
- f) Being unprepared meet emergencies

Each mother must become an astute problem solver in order to master these "critical areas of distress." "How To Do Manuals," often identify the very same trouble spots as those

reported by many women in this survey. Indeed some of their strategies were also suggested by professional counselors who publish guidelines for successful life management for modern working females. A composite list of the most frequently recommended remedies used by employed mothers can be located in the appendix.

A Forwarding Note

Almost every woman in this survey expressed anxieties about being forced to bring up their children in present day urban environments. Many of them spoke candidly of their feelings regarding excessive frustrations, stultifying depression, aggravations and other forms of emotional distress. Since these emotional responses deal more with internal conflict, they can be treated as socio-psychological phenomenon. While this study does have a behavioristic orientation, it is essentially limited to an examination of the concrete social indicators of role strain and adaptive reactions to discord in the motherhood role set. Therefore, it seems sufficient to merely acknowledge the importance of the relationships between psychological factors and the single mother's adjusted response to role conflict.

The appropriate response to critical areas of distress encourages the single black mother and sharpens her abilities to cope mentally and spiritually with the challenges of performing under pressure. It has often been necessary for them to make allowance for and adjust to degrading myths and derogatory stereotypes. They have also contended with outmoded standards of the traditional American ideal of motherhood which emphasizes that the mother's primary responsibilities are to raise the children, manage the home and take care of the working spouse. Inherent within this model is the underlying ideological suggestion that those mothers who find themselves alone (particularly those who are alone due to desertion, separation or divorce) as supporters of their families, have failed in some way as a wife, as a parent and as a woman.

CHAPTER V

BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS COPING MECHANISMS

A Preface to Conflict and Coping

The answers derived from the responses of 115 minority women, clearly indicated that at least sixty (60%) percent of them perceived relatively low levels of role conflict. In the light of their individual contexts of struggle and the current state of unrest prevailing in municipalities like New York and Providence, Rhode Island, this particular disclosure comes as an unanticipated finding. Since most of these respondents are faced with stressful situations, it seemed logical to expect that a larger portion of them might feel pressured by their efforts to perform multiple duties.

Although seventy-five (75%) percent of them grew up in communities of over five hundred thousand, their present existences are more complex than that of their predecessors. Most unmarried urban black mothers, like those in this sample, reside in areas of the cities which are violent and hostile places. Previously, drugs and widespread epidemics of crack and aids did not threaten to dissolve the propagation of the black family. Poverty was known, but unattached provider/mothers in the subculture could always scratch out a living by finding some sort of job. Currently, the pressures of supporting a one parent household have been intensified by two events: The first factor of significance can be traced to a continuing economic decline in most industrial centers across the country, especially along the eastern seaboard. This unhappy outcome has often weighed more heavily upon poorly educated minority females and most other African Americans under twenty five years of age. Since these respondents typify such a group, it is not inconceivable to presume that they too are personally affected by the overall deterioration and generally poor conditions now seen in predominantly black urban areas.

The present circumstances in this city (as described in the New York Times) were cited and carefully delineated in Chapter III because these insights reflect those of a larger portion of this sample. The potential for becoming long term displaced workers has been heightened by the collapse of occupational slots for assemblers, operatives and kindred workers. These trends along with widespread automation and massive layoffs in both the private and public sectors have increased fears of dismissal among working mothers in this sample. Sixty percent of those respondents in routine white collar positions "wanted out" or felt insecure. Only ten percent classified themselves as professional and twelve percent as skilled.

The second event, the domestic social class of the last three decades, can be seen in the crisis in public school; the drastic upsurge in crime and violence; and in the spread of illegal drug dependency among mothers themselves, as well as their families. Many older women in the sample are alone, but forced into raising their grandchildren. Seemingly, some unwed younger and/or addicted parents tend to abdicate their responsibilities, leaving the care of their young in the hands of grandmothers. Quite a few of the women over thirty-five report "prolonged adolescence" among their young adult offspring, who remain idle at home. These people don't work, don't go to school; in fact, they don't contribute anything to the household but trouble.

All of the above factors have increased welfare rolls, prostitution, homelessness and also contributed to growing numbers of child abuse and child negligence cases among minority female heads of household. This is not meant to imply that all of these social disorders should be taken as features typifying this entire sample, but rather that such calamities do effect their lives and increase their tensions. At the same time, full disclosure would make note of a tiny percentage of those respondents who were suspect of using crack. Others acknowledge being generally unstable professed hustlers and alcoholics. They were willing and able to make some cogent suggestions on questions of

"How to get over?" or "How to use or misuse any available friend or relative." At best, their methods of coping fill a few pages of Chapter V and VI with some interesting anecdotes. However, these remedies are not being recommended as viable ways and means for the resolution of role conflict.

Relationships Between Three Key Variables

This study is focused upon understanding the relations between the precursors of strife within and outside the households of minority females, and the strategies they develop to help them deal with these distressful conditions. It is, therefore, necessary to discern where and how urbanization, adverse socio-economic changes, sexism and racism impact upon the 'color of the black experience.' From this stance any serious analysis of single black mothers' coping mechanisms must probe beyond examining the suggested methods of planning time or setting up good routines in order to master the tensions derived from simultaneous performance of multiple and sometimes competing social obligations. Since the daily struggle to overcome work overload and generalized discord on the job and at home cannot always be seen, such difficulties must be depicted through the sample's expressed attitudes toward their motherhood roles. Thus, the group's generalized perception of role conflict was taken as the most concrete index of less discernible turmoil they profess to encounter. A test of single mother's tolerance for stress was measured by self evaluated ratings.

In Part II of the questionnaire, question QQ28, each participant indicated whether she felt strained or overtaxed in trying to handle the demands of multiple duties. The intensity of responses was registered on Likert Scales of six possible choices, ranging from extreme disagreement to strongly agreeing (or just agreeing). The results of

frequency distribution can be seen in Table No. 5.1. (See Appendix). An analysis of narrative interviews and manipulated data revealed that fifty-one (51%) to sixty (60%) percent of the sample said they do not feel unduly pressured or frustrated by all of the aforementioned economic problems, high rates of violence, crime, crack and disease. If this is true, then why did a large percentage of them claim to experience so little pressure from either a stressful environment or the strain of performing multiple duties? Answering this question made it necessary to take other controlling factors into consideration.

Further cross tabulation of data unveiled the presence of a positively biased association between level of depression and level of perceived role conflict. What was foremost in redirecting the research? Follow-up inquiry led to further exploration into the strong association between perception of role conflict and depression, which were both related to and precipitated by role strain. In fact sixty-five (65%) percent of that portion of single mothers who did feel some depression also tend to experience considerable frustration. In other words, almost two-thirds (2/3) of those respondents suffering appreciable amounts of melancholia also register higher levels of role conflict. Additional cross tabulation of data corroborate these partial correlations as shown in Table No. 5.2. There seems to be no better way to fully understand these results without also attempting to explain this outcome. There are several probable explanations:

Age played a rather important and influential part in determining how these black single mothers viewed their circumstances. In this study, age is treated as an independent variable with a direct link to perception of role conflict. This positive impact is clearly reflected by results depicted in Table No. 5.3, showing that sixty (60%) percent of women over thirty-five were less pressured in other roles, while only forty (40%) percent of those between ages seventeen and thirty-four felt uncomfortable dealing with strains in their role sets.

**Table 5.2 - PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT
BY ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION**

LEVEL OF DEPRESSION	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH LEVEL	LOW LEVEL
HIGH	65% (30)	39 % (24)
LOW	35 % (16)	61 % (37)
	100 %	100 %

PHI: 0.25619

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0141

**Table 5.3 - MOTHER'S PERCEIVED
ROLE CONFLICT BY AGE OF MOTHER**

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	AGE OF MOTHER	
	20-34 YEARS	35 YEARS & UP
HIGH LEVEL	60%	40 %
LOW LEVEL	40 %	60 %
	100 % (52)	100 % (48)

PHI: 0.19978

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.040

When controlling for the effects of age, cross tabulations of depression X perception of role conflict were significant. The association between these variables is made self evident by data displayed in Table No. 5.4 . Here higher degrees of depression among younger mothers is directly related to higher levels of perceived role conflict. This finding might suggest that the sixty (60%) percent of women in this sample who feel less pressured, are more likely to be located among mothers over thirty-five or forty years of age. However, no significant correlations are obtained through two-way cross tabulations of age and depression. (See Table No. 5.5/Appendix.). The reasons for such differences in the outcome of these correlations must be sought in the pervasive nature of depression which is a widespread and commonly felt emotion. It is, therefore, no surprise to find that a fair percentage of all participants do experience some degree of melancholia. However, the exact strength of this association was not discovered without taking two other additional steps: a) Two-way cross tabulation of perception of role conflict by depression reaction to role strain. b) Three-way cross tabulation of age.

By using age as a controlling factor, it was possible to illustrate the strong impact of role strain among women under twenty to thirty-four years. Almost thirty-nine (39%) to forty-five (45%) percent of this group seem to be more inclined to develop strategies in order to alleviate or remove the conditions that produce stress. Table No. 5.4 suggests that the interaction between these two variables has a tendency to arouse subject's adaptive behavior. Thus, it is easier to see and to confirm the significance which age plays by examining that subset of respondents who sustain both high levels of perceived role conflict and high degrees of depression. This principle can be seen, for example in the cases of T.H. Teems and Vonnie Willey: Upon becoming single parents both of these young women, took several steps to recoup academic and career goals which had been interrupted by early, unplanned pregnancies. Instead of "lowering their sights," they raised former aspirations and prepared to return to school.

Table 5.4 - PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING FOR AGE OF MOTHER - VALUE = 0.00

LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ROLE CONFLICT	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
(HIGH LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT) FEELS UNDER PRESSURE IN OTHER ROLES	83%	45 %
(LOW LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT) EXPERIENCES ONLY MINIMAL OR NO PRESSURE IN OTHER ROLES	17 %	55 %
	100 % (23)	100 % (31)

PHI: 0.37984

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0121

NOTE: Value 0.00 = Respondents under twenty to thirty-four years of age

When controlling for age, older respondents with lower levels of role conflict also exhibit more modest levels of melancholia (See Table No. 5.6). Here the lack of statistical association is indicative of a weaker correlation, and, therefore, the presumed relations between these variables seems to hold less importance for women over thirty-five than it does for their younger counterparts. While many of these mothers suspend their education to raise families, they are more likely to have revised occupational choices. One quarter (1/4) of them had already achieved desired career objectives. Subsequently, they are usually more satisfied with their current employment situations.

Relationships Between Mom's Age, Family Size and Children's Age

This study hypothesized a relationship between mom's age, number and ages of children. It was thought that younger mothers, with younger children would have greater role conflict. There is little or no hard data to support the supposition of an existing and close link between family size, single mom's age and discord in one parent households. Nevertheless, the presumed relationship between perception to role conflict by number and ages of minors does appear to have more relevance for younger mothers in this sample. An analysis of data simply shows a greater frequency of perceived role conflict and depression among respondents with babies and/or minors under school age. Forty-four (44%) percent of all women under twenty to thirty four have children under five or six years. Half (22.7%) of those single parents in this category express both higher levels or role strain and considerable amounts of depression. By comparison, only seventeen and one-half (17.5%) percent of all respondents over thirty-five years had under school-age children in their homes, and a mere six (6%) percent of them felt under pressure in other roles. While older women tend to exhibit much lower levels of real or imagined

Table 5.6 - PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING FOR AGE OF MOTHER - VALUE = 1.00

LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ROLE CONFLICT	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
(HIGH LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT) FEELS UNDER PRESSURE IN OTHER ROLES	50%	35 %
(LOW LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT) EXPERIENCES ONLY MINIMAL OR NO PRESSURE IN OTHER ROLES	51 %	66 %
	100 % (20)	100 % (29)

PHI: 0.37984

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0121

NOTE: Value 1.00 Indicates respondents who are 35 - 50 years of age plus

role strain than their younger counterparts, twenty-seven (27%) percent of them have more than an average number of children.

In the light of current socio-economic status of most urban black single mothers, it is no surprise to find that eighty-four (84%) percent of them had two or less children. These households will be denoted as "small family." Sixteen percent of all remaining one parent units with three or more members are being defined as "large families." As many as four percent of the latter group contained other bloodline relatives and as well as non-related and adopted persons who share the 'double household.' Younger women and student mothers usually reported less than two children who are adolescents or infants. Older women often list more members in the household and many of them are not related by heredity. Some mothers in this category have sons and daughters from thirty-plus years down to babies of one year. Only recently have significant numbers of Caucasians begun reporting live births for females in their late forties and early fifties. Incidences of pregnancies and successful deliveries is neither new nor novel for black women in this same age bracket.

An initial hypothesis of this study asserts that the presence of adult offspring in the home would be closely associated with a reduction of role strain and work-overload for elder female heads of household. However, results of research show that a portion of older mothers with grownup relatives at home still feel some degree of conflict and melancholia. (See Table No. 5.7.) Almost three quarters of these respondents talked about difficulties caused by young adult children, especially those remaining at home after age twenty-one, or returning due to divorce, separation, substance abuse, layoffs and the like. Although they have lower levels of perceived conflict, almost one third (1/3) of these women also suffer from higher degrees of depression.

**TABLE 5.7 - PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT
BY DEGREE OF DEPRESSION; CONTROLLING
FOR FAMILY EXPECTATIONS**

LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ROLE CONFLICT	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
HIGH LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ROLE CONFLICT	67 % (21)	44 % (20)
LOW LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ROLE CONFLICT	30 % (09)	56 % (26)
	100 % (30)	100 % (46)

PHI : .26009

SIGNIFICANCE: .0234

Many women rely heavily upon their mothers, their male companions, for aid and comfort in meeting day to day schedules. A brief review of Table No.4.3, in Chapter IV seems to indicate that assistance from unwilling children or relatives does not necessarily change the lone mother's perspectives or feelings of being overwhelmed. In the previous discussion in Chapter IV it was noted that one quarter (1/4) of the subsample Group A, was dependent upon older children to complete homemaking chores. Unfortunately the offspring of these single mothers are not always cheerful, willing housekeepers. Any number of respondents retorted: "When it comes to helping me out, my kids act like captured slaves; forced into doing household duties." These involuntary hands must be prodded; closely directed and kept under constant surveillance. When reluctant youth must be so coerced into helping around the house, they frequently become restive, and they half heartily perform the assigned task. A majority of the sample said minors and children under five or six years are usually no help, but siblings over ten might pitch in occasionally.

Today, millions of black and white families contain male and female children who continue to reside at home past adolescence. A recent survey by the U.S. Census Bureau found that 18 million single adults 18 to 34 years old were living with parents, an increase of about a third since 1974.² In the subculture, the 'doubling-up of households' is not a new phenomenon, but the revival of an old custom. According to Robert Hill forty-one percent of female headed households "absorb other related children." Compared to only "seven percent of similarly-situated white women, [who] had relatives under eighteen living with them. The families headed by elderly [black] women take in the highest proportion (48 percent) of children."³ Robert Staples also took note of these

2. Alison Leigh Cowan, "Parenthood II; When the Nest Won't Empty," The New York Times (March 2, 1989), p.1; p.30.

3. "'Doubling-up' was a common occurrence in many black families, particularly among new arrivals to urban areas. Recent Census data relating to subfamilies suggest that a differential between blacks and

compounded family forms. He states: "Households ... have shifting memberships, but they maintain for the most part a steady state of three generations of kin: males and females beyond child-bearing age; a middle generation of mothers raising their own children or children of close kin; and the children."⁴ This particular pattern of living may be seen more frequently in times of economic downturn and societal upheaval. Social scientists would be wise to take a serious look at these developments, because all families in America will be experiencing similar trends in life styles, regardless of race, creed, class, or color.

What and how do all of these findings relate to the problems of this study? Directly, in terms of the inherent problems and conflicts which naturally arise in situations where several families share the same home. This point is well illustrated in the case of "Madame GeGe." This older black single mother lives in the Bronx, New York with four of her five grown-up children. Recently, she found herself in constant battles with two homosexual sons who were always at war with a younger heterosexual son. Then there is J.R., the eldest child, he is a thirty-two year old alcoholic. He manages to escape being a vagrant by returning home at regular intervals. Being unstable he found it difficult to retain a job and was often observed badgering his mother, other relatives and friends to give or loan him a few dollars in order to buy alcoholic beverages. J.R.'s dependency on his mother and on alcohol make him susceptible to a strange mix of emotions that run the gamut of love/hate and violence. Two of the other siblings work, but the third child was on welfare until his Aids related death, at age 29 in 1986.⁵ Prior to his untimely demise, the middle son's common-law spouse and two children also lived with Madam-GeGe."

whites still exist." See Robert Hill, The Strengths of Black Families (New York: Emerson Hall Publishers, 1972), p.5.

⁴ Robert Staples, The Black Family: Essays and Studies (Belmont, California: Wordsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1978), pp.125-126.

⁵ Leon J. Saul, Emotional Maturity: The Development and Dynamics Personality and its' Disorders (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1971), p.7; pp.174-176.

The youngest son Chad had to be threatened before he would perform the duties of maintenance man at the premises where his mother was superintendent of building and grounds. Although Chad received a salary of \$798.00 per month and a three room apartment as fair compensation to act as porter, he expended more energy smoking crack and hanging-out on the block than completing his daily work assignments. These young adults seldom cleaned house, cooked or helped out with other homemaking tasks. They did stress Madam GeGe by bringing other displaced wayward youth into the dwelling place.

In her article entitled "'Parenthood II: When the Nest Won't Empty,'" Ms. Alison Cowan attempts to assess these matters in more positive terms. She states: "In an era when divorce and drugs strain welfare programs, the parental home has emerged as a place where adult children can retrench without burdening society."⁶ This journalist certainly does take a pragmatic and optimistic view toward our current crisis. Unfortunately, Ms. Cowan's suggestions would tend to temporarily relieve and placate the situation rather than resolving the problem. The depth and pervasiveness of the devastation caused by drug abuse and AIDS have had some rather serious and negative effects upon the American populace. And the most adverse impact is being felt in the subculture and especially within single parent households. Indeed, more socially conscious reporters decry crack is literally a "Destroyer of Families." In a New York Times article, Ms. Felicia Lee narrates the following account:

Family Court in Manhattan is an increasingly frayed conveyor belt of violent tales and misery these days, largely because of crack. The judges, lawyers and caseworkers who sift through the ruins of families are handling more cases. As pressures on social services ... mount, the court often finds itself

⁶. Alison Cowan, Op. Cit., p. 30.

assuming their role, giving advice and dealing with family disputes that never used to reach its dockets.⁷

This writer also describes a few cases commonly heard by Manhattan Family Court. She cites the following as typical examples:

A pregnant woman, her hair tied in a dirty scarf, answers a charge that she frequents crack houses and neglects her child. Five minutes later, the case is dismissed for lack of evidence. A mother, suffering from depression argues that she is able to handle her 15 year-old son, who hears voices, has swallowed razor blades and once carved his initials on his body. The boy was placed with the State Division for Youth.⁸

These cases not only reflect the acute nature of the present dilemma, but they characterize similar kinds of incidents reported by members of the sample population. One elderly respondent assumed legal responsibility for her teenage granddaughter because the child was abused by her natural mother. This change of guardian precipitated an appalling quarrel which left a deep rift between Mrs. Greer and her daughter who had given birth to two other children besides Lena. Both her advanced years and long hours of work as a nurse made it difficult for this grandmother to keep constant vigilance of her overactive and spirited charge. Like many other urban youth, Lena seemed to be fatally attracted to the glamour of street life. Some of her peers smoked crack and roamed neighborhoods until early morning hours. Between bad habits and poor judgment, she soon was arrested. One morning in the spring of 1990, her grandmother was asked to come to a hearing at Juvenile Court.

Suffice it to say, the judicial system is not set-up to handle the volume and complexity of "family matters, including paternity delinquency, child support and child

⁷ Felicia R. Lee, "Destroyer of Families, Crack Besieges a Court," The New York Times (February 9, 1989), p. A1. "In Manhattan, most of the court's nine judges hear as many as 40 to 50 cases a day in eight courtrooms or parts."

⁸ Ibid., p.A1.

abuse and neglect," as well as incidence of domestic disputes and violence. In the words of Judge McDonald: "You're talking about housing and crack and physical disabilities, sometimes all in one case. The extended families and social agencies just aren't able to deal with them."⁹ Again Madam GeGe's plight could be used 'as a case in point.' At the time of the interview (1987), she was making regular trips to court in an effort to evict the second son Edgar. Both he and J.R. provoked fights between siblings and other occupants of the household. They bitterly reproached their mother on several occasions, but the eldest brother did comply with his mother's request to move as soon as possible. Edgar, on the other hand, refused to leave, and continued to bring in undesirable male lovers. Because he is mentally unbalanced the family showed a great deal of tolerance especially in view of what they saw as outrageous behavior. While the judge granted his mother an injunction against further violence in the home, no professional or psychiatric help was sought and none was given. No other action would be taken to remove him from the premises until he found another place to live. Since Madam GeGe has the ability to best six feet men in any duel of fisticuffs, she did beat up Edgar, and could easily have ejected him bodily through the front door. However, she was torn by compassions of a mother who understood and accepted the fact that he was her sick son. And she loved him dearly.

As single head of this chaotic household, this fifty-eight year old woman registered a very high level of perceived role conflict. Although 'Madame GeGe' copes well with traumatic situations, she continues to suffer from episodes of extreme depression. A cross-sectional review of sample revealed that some respondents over thirty-five years were also disturbed by other types of discord within 'compound family units.' For example, Ella Odes' symptoms of melancholia had no medical basis, but she admits being despondent about the distance and indifference exhibited by her adult children. While returning to the classroom at forty plus years has given her an emotional boost, she

⁹. Ibid., p.B9.

still feels somewhat depressed about her overall condition. Her adult daughter and sons are not necessarily failures or a disappointment, and they are not troubling this rather middle class home in any tangible manner. However, they are not attentive nor do they display the deep sentiments of a concerned family. The most righteous indignation of the offended parent surfaced when she was asked: "What do you feel is the ideal number of children to have? Ms. Odes replied: "Why None!"

If so interpreted, these narratives might underscore the direct link between the quality of family relationships and the black single parent's attitude toward motherhood. Question No. 19 was designed to explore this issue. Respondents were quizzed about the amount of assistance they received from their children. Seventy-six (76%) percent of these women (seen in Table No.5.8) with non-supportive offspring said they are unable to carry out all of their maternal duties and complete household responsibilities at the same time. Three-fourths (3/4) of this same group of unmarried mothers also experienced more incidences of melancholia, on a more constant and frequent basis. However, when controlling for 'child support; cross tabulation with perception to role conflict by role performance, shows the relationship to be significant. (See Table No. 6.2.) On the other hand, cross tabulation of depression by negative reactions to role strain seems to both alter and produce scores of significance. The dynamics of this principle can be visualized by revisiting the case of 'Madame GeGe.' She claims her grownup charges "pitch-in only on rare occasions, but they expect as much help from her whether she is working or not." Since they are not trustworthy, she cannot leave the building in their hands for more than a few hours. Like most single heads of household 'Madame GeGe' is caught in the vise between time pressures and limitations of resources and energy needed to cope with all of her on-going crisis.

Table 5.8 - ROLE PERFORMANCE BY ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION; CONTROLLING FOR AMOUNT OF CHILD SUPPORT

ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
(AGREES +) Cannot meet or handle demands of motherhood	70 %	43 %
(DISAGREES-) Feels capable and adequate in meeting the demands of motherhood	30%	57 %
	100 % (20)	100 % (28)

PHI: 0.26864

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.06279

Thus, it seems reasonable to deduce that the intensity in degree of role conflict and depression tend to vacillate in relation to the type and nature of demands placed upon the working as opposed to non-working respondents. This deduction is supported by findings displayed in Table No. 5.9. According to these figures, eighty-five (85%) percent of the sample who do express more positive attitudes toward their maternal obligations also receive sufficient backup from relatives and other members of the compound family headed by minority females.

None of the foregoing accounts appears to substantiate the proposition, that older black single parents have an extra edge in coping with the trauma of their role conflicts. While emotional maturity can help one attain a good sense of balance in life, it carries no other immediate guarantees. On the whole, the self-evaluated role performance of older and younger mothers alike, is equally critical. Consequently, it is difficult if not impossible for these mothers to objectively assess the quality of the services they render. Assuming the full responsibility of providing and molding the future of another life form is an awesome and profoundly serious commitment. Naturally, younger black single mothers often feel more overwhelmed and insecure than their older counterparts.

Perhaps many of them are nervous and uncertain about their new status and role as single parents. Since some of them lack first hand experience, they may be expected to display anxiety and a deep sense of insecurity. Many respondents in their twenties also expressed the desire to explore and try new approaches to the current social disorders, but they felt constrained by doubt and fear. Others were just plain rebellious and rejected help and advice from elders, even their own mothers. Ideas about the character of the 'strong black woman' role are presently being altered by the more avant-garde members of the black subculture. However, the unmarried youthful parent is the one most frequently caught in the vise between transitional, versus traditional prototypes of the 'good mother.'

Table 5.9 - ROLE PERFORMANCE BY ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION; CONTROLLING FOR FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
(AGREES +) Cannot meet or handle demands of motherhood	77 %	15 %
(DISAGREES-) Feels capable and adequate in meeting the demands of motherhood	23%	85 %
	100 % (13)	100 % (13)

PHI: 0.61721

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0016

The circumstances of conditioning and custom help explain lower rates of perceived role conflict among all women in this sample. These two factors may be observed in the historically high percentages of labor force participation among minority females, as well as as their precedence for being provider mothers. Both these factors were discussed and carefully documented in Chapter III. Such known social facts are very obvious and they have often been quoted by other social scientists. It is also no secret that prior to the late 1970's the average unattached black woman, whether she becomes a single parent or not, has always been more familiar with these alternative family forms because many of her friends, aunts, sisters and other relatives frequently live in or operate female headed households. Consequently, any number of them tend to view the probability of unwed motherhood with a grace and compassionate understanding seldom appreciated by the larger society, until the advent of the Woman's Liberation Movement.

Since their years of struggling successfully and coping with combined mother provider roles is a familiar practice, it will not be necessary to reiterate this chronicle. Suffice it is to say that writers like Paula Giddings, Robert Staples, Andrew Billingsley, Robert Hill and a list of others have also commented on the African American woman's ability to maintain the black family even in the face of adversity. Staples comes closer to voicing doubts about how minority heads of households are able to coordinate and manage multiple and sometimes competing obligations. He also recognized the heavy impact of black woman's dual roles, as well as the difficulty of assessing the ultimate consequences of their being forced into such untenable positions. While the issue is well stated, the author could "only speculate that the problem of running two households--her own and her employer's--takes a rather high toll on the black woman's body and mind."¹⁰ Much of the solution to present day quandaries faced by unmarried minority females, like those in this sample, must be partially sought out in past events and also in the current

¹⁰. Robert Staples, The Black Woman in America (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1970), pp.15-16.

modifications of feminine roles. Like everyone else, single black mothers tend to take action based upon and in accordance with their cultural biases with their own personal value systems. Indeed, there is no truthful way to explain or understand the real basis of role conflict endured by this subgroup without delving into the phenomenon of social facts like: their family background; their expressed attitudes toward motherhood; their present matrix of struggle and disillusionment, derived from ghettoism, and the economics of exclusion.

PART II
APPROACHES TO MOTHERING

After taking all of the foregoing factors into consideration inquiry here, is being geared toward not only viewing the specific coping mechanisms of Black single mothers, but also studying their overall reactions to current transitional models. Several steps were initiated in order to construct an empirical set of reliable measures. Step 1: Entailed translating all responses of sample into numerical terms and arranging this data onto ordinal scales. Step 2: Involved designing three separate indexes which will graphically display respondent's individual approach to mothering. Expressed reactions to specific parts of the questionnaire were incorporated into quantitative indices and placed on a progressive continuum, from the most positive adherence to traditional values over toward the extreme negative points of orientation to motherhood role.

a) Status Index: Shown in Table No. 5.10, contains materials that reflect attributes of Traditional Motherhood. Traits like dependency, 'other orientation,' non-aggression, and accommodation are most commonly associated with conventional methods of single parenting. In many instances traditional type homes tend to be 'child centered.'

b) Change Index: Seen in Table No. 5.11, encompasses characteristics of Transitional Motherhood. This synopsis was drawn up according to the following ascriptions: independence, autonomy, confidence, persistence and determination. Modern Feminists, heading their own households, are often advocates of the foregoing principles. Many in Table No. 5.12 proved to be a reliable independent indicia by which to measure the consistency of associations. The cross tabulation of Age of oldest boy as controlling factors. Is calculated against depression and guilt would appear to influence and/or modify the outcome of the other statistical programs, like those recorded in Index I) Status. Almost sixty (60%) percent of respondents fall in lower cases of category and they also

**Table 5.10 - (TRADITIONAL MODEL)
STATUS INDEX**

TRADITIONAL STATUS	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH	LOW
LESS TRADITIONAL	34 %	51 %
MORE TRADITIONAL	66 %	49 %
	100 % (47)	100 % (45)

PHI: 0.17266

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0977

**Table 5.11 - CHANGE INDEX
(TRANSITIONAL VALUES OF MOTHERING)**

TRANSITIONAL STATUS	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH	LOW
LESS TRANSITIONAL	38 %	52 %
MORE TRANSITIONAL	62 %	48 %
	100 % (47)	100 % (46)

PHI: 0.13941

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.1788

**Table 5.12 - PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT
BY TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO MOTHERHOOD
ROLE-SET (THREE WAY TABLE) CONTROLLING
FOR AGE OF OLDEST BOY**

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	DEGREE OF TRADITIONAL ORIENTATION	
	LESS TRADITIONAL	MORE TRADITIONAL
HIGH	41 %	59%
LOW	59 %	42 %
	100 % (56)	100 % (53)

PHI: 0.17413

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.06906

maintained lower levels of perceived conflicts. In this instance .06 score of significance might be considered a viable index of correlation. Figures of association (PHI = .17413) link these variables clearly corroborates in the Information and Data Table No.5.11.

Due to overlapping of categories it was hard to draw rigid cutting points in order to separate Status from Change Indexes. Then too, many of today's traditional single black mothers must shift their postures in order to cope with modern crisis like Crack, AIDS, etc. In other words both traditional and transitional approaches often merge and may be blended by the same parents. Any particular subjects adaptive behavior changed dependent upon the nature of the difficulty or number of tasks she is simultaneously performing. A traditional approach to solo parenting may require that female head to take more of the physical and financial burden of the household upon her shoulders. This prototype can be expected to be more self sacrificing; being oriented more to her man, or her children. Seventy-five (75%) percent of the sample said that their families "expects as much help from me when I am working or not." The price of such stoicism can be seen (Table No. 5.13) in the large numbers of Depressed Mothers. Some seventy-nine (7%) percent of those who are depressed also felt they were inadequate in the performance of their maternal duties. But despite these consequences many, many conventional parents are willing to go this route. Like their predecessors, survival means accepting the full, total responsibilities of clothing, feeding, nurturing and training of minors while also doing the daily homemaking chores. And above all, to do their duty without complaint. Supposedly most of their forerunners were also traditionalist, thoroughly socialized into quietly playing parts cast for the ideal maternal caregivers; "selfless, giving forgiving and totally sacrificial beings."¹¹ In the subculture the old fashioned mother successfully combined dual Mother/Provider roles by acting like "Wonder Woman." At the same time, however,

¹¹. Ascription used to denote the typical qualities of traditional mothers. See discussion in Chapter II (pp.____).

**Table 5.13 - ROLE PERFORMANCE BY
ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION;
CONTROLLING FOR FAMILY EXPECTATIONS**

ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
(AGREES +) Cannot meet or handle demands of motherhood	79 % (23)	59 % (27)
(DISAGREES-) Feels capable and adequate in meeting the demands of motherhood	21% (06)	41 % (19)
	100 % (29)	100 % (46)

PHI: 0.21296

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.0651

unmarried African American mothers are also characterized as being anything but soft-spoken. Indeed participants in this survey usually exhibited all of the qualities of the "strong woman," figures such as those whom teenagers in Ladner's sample were expected to portray. The subjects in *Tomorrow's Tomorrow*, "expressed strong admiration for their mothers and other women they know." Although the respect given is well deserved, it also acknowledges the custom which dictates that ALL females must be accommodative and accepting of the "heavy responsibilities of single parenting." Professor Ladner noted that acquiescence is affected "in a non-romantic way." And this "abiding reality, was a way of life:"¹² "These girls were drawing on centuries of tradition in attempting to conceptualize and emulate the hard-working woman, because this is probably, more than any other, the strongest image of the Black woman that exists. This image has persisted through the centuries because conditions are fundamentally unchanged."¹³ At several points through out this section of her text, the author repeatedly calls attention to the importance of the assumption of strong roles by African American females. Interestingly enough she hits upon the same factors which continue to confuse strength versus dominance as reflected in current debates about the correct profile for Black femininity. Even today the same paradox is felt by many of the 115 respondents we interviewed. Three fourths of this cluster group appear to be somewhat fractionated by the desire to be needed, to be encouraged socially approved as opposed to being staunch, independent, progressive and aggressive.

A descriptive outline of the preceding qualities were embodied in questions number: QQ6, QQ11, QQ29 and QQ16. Each query was selected to probe specific areas of personal character, temperament and other general proclivities: QQ11 ask subject if she "liked to be independent of others in deciding what to do?" This information is essential in

¹². Joyce Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow, The Black Woman*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), p.135.

¹³. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

determining the exact percentage breakdown of the sample. Thus making it possible to establish scales showing indicia from the most to the least independent single parent. (See Appendix Graph No. 5.1). A second graph was also used to display the frequencies of dependency indexed from responses to survey. The rationale behind this approach required close inspection of the special qualities that distinctly typify this sample. Somehow this particular attribute has remained a mute point; receiving little or no attention in published text. African American females differ from their white counterparts, in respect to the meaning which they attach to these concepts.

Although eighty-seven (87%) percent of participants in this survey express a strong desire to be autonomous and/or self-governing, over three quarters of those women in this category, also "wish to be encouraged when (they) meet with failure." Table No. 5.14. The significance of this disclosure is well taken when eighty-nine (89%) percent of the sample sets-priorities based upon the amount of support respondent requires in order to face frustration and/or disappointment. By contrast, Table No. 5.15 reflects the unanimous sense of identity which eighty-one (81%) percent of the sample feels towards being independent, regardless of approach to mothering. In this instance fair scores of statistical significance may be interpreted as proof that a majority of Black single mothers believe in their autonomy, but they define freedom and self reliance differently. At first sight the whole proposition seemed paradoxical. But contradiction and dissention surround the status of minority females, especially unwed mothers. Many Black women are still uneasy about acknowledging their status as single parents. Delving further into this dichotomy only makes the preceding premise even more compelling.

Additional inquiry underscores the opposite side of this argument as to whether participants mothers should be viewed as Independent or dependent. Furthermore the facts revealed that sixty-five (65%) percent to seventy (70%) percent of the entire cluster reflected other measures of dependency such as: "other -orientation" and the need to

**Table 5.14 - COPES BY SETTING PRIORITIES
BY MEASURING OF SUPPORT
NEEDED TO DEAL WITH FAILURE**

SETTING PRIORITIES	AMOUNT OF SUPPORT NEEDED	
	NEEDS A LOT OF SUPPORT	DOES NOT NEED ANY SUPPORT
DOES NOT SET ANY PRIORITIES	11 %	28%
SETS UP PRIORITIES	89 %	72 %
	100 % (80)	100 % (25)

PHI: 0.19851

SIGNIFICANCE: .0419

**TABLE 5.15 - SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE
BY DEGREE OF DEPRESSION; CONTROLLING FOR
INCLINATIONS TOWARD INDEPENDENCE
VALUE - 1.00**

APPRAISED ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
POOR	81%	51%
GOOD	19%	49%
	100 %	100 %

PHI : .3077

SIGNIFICANCE: .003

VALUE - 1.00 = STRONG TENDENCY
TOWARD BEING INDEPENDENT

be needed. QQ12 and QQ13 were designed to ascertain whether respondents "like to do things with ... friends rather than by (themselves)". Both of these questions made-up standard range of measurements for 1) Status Index and 2) Change Index.

Likart Scales were also utilized in construction of overall cutting points to test and rank tendencies from moderate to extreme indications of strengths in individual assertiveness and/or degrees of competence and confidence. For example QQ29 ask "Do you feel very adequate in ... job performance?" And QQ6 attempted to judge persistence, and asset essentially attached to connotations given to independence. So if, a participant wants less support she should feel comfortable "taking a stand," even on an unpopular issue. The self-sufficient and able bodied soul usually require less help in case of disappointment and unanticipated difficulties. Along this same line or disagreement with the following statement: "Do (you) like to do things that other people regard as unconventional?" Coded answers of respondents resulted in the following quantitative breakdown: Eighty-seven (87%) percent were recorded as being independent; sixty (60%) percent thought of themselves as non-conventional and eighty five (85%) percent exhibited a great deal of determination to realize their career goals. It might, therefore, be presumed that the aforementioned attribute were developed (some years ago) by black provider/mothers, in order to help them cope with multiple and sometimes competing obligations.. White single parents are only now beginning to inculcate the values of being self-sufficient; hard working and independent. But the fact remains (as previously stated) that the "dual role act" is historically more familiar to members of the subculture. For this reason minority female heads of household perhaps tend to play down the strains inherent in their role-sets.

Visibility of Response to Role Strain

There are no guarantee that a retiring, dependent traditionalist as opposed to an assertive, transitional mother is more capable of handling common problems like: time pressures, work overload, finances or baby sitting, etc., etc. In meeting the demands of "critical areas of distress," fifty (50%) percent of the sample lowered their standards of performance both at home and at the office. Through consistent application of strategies D4 and D5, alternately combined with D2 (Organization) and D3 (Planning), a majority of participants are able to work out a viable balance between the expenditure of the time X energy. In the final analysis the outcome of this issue is largely contingent upon individual patten of reflexive responses to varied stimuli. Indeed each mother's personal level of perceived stress, as well as her role definitions are inversely tied to ultimately choices of coping tools. In other words the spurious relationship between perception of role conflict and the formation of coping mechanism makes it hard to establish a direct link between these two variables. Consequently the adequacy of selected modes of adaptation, must be discerned through inference, by looking at the visible indexes of single mom's reactions to role strain. The most valid scales were located in expressed feelings of anxiety, which are usually manifested as frustration, depression and/or guilt.¹⁴

How can the preceding sentiments be seen and drawn out to show the different kinds of adjustments each participant emulates in order to accommodate the conflicting demands of motherhood? Such emotional relief may be concretely reflected in the self-evaluated role performance. In this study perception of parental functions is being defined subjectively, from the actress standpoint. In essence, performance is that measure of an ideal type construct of the "perfect Madonna image," against which each respondent

¹⁴ Critical Areas of Distress is a coined expression used to denote the main or principle types of difficulties which single mother participants identified as the most frequent source of trouble. Term previously mentioned in Chapter II.

rates herself. Because the product of maternal labor cannot be judged purely in quantitative terms, most minority heads of household felt ambivalent about assessing the effects of their role playing as single parents. Under these circumstances depression and/or guilt are both natural outcomes of internal and external discord. Thus self-blame and melancholia often cause many women in the sample to feel inadequate about their ability to handle multiple obligations. This disclosure appears to be consistent with higher levels of role conflict among those respondents who devalue their own maternal skills. These results (Table No. 5.16) are confirmed by seventy-nine (79%) percent of depressed single mothers who poorly appraised their performance as principal/provider and caregiver.

An .001 score of significance is ample proof of the strength embodied within the preceding correlation. In addition the .3177 PHI'S seem to indicate the presence of a positive and direct connection between main variables. But these findings do not address queries such as "to what degree do different types of coping mechanisms influence, alter or otherwise improve upon the effectual enactment of parental duties? And if role performance is upgraded, will corresponding changes also take place in the selection of coping tools? To be perfectly honest, there are no "cut and dried," yes or no answers. There are no smooth or broken neat ties, leading from single Black mothers' point of cognition through to the final sequence of their adjusted response. Money, environment personality, educational status, job satisfaction are listed among the many intervening variables which frequently play an important part in the outcome of these on going episodes. In the cases of most participants the construction of sufficient defensive strategies might be utilized with the expectation of reducing tensions. Perhaps the immediate benefits of momentary relief outweighs the long term mastery achieved through organization and planning. In other instances their level of perceived role strain proved more sensitive to age groupings as well as depression reaction syndrome.

**Table 5.16 - SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE
BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING FOR
AGE OF MOTHER. - VALUE 1.00**

ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH DEGREE	LOW DEGREE
POOR	90 %	48 %
GOOD	10%	52 %
	100 % (20)	100 % (31)

PHI: 0.42514

SIGNIFICANCE: 0.00240

Again the relevancy of age becomes apparent only in three-way cross tabulations. This observation is clearly visualized by data in Table No. 5.17. The first menu depicts a drastic shift of ninety (90%) percent, positive orientation toward higher degrees of depression among participants over thirty-five (35) plus years. These figures represent a noticeable reversal from sixty-five (65%) percent of lower level of melancholia reported by older women, as shown in the previous Table No. 5.06. A comparison of figures in these two statistical programs does warrant a serious reevaluation of age via other key variables in this study.

Obviously mature mothers' definitions of motherhood are different and they may be more concerned about the quality of their performance than discerned at the beginning of this investigation. Older respondents also seem to become more dependent about their failures as a parent. Certainly a segment of matriarch living with young adult offspring who smoke crack and stole from them, had sufficient cause to fell dispirited. Other research on depression would support this observation. Phyllis Chesler's extensive treatment of females suffering from this disorder, identified age as a key contributor to this malady. In her book on Women and Madness, she wrote:

"Perhaps more women do get depressed as they grow older--when their already limited opportunities for sexual emotional, and intellectual growth decrease even further. Dr. Pauline Bart studied depression in middle-aged women and found that such women had completely accepted their feminine role--and were depressed because that role was no longer possible or needed."¹⁵

By contrast younger respondents appear to be less disturbed regarding the competency of their role enactment, than by higher levels of perceived role conflict. (See Table No. 5.04/ p.) According to the results of three way cross referencing of variables elicited the following results: Association between role performance is greatly increased

¹⁵ Phyllis Chesler, Women and Madness (New York: Avon Books, 1973), p.63.

**Table 5.17 - SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE
BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING FOR
AGE OF MOTHER - VALUE = 0.00**

ROLE PERFORMANCE	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
POOR	75 %	48%
GOOD	25 %	52 %
	100 % (20)	100 % (29)

PHI: 0.26724

SIGNIFICANCE: .06139

Value = 0.0 - represents mothers
between twenty and thirty-four
years of age

from .3177 to one of .4251 by the introduction of age. The full import of these findings will be examined in Chapter VI and VII.

CHAPTER VI

CURRENT STATUS OF BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS

Having It All -- Reality or Myth?

The daily struggle to survive the years of nurturing young children and the unavoidable trauma associated with raising teenagers are frequently filled with dissension and discord. The more successful women in this sample usually deal with role conflict as a fact of life which they will either peacefully live with or learn to properly manage. For them, coping involves handling emergencies as well as routine chores, trying to have a personal life, and maintaining a career. By definition, the uneasy proposition of having it all--of being successful includes--full exposure to all of the nuances of these multiple role functions. Certainly, coping in its more generalized context does involve broad considerations of the emotional, individual and environmental phases of life. According to Norma Haan, the executory concomitants of coping imply "an active intervention to change the world."¹ However, coping processes are not only responsive to external threats but also can be flexed to address internal danger as well.

In order to equally divide responsibilities between work and home, the single female parent must deal with life's motion and constant transformations. In essence, for development of coping abilities entails mastering both change and the processes that elicit social transitions. Being a provider-female parent means taking the full array of household responsibilities normally shared by two people and meeting them with the abilities and resources of one person. Many Americans continue to labor under the widespread presumption that any-woman can easily have it all, that is to raise children, to

¹. Norma Haan, "Proposed Model of Ego Function: Coping and Defense Mechanisms in Relationship to IQ Change," Psychological Monographs: Vol 77, No. 8; No. 571, 1963, p.2.

have a career and to maintain a home. Not so! Quite to the contrary, many participants in this survey find that they must struggle in order to be successful. A large number of these women are ambivalent about their maternal duties and sixty five (65%) percent of them voice this misgiving in highly critical self-evaluations of their role performance. (See Table No.: 5.08/ Chapter V) Role Performance refers directly to the quality or degree of proficiency which each mother exhibits in the execution of her maternal obligations. Respondent's actions are deemed sufficient if she is able to carry out her duties while enduring minimal degrees of anxiety, frustration and/or depression.

One of the more distinguishing characteristics observed among black single mother is their decided "stronghold on reality."² This self-image synchronizes with the "strong woman image" typically ascribed to minority females, especially those heading their own households. This and other stereotyped profiles are detailed in the second, third and fifth chapters of this text. This stands in contrast to that of a plurality of 870 white respondents who were interviewed by the National Family Opinion Poll during the spring of 1985. The majority of these women came from all ages and educational backgrounds. Out of this survey, "about (70%) percent were neither realistic nor pessimistic but extraordinary illusionistic ... Their unrealistic fantasies ran the gamut from slightly romantic notions to fantasies of perfection: Perfect child, perfect mother, and perfect families."³

The second abiding disclosure regarding the make-up of black single mothers are their lower levels of perceived role conflict as compared with whites. Overall sixty (60%) percent of the sample exhibited low levels of perceived role conflict. This

². Andrew Slaby and Joan Sealy's study on college students' perception of sexual and parental roles. White subjects described mothers as flamboyant or less practical than their fathers, while Black respondents portrayed their mothers in terms suggesting them as being more practical and less flamboyant." Excerpt cited earlier in Chapter III, p.20.

³. Louis Genevie and Eva Margolies, The Motherhood Report: How Women Feel about Being Mothers (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1989), p.5.

figure contrasts with the forty-five (45%) percent of low levels of conflict reported by white respondents in the National Survey. However, a comparison of minority heads of households with the nationwide canvas does corroborate similarities in their mutually focused aspects of role conflict. The similarities shown in Table No. 6.0 clearly denotes this parity of perception between racial groupings.⁴ Louis Genevie and Eva Margolies' study of mostly Caucasian females produced several propositions which are pertinent to this thesis:

- 1) "That conflicted working mothers experienced somewhat less personal well-being than working mothers who were not conflicted." Among those fully employed parents, "a majority, 55% percent, experienced moderate to very strong conflicts about the fact that they had to leave their children every day to go to work. The stress of combining working with mothering, said 53% percent of working mothers, negatively affected their ability to be good mothers to their children even when they were home.."⁵
- 2) That "45% percent of working mothers (who) experienced little or no conflict expressed the sentiment that working made them better mothers. Not only did they enjoy their jobs, they also felt they liked themselves better because they were working."
- 3) That "the vast majority (70% percent) of all homemakers experienced little or no conflict about their role as full-time mom. On the contrary, it is working mothers who felt most conflicted."⁶

Of course, the visions and objectives of these two studies do not converge at all points. The Motherhood Report is based upon a macro project which was set-up to collect data on a large sample of mostly married (81% percent) white women. Single mothers made up only one quarter (20%) percent of this research and minorities constituted less than four (4%) percent of the random selection of respondents. This rather

⁴. *Ibid.* pp. 362-399.

⁵. *ibid.* pp.382-386.

⁶. *ibid.* pp. 382-391.

**TABLE 6.0 - RACIAL PARTY
IN PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT**

PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT	RACIAL CATEGORIES	
	BLACK SAMPLE	WHITE SAMPLE
HIGH LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	40 %	55 %
LOW LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	60 %	45 %
	100 %	100 %

comprehensive survey was designed to achieve the following goals: a) Ascertain women's feelings "about their children and about being mothers." b) "Portray their feelings in their own words," while also "identifying the life experiences that differentiate between" positive and less positively oriented mothers."⁷ It is upon the one (last) issue that The Motherhood Report and the Sample of Black Single Mothers do agree.

Both inquiries acknowledge women's ambivalent attitudes toward role and role performance as the main factor determining mother's perception of and adjustment to distressful conditions. The manner and amount of input (energy, time and money) into motherhood is almost always influenced or otherwise compromised by an unhealthy point of view. Genevie and Margolies noted; "How overburdened by motherhood a woman felt had little to do with whether she was working or not, whether she was single or married.. What did matter was how positive she felt about her role as a mother." In expounding upon this point, the authors added the following postscript: "the overburdened mother was usually conflicted."⁸

Therefore, any parent's performance, especially single mother/providers ought to improve by lowering levels of perceived conflict, and lower levels of melancholia and/or guilt. This principle is well illustrated in Table No. 5.2. (See Chapter V) The data in this figure suggest the positive relationship between these two variables, whereas an increase in one factor causes a negative reaction in over half this sample. Consequently, women so adversely affected by depression are more likely to compromise on the quality and delivery of their services, both at home and at work. From this stance, it also seems logical to propose that respondents who feel more positive may be expected to perform better. Nevertheless, these postulates will remain unproven hypotheses without answering questions like: What kinds of factors help or hinder the lone female parent in carrying out

7. ibid., p.33.

8. ibid., p. 33.

her primal functions? How well do unmarried minority heads of household handle the tough proposition of "Making It-All Work Out"? Are they the best judge of their performance? To answer these questions this study collected information on a sample of single black mothers, on a variety of issues. Certainly, no one simple reply could begin to shape the basis of a scientific inquiry to search for the true answers. For, without examining role conflict or its' resolution from the stance of an empirically based investigation, any assessments are little more than opinions.

Many of the respondents, whether they were under twenty-one or older women, or separated, divorced, have borne children and returned to a normal life style within a period of nine months to two years. Their successful entrance or return to productive work is accompanied by numerous experiences of overcoming "bitteer-sweet hardships," about how they learned to cope and ultimately conquer the system. Marjetta Brit is an encouraging example of the new, progressive bachelorette mother. At thirty (30) years of age, she certainly appears to "Have It All:" a healthy five year old son, a nicely furnished apartment and a truly exciting, good-paying job. Ms. Brit is both competent and confident in her chosen profession. She is fortunate in being able to pursue her original career goals in becoming an accountant and respected administrator in the heart of New York City's industrial center.

On the other side of this picture are some of the other unmarried mothers who seemingly cannot "Make it All Work-Out." Many of these participants have fallen down, lost ground, discovered the fast track, and they often abandon their babies and their dreams. In some of these instances, grandparents must again become single mothers. In so doing, they assume the responsibilities of raising the third and fourth generation. The trip through memory lane and the repeated stages of reversed role playing is not the same. This "hard place," said one older woman "doesn't get any easier the second time around." Such heroics on the part of elder heads of household are all too common. Living examples

of these heroines can be vividly portrayed in the life style of 'Madame GeGe.' Having spent most of her life in New York City, this respondent of fifty plus years had already raised (alone) four boys and one girl, when she stepped in and rescued her grandchildren from the addicted hands of her son and Nina, his common-law spouse. This young woman has delivered four infants out of wedlock, before her nineteenth birthday. But she and 'Madame GeGe's' son seldom bought food or clothing for any of their children. They, in fact, sold food stamps and translated ADC checks into cash in order to get CRACK instead of buying milk for the ten month old infant. This profile, along with other case histories, will be presented later because a study of such details actualized the proportions of women who fit the category labeled poor copers.

The number of failures in motherhood, even the growing numbers of minority females on drugs and on the streets is not the most important point here. The profound question is why can't they all be "good mothers?" If their predecessors survived slavery, why can't African American mothers of today pursue the traditions and proud heritage of being single provider/parents? The main thrust of this exploratory study is to scientifically probe these issues in order to understand the current transitions. Some questions to be answered are: How Madame Walker, Ella Baker, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Rosa Parks performed as well for so long? What are workable mechanisms for successful coping in the future? What modes must black single mothers acquire to continue overcoming the dualities of mothering and the adversities of a sexually and racially biased society?

The intent here is to objectify elements of the process that created and facilitated the perpetuation of Ladner's "strong woman figure" -- thus enabling her to tend hearth and home, while also going out to earn a living, march on the civil rights line, go to church on Sunday and 'whoop' the kids regularly. This image was and is still etched into our memories as the old fashion black matriarch. She single-handedly executed manifold

duties simultaneously, every hour of every day for every day of every year of life. What happened? What will happen to the black family if we do not answer all of the questions posed here? An examination of pertinent factors involved in overcoming the more negative consequences of role strain and the stressful conditions of urbanization can help to answer this query. Perhaps through cautious use of the conceptual models of sociology, it may be possible to visualize some of the correct as well as inappropriate reactions to role conflict and hardships of the black experience. Certainly, the higher percentages of depression and critical self-evaluated ratings of role performance revealed by cross tabulation of data are concrete indicators signifying -- something is dreadfully wrong with the "Current Status of Black Single Mothers."

Pathways To Adequate Coping

The conflicted mother's moment of awareness begins when she starts making mental notes, or saying out loud (especially at the time, nobody is present): "Everybody's always looking for you to do something or other." "There's always something you just can't quite seem to get around to doing." "There's never any time for me." For any lone Black mother these are all too 'familiar puns' that voice her righteous feelings: "being fed-up, being pushed too far, being overwrought and taken for a ride or being taken for granted." Too often such outcries of indignation are expressed privately, but held inwardly -- ever so quietly bemoaned and then shrugged off as petty gripes. In reality, these little annoyances comprise the stuff of troublesome situations which become signals for real as well as imagined distress. Because the distresses of role conflict are completely internalized, private individual perception is the only determinant of whether an incident will be viewed as a problem. Whether a threat exists or is intensely felt varies by private not adjusted discourse. What one parent sees as a monumental difficulty may be ignored by another. If well concealed, open admission may be the only observable sign

that the actor is disturbed by a specific set of conditions or the actions of someone toward her or her family.

Prior to making an adjusted response, each single mother must first define the situation as conflicted; if she acknowledges her predicament, then she is ready to correct and/or eliminate an immediately disruptive force or potential threat. From this stance, recognition is the initial point at which the lone parent decides to act. Therefore, it may be designated as the first step in the problem solving process. Her perception is sharpened by raising her level of awareness.⁹ Recognizing the central position of perception in the very first stage of problem solving, this study designed an index to measure perceived role conflict, according to the following stipulations:

- a) The overt response actually made.
- b) The effect of an overt response.
- c) The efficiency of an overt response.¹⁰

Other dimensions of cognition will be presented in order to provide a more accurate vision of respondent's view of her maternal role and her performance in that role. Selection and organization of single mother's response does influence the manner and type of antidote which best suits her outlook and personal needs. Her choices of possible remedies are always filtered through a particular cultural context and a specific set of social norms. This principle will be illustrated through an ideal type 30 year old woman who represents a cross-section of respondents in the sample. The example will be conceptualized through the character of 'Ms. Smith, an average unmarried African

⁹. "Perception is a process and a pattern of response to stimuli, as well as of previous social and cultural conditioning." Definition of term usage by George Thodorson and Achilles Theodorson's, A Modern Dictionary of Sociology, p.295.

¹⁰. Leon Warshay, "Breadth of Perspective," Human Behavior and Social Processes, edit. by Arnold Rose, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962, p. 148. Author developed and studied the concept 'Breath of Perspective,' he contends: "In a problematic situation the woman or man with the broadest perspective is able to see more. He/ she is, therefore, able to bring more to the problem solving process."

American mother. As a product of the 60s, she felt disposed to protect her child against the inequities of New York City's defacto-desegregated school system.

This aspiration posed a potential situation of conflict. For, to defend Joey, she will have to take off from work and run the risk of losing her job. Obviously, 'Ms. Smith' is faced with an incompatible and competing set of role demands. How the subject chooses to resolve her dilemma has only nominal relevance for this thesis. What is pertinent? The fact that her behavior is the outcome of the following determinants: 1) the definition of the situation; 2) the individualized view of her role; 3) the expectations of the generalized others (her son, relatives, boyfriend, Joey's teacher). Although this narrative is merely a heuristic construct, it does reflect similar incidences in the real life stories of women in this sample. Like 'Ms. Smith,' any participant faces the same limitations of time vs. number of task, amount and quality of supportive helpers. Such women, in some form, must adjust their definitions, expectations and actions to properly manage and balance multiple obligations. When they do so these parents may be categorized as adequate copers.

How much work the lone female parent does often effects her level of competency. The sample was evenly divided, when asked (QQ38) if the quantity of work interferes with the quality of completed task? Forty-nine (49%) percent agreed with this query and forty-eight percent disagreed. Interviews (1985-1989) with many single black mothers focused attention upon several questions about family expectations, such as: Whether these demands changed when they were working or not? How often do they discuss their occupational and educational goals with members of the family? From whom do they seek support, aid and advice? Details about the answers to these specific probes will be revealed later in this Chapter VI and Chapter VII.

A few subjects said that their rather ordinary lives could be described as having the qualities of both circumspection and turbulence. They regard routine problems as being more or less normally difficult. Most of them see disturbing episodes in their lives as frustrating and depressing rather than "conflicted situations," per se.¹¹ These sentiments can be summarized through the composite statements of several unmarried mothers: First respondent said: "I do think about my daily schedule as overloaded. But it's also pleasant and having a child and an apartment all by yourself gives one a personal sense of fulfillment. Perhaps the 'good feelings' help to make up for the moments I feel lonely, isolated and confused." Second subject spoke about doing something only when things "started getting really crazy. Then, I think about changing and yelling at everybody to shape up or else. For a while we all try different ways to make it all work-out better." A third more youthful participant pointed out the obvious, she lamented: "I'm not perfect! It's my kid, and I really try hard to be a good mother. I make a lot of sacrifices too. But I'm not a horse and I have no intention of playing the role of Black Superwoman." Quite often a large percentage of the members of this cluster group talked about the advantages of making a strong and determined effort to reorder the children and their private lives differently, but imposing marshall law upon themselves and the 'now generation' is easier said than done.

The decision to cope or not is never quite a simple matter of "cut and dried" deliberation. Whether the lone parent determines upon a course of action to improve her circumstances, or continue to put up with disorder and ineffective methods of dealing with

¹¹. "Conflicted Situation is a word not commonly used outside of academic circles. In this instance it refers to the 'Black/White Social Setting that unmarried African Americans must work and live in . These intimate boundaries include the on-going interrelationships of mutually compatible as well as alternately opposing maladapted roles and statuses. "Each situation within a larger system is connected to each of the other situations in that system by at least one status-role." (Stuart Palmer) "Continuous adjustments and new adaptations are required and must be accomplished by a social system to accommodate this diversity of external influences that impinge upon it." (H. Lennard and A. Bernstein/ p.16)

problems is a quandary. Resolution of an issue is contingent upon level of tolerance and the degree of perceived discomfort. This study hypothesized that as perceived discomfort increases, the developments of coping mechanisms hastens and that levels of tolerance tends to slow the process. Two basic steps were taken to test this hypothesis:

- 1) Design Conceptual Models
- 2) Cross Tabulate Coded Data

In the final analysis, cross referencing perception of role conflict with single mom's status (working or non-working), by approach to mothering does have a significant impact upon her adaptive responses to stress and the stressful conditions, now prevailing in urban areas like New York City and Providence, Rhode Island. Results of statistical tables also show higher degrees of depression among those participants who are more conflicted. "National statistics and research studies all document a much higher female to male ratio of depression or manic-depression at all ages."¹²

The preceding findings can be inductively verified by examining the potential vicissitudes of solo parenting. Take for example the predicament of an unemployed student mother who is caught in the vise of a tight budget. This is truly a 'hard place' to be, but the distress might be eased if the head of household becomes resourceful about stretching a dollar and/or enjoys dressing-up leftover meals. She can 'cut-corners' without feeling socially or economically deprived. In principle, the relativity of 'sensed conflict' is as real or imagined as any one mother's decision to put extra hours in at the office in order to pay bills, even though there will be no adult supervision of minors from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. The stress here (in this situation) is not being created by the

¹². Phyllis Chesler, Women and Madness (New York: Avon Books, Publishers of Bard, Camelot, Discus, Equinox and Flare Books, 1972), p.63. Dr. Chesler cited the research of Dr. Alfred Friedman (1970). He wrote: "Depressed women are even less verbally hostile and aggressive than non-depressed women; their depression may serve as a way of keeping a deadly faith with their 'feminine role.' (Ibid., p.64.)

question of working overtime. Remaining at the office past closing hour is not unusual in the life of a career oriented mother, with or without, a live-in partner and older children. However, the issuance of the same request to stay after 5:00 p.m. could cause major trouble for "home oriented mother" with no boyfriend and no family member or girlfriend to pick up 'Joey' from school.

In the latter case, the mother cited is a typical worker, earning a small wage with no deep interest in promotion. She believes there is only marginal hope of a black worker escaping the secretarial pool. She, therefore, has little or no devotion to her dead-end job, other than showing up on time and being present to collect a paycheck. This provider/parent may not be motivated or prepared to meet certain kinds of emergencies and there may be no contingency plans to cover such unforeseen events. As a non-essential employee, who lives on a small income, this woman is representative of two-thirds of respondents who are stuck in 'run of the mill' white collar occupations where they cannot afford to hire extra help for additional baby sitters or pay for other services for the supervision of older children. What are their alternative? Some authorities or family counselors would suggest that an older and more reliable child can be given a key and trained to travel alone, so that he can let himself into the apartment or house. Such remedies are not always advisable in poorer and high crime areas of the large cities. Nevertheless, these run down areas are usually the ones where a large portion of the respondents in this sample reside. For non-white minorities: Hispanics, African Americans, Afro-American Indians, and West Indian children the hazards of being assaulted, robbed or approached by a pusher or a crack head are much greater in run down sections of the Bronx or Harlem than for white minors living in Scarsdale, New York or Warwick, Rhode Island. In most of the black subculture of the 1980's and 1990's even the safety of unattached young women, especially older minority females are equally in as much danger of being molested, violated and murdered.

While most women in this sample are opposed to turning their offspring into 'latchkey kids,' others must reluctantly do so at considerable risk. Black single mothers vary in managing the constant stresses of mothering sixteen to twenty hours, out of seven days of every week. No one specific set of strategies will resolve all of their problems in the same way on all occasions. For, in truth, there are many different routes on the pathways to building adequate coping mechanisms. This study will now examine the process of building coping mechanisms by inquiring into three questions:

- 1) How does the average Black single mother see her predicament?
- 2) To What extent is the development of coping mechanisms influenced by single mother's perceived level of role conflict and her sense of depression and/or guilt?
- 3) What aspects of the self evaluation role performance will be modified by current transitional models?

Assessing Attitudes Toward Maternal Roles

A review of survey revealed that Black single mothers are able to successfully combine dual and triple roles by mastering three basic modes of stress reaction: 1) Lowering their standards of performance at home and work; 2) Maintaining a stable support system; and 3) Managing money and time pressures properly. Presumably, the application of adequate coping tools can help to uplift lone parent's feelings of being overburdened and/or overwhelmed. However a poor adjustment is likely according to R. Kriegel and Kriegel, such negative reactions to "bad stress" tend to have very adverse effects upon all of us. Where "there don't seem to be any options, you may become

frustrated and depressed. This kind of negative stress is dangerous to your health and well-being. It results in disappointment and many of the depression-based diseases.¹⁴

There is some indirect proof that perception to role conflict does bear upon status of a working mother. Being an employed homemaker also seems to influence a respondent's tendency to be more conventional in her approach to mothering. These parents might appear to place heavier emphasis upon maintaining as high a standard of performance at home and reduce their input at work. Therefore, traditionally oriented female provider/parent may not set priorities strictly in terms of her perceived level of conflict. From her standpoint, there is no disagreement. Respondents adhering to this approach will almost always regard home obligations above and beyond any aspirations to climb the corporate ladder of success.

From all indications, respondents experiencing lower levels of perceived role conflict are not prone to lower standards of performance at home or that at the office. This fact is clearly demonstrated by the results of cross tabulated Table No. 6.1 and No. 6.2. Obviously the value system of each unmarried Black mother helps to determine whether she will be negatively or positively disposed in reacting to role strain. Since sixty-five (65%) percent of this sample grew up in female headed households, they are presumed to be conditioned to weathering the strains of solo parenting. At least, most of them have already been exposed to fairly good models. Whether they originated in single or two or two parent families, it is 'the school of hard knocks' that has truly tempered and prepared participant mothers for the strong roles they must enact. Undoubtedly, harsh circumstances have molded most of them into pragmatic creatures. This quality of staunchness may be transmitted in situations where participants endure unpleasant working conditions and even racially charged encounters on the job. Such adaptability is reflected in

14. Rober Kreigel and Marilyn Kreigel, The C/Zone: Peak Performance Under Pressure. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, 1984), p.17.

**TABLE 6.1 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT
WORK BY PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT**

STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH	LOW
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	60 %	34 %
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	40 %	66 %
	100 % (52)	100 % (50)

PHI : .25656

SIGNIFICANCE: .00957

**TABLE 6.2 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT WORK
BY PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT; CONTROLLING
FOR STUDENT/WORKING MOTHER'S ATTITUDES**

LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH	LOW
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	59 %	35 %
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	41 %	65 %
	100 %	100 %

PHI : .23797

SIGNIFICANCE: .01909

the adjusted responses of more than half the sample. This precept can be visualized by an examination of data displayed in Tables No. 6.2 and No. 6.4. This synopsis shows that sixty-five (65%) percent of all employed women in the survey do lower their standards of performance at work, even when they are conflicted. But many respondents are evenly split on the issue of whether to lower or not to 'lower their sights' at home. By contrast, seventy-five (75%) percent of all working students mothers do not lower standards of performance at home and eighty-six (86%) percent of them also upheld high measures of excellence at the office. These observations are confirmed by findings depicted in Tables No. 6.3. However, an analysis of statistical test depression does show a stronger association with the lowering of standards of performance at work. (See Table No.6.5.)

Almost everyone in the sample also set some sort of individual guidelines by which to judge their performance as a parent and provider. This fact might help to explain the weak association between reinforcing standards of performance at home X self-defined role performance, when controlling for level of perceived role conflict. Whether a respondent's self-appraised role performance is good or bad also seems to have considerable influence upon any decisions about compromising on the quality of delivery in executing her maternal duties. Patterns of association between key variables changed drastically in three-way cross tabulated tables. In figure No. 6.6, a PHI of .3799 was produced by strong association between coping mechanisms (D5) by favorable attitudes toward role performance and lower levels of perceived conflict. In this computation, seventy-seven (77%) percent of the respondent's with poor self evaluated role performance also lowered their standards of performance at work. A comparison of data in Tables No. 6.7 with No. 6.6 shows an opposite impact of a positive attitude toward maternal obligation and resistance to the lowering of standards of performance on the job. These illustrations provide a visual index which denotes the beneficial effects that more moderate levels of role conflict can have upon working student/provider. It is interesting to find the

**TABLE 6.3 - ESTIMATED ROLE PERFORMANCE
BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING
FOR TIME PRESSURES**

ESTIMATED ROLE PERFORMANCE	DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	(AGREES) FELT DEPRESSED BY INABILITY TO DEAL	(DISAGREES) DID NOT FEEL DEPRESSED
(AGREE) COULD NOT MEET OBLIGATIONS TO COMPLETE HOUSEWORK AND OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES	75 %	33 %
(DISAGREE) FELT SURE SHE WAS ABLE TO COMPLETE HOUSE WORK AND OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES	25 %	67 %
	100 % (12)	100 % (18)

PHI : .40825

SIGNIFICANCE: .0253

TABLE 6.4 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT WORK BY PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT; CONTROLLING FOR OF STUDENT/WORKING MOTHER'S ATTITUDES

LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH	LOW
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	59 %	14 %
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	41 %	86 %
	100 % (17)	100 % (07)

PHI : .40629

SIGNIFICANCE: .04655

**TABLE 6.5 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT WORK
BY DEPRESSION REACTION**

STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	70 %	32 %
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	30 %	68 %
	100 % (43)	100 % (60)

PHI : .37623

SIGNIFICANCE: .00013

**TABLE 6.6 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT WORK
BY SELF DEFINED ROLE PERFORMANCE;
CONTROLLING FOR PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT
VALUE = 1.00 LOWER LEVEL**

LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
(AGREES +) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	52 %	16 %
(DISAGREES -) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	48 %	84 %
	100 % (25)	100 % (25)

PHI : .37998

SIGNIFICANCE: .00721

**TABLE 6.7 - LOWERING STANDARDS OF
ROLE PERFORMANCE BY
SELF-APPRAISED ROLE PERFORMANCE**

**SELF APPRAISED
ROLE PERFORMANCE LOWERS STANDARDS AT WORK**

	YES LOWERS STANDARDS AT WORK	NO DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS AT WORK
POOR PERFORMANCE	77 %	46 %
GOOD PERFORMANCE	23 %	54 %
	100 %	100 %

PHI : .30902

SIGNIFICANCE: .0019

same parallel response in the overall sample's positive approach to their self evaluated role performance. In both cases, the mutual exchange between positively oriented reactions to role strain helped to encourage participants to uphold higher measures of excellency at the office.

The coded data in Table No. 6.8 has no statistical significance. However, the results of this program do suggest the need to understand why traditionalism continues to affect a black single mother's choice of strategies. Referring back to the norms of yesteryear is pleasant, but such efforts to emulate old models which require the black matriarch to expend a great deal of time and effort into playing the 'perfect host. Enacting the role of the perfect mother' will not increase proficiency but simply add to work overload. In most instances, the 'nine to five,' prototype has begun to progress beyond the need to fulfill every little societal expectation. Well over half the sample population has mixed feelings about trying to live up to the "ideal Type' Provider/Mother. What all of the preceding occurrences might suggest is the unveiling of modified African American role models which are presently evolving out of the mix of old and new values. An in-depth analysis of participant's responses to questionnaires reveal a "divided self" that wants to be in the new play where parts are being cast for avant-garde feminist forms. However, a majority of them are lacking in essentials like: strong support systems, adequate finances and good-paying jobs that are required in order to imitate America's "New Dream Girl." Nevertheless, seventy (70%) percent of this cluster group seems to be caught up in a 'cultural lag,' between less traditional paradigm and ultramodern transitional images of the 'now generation.' Consequently, the lone black mother's vista is clouded and fractured leaving her standing firm, but in center stage, with no audience, no script and no one to listen.

Another drawback discouraging change in the subculture is the black provider/mother's tendency to be largely accommodative. As a whole, this stratified group

**TABLE 6.8 - LOWERS STANDARDS AT HOME
BY ROLE PERFORMANCE; CONTROLLING FOR
PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT - VALUE=.00**

LOWERS STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	SELF EVALUATED ROLE PERFORMANCE	
	POOR ASSESSMENT	GOOD ASSESSMENT
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	31 %	67 %
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	69 %	33 %
	100 % (36)	100 % (15)

PHI : .3343

SIGNIFICANCE: .016

* VALUE OF .00 = HIGH LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ROLE CONFLICT

appears to anticipate and subsequently adjust to a certain amount of discomfort. This passive attitude can be traced to conventionality and the acceptance of sacrifice as a natural and ineluctable part of motherhood. However, in forgiving all and in giving up too much, these women become victims of a thorough and self-imposed denial of the right to life and the pursuit of happiness. This excessive outpouring of love and care to the 'other' may result in defacing of the personalized "I" (self).

Regardless of class or color, females have been traditionally reared and socialized for service to the generalized other. But this propensity is over emphasized in the subculture, where women are often criticized if they do not play the role of chief caregiver. Often the oldest daughter in minority families is still ruler of the clan. In times of crisis or death of an uncle or aunt, she is expected to take charge and do a man's job of 'holding things together.' Many participants do not question these practices but instead routinely extend themselves to children, elderly and disabled members of the kinship circle. Indeed "family care," of dependents is an age old form of nurturing. But it was not until the late 80's that journalists and social scientists begun to take note and they acclaimed this consanguine arrangement to be a national way of life. A study made by Older Women's League was cited as reprinted as feature article on May 14, 1989. In this issue of the New York Times, the League's president, Lou Glasse reported that "On the average women spend seventeen (17) years of their lives caring for children and eighteen (18) years assisting aged parents."²⁴

Ms. Glasses's deduction also concur with those drawn in this text. The following excerpts contain the highlights of her findings:

- a) "Ninety-five (95%) percent of the elderly and 90% of the disabled elderly live at home, with their family members providing virtually all their care."
- b) At least seventy-two (72%) percent of the female population is programmed to attend to the needs of senior citizen. Furthermore she said

²⁴. Editorial, "Mothers Bearing a Second Burden," The New York Times/Sunday, (May 14, 1989), p.26.

"traditional expectations account for the disproportion despite of the increasing participation of women in the work force. Women who work full time are four times more likely to be primary caregivers to the elderly as are working men."

The act of assuming total responsibility for Reversed Roles, seems to imply that participant mothers must also take on the obligations of making all of the sacrifices and taking all of the blame as well.

This willingness to go the extra distance and accept the extra weight is tantamount to an extreme gesture of accommodation. Without single black mothers' huge capacity to voluntarily give-all and forgive-all, most of the present generation of African Americans would not be here to tell this saga. Unfortunately total and unequivocal sacrifice has an alter image. Ultimately if not controlled, 'the altruistic gift can be transformed into self destructive, symbiotic acts which frequently open the doors to mother blues, depression and/or guilt. As previously illustrated in Tables No. 5.7 in Chapter V, age and time simply augment human proclivities toward negative attitudes and counter productive behavior. Nevertheless, almost seventy (70%) percent of this sample felt disposed to make some offering of themselves in order to carry-out their primal functions as women and parents.

Quite often respondents were not fully conscious of their need to be needed. These inclinations toward depression syndrome may therefore remain dormant because they are so well integrated into the disposition of Black feminine personality. A skewed or partially blind perception of conflict makes it simple to ignore or deny dissension within and outside the household. "I'm too tired to tell my kids to quit! Stop! and don't behave," decried one overwrought parent. A few participants find it easier to continue overlooking and/or overcompensating and they admit to completing almost half the unfinished chores nobody else wants to do. Others just stand firm and grin and bear the bad effects of 'bad stress.'

The adverse side of being to helpful and serving others too well is evident in single Black mother's tendency to develop defensive strategies as a means of resolving their difficulties. The results of overextending oneself can be disastrous for the overzealous mom who 'wants to be all things to all people.' This may be especially true of the more traditional parent who 'needs to be needed.' One might ask, why do so many African American mothers stress themselves out this way? Because as Alexander Kadan and Joan Bean write: "women have been trained to see themselves in nutrient roles," and through socialization they develop "the accompanying emotional characteristics of supportiveness, warmth and need for affiliation."²⁶ Although the level of awareness varies among members of this cluster group, a majority of them do recognize the necessity of alleviating strains and tensions derived from role conflict. A plurality of this sample do make some sort of connection between "better strategies" and an improved role performance. But this notion is more a part of the "Ideal standards of Mothering" rather than their own normal practices.

Stress and Role Performance

From all indications, both higher levels of role conflict and depression reaction to role strain play a significant part in contributing to respondent's poor self evaluated role performance. Analysis of frequencies show that sixty-one (61%) percent to sixty-five (65%) percent of the sample felt they do not perform as well as they could or should. Results of cross tabulated data, (in and of itself) does not explain the exact implications of such negative feedback. Certainly, there is a discrepancy between the theory of being a "good mother" and the practice of carrying out the obligations of that role.

²⁶ Alexander Kadan and Joan Bean, *Beyond Sex Role Stereotypes* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1976), pp.319-331. The authors suggest that females have greater affiliative needs than do males.

What appears to be most essential in understanding this matter, then, is not grounded so much in the reality of role strain itself, as in each Black single mother's cognition and immediate reaction to on going distress.

Since stress is felt but not always seen outwardly, it must also be gauged by inference through revealed sentiments. It is, therefore, necessary to observe both explicit as well as implicitly aroused sensors that compel them to deal with tensions and strife. The following measures were created as concrete Indexes of Role Perception:

a) Responses to Household Duties:

This concept may be defined as single mother's posture toward homemaking and maintenance. This attribute is visualized through an appraisal of the standards of excellence set by unattached black parents. A clear or good appreciation of their self-evaluated role performance both illuminates and clarifies the values they place upon the selection of a particular coping technique. For example the decision to reduce tensions by using defensive strategy to lower standards of performance at home and/or at work, may be treated as a reflection of mother's negative and or positive biases toward either of these obligations. According to Table No. 6.9 seventy-five (75%) percent of the participants did not lower their standards of performance at home although they left inadequate in meeting their role demands.

b) Degree of willingness or Reluctance to Relinquish Parental Responsibilities:

Supervision of children and home are given over to other relatives, friends and/or hired help. This particular variable was designated as "Delegation of Authority." Meaning the act of entrusting maternal obligations over into the hands of other caregivers. Only thirty three (33%) percent of those interviewed were able to comprehend, less more than deliver this directive. For this reason, no statistical significance is shown in Table. No. 6.10.

**TABLE 6.9 - LOWERING STANDARDS
OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME**

MEETING ROLE DEMANDS	LOWERING STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	
	YES LOWERS STANDARDS AT HOME	DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS AT HOME
(DISAGREES) FEELS CAPABLE OF MEETING ROLE DEMANDS	49 %	75 %
(AGREES) DOES NOT FEEL CAPABLE OF MEETING ROLE DEMANDS	51 %	25 %
	100 % (51)	100 % (51)

PHI : .26227

SIGNIFICANCE: .0081

**TABLE 6.10 - PERCEPTION OF ROLE
CONFLICT BY ABILITY TO
DELEGATE AUTHORITY**

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY	
	(NO -) DOES NOT DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY	(YES +) DELEGATES RESPONSIBILITY
(YES +) FEELS HIGH LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ROLE CONFLICT	51 %	61 %
(NO -) DOES NOT FEEL A HIGH LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	44 %	39 %
	100 % (47)	100 % (31)

PHI : .10062

SIGNIFICANCE: .03742

c) Orientation Toward Guidance and Nurturing:

Contours of this variable were determined by examining the negative and positive disposition toward handling parental functions. These attitudes are embodied in QQ23, which asked subjects if they had given up enjoyable activities in order to fulfill motherhood roles. The tendency to voluntarily make sacrifices in personal time and pleasures was noted and interpreted as an attribute typical of traditional approach to mothering.

Indicator (a) "Responses to Household Duties," is reflected in a large portion of the sample population which appears to be equivocal about lowering their standard of performance at home. This paradox cannot be understood without probing into queries like: What sort of adjustments do these women make in order to sustain their households and build a bulwark against the current tide of violence, social chaos, and economic instability? What consequences do they endure in order to fulfill their maternal obligations? What types of changes do single black mothers go through, especially in terms of their personal compromises? The more obvious alterations in the life styles of single Black parents are observable in their revised choice of occupation, which usually occurs after the birth of first baby. Forty-nine (49%) percent of the sample population changed jobs and career goals in order to bear and raise young children. Equally as many (48.7%) participants also listed family responsibilities and money as reasons for the interruption of their education. Monetary resources are limited because the income of one parent is generally smaller than two wage earners. Two or three members of a household do not live as cheaply as one, so when times get hard and things get tight, it is the single mother who does without.

The preceding social facts are not only pertinent but closely tied to indicator (c) "Orientation toward Guidance and Nurturing." Since this indicia uses 'sacrifice' as a key measure of traditional motherhood, participants were asked to denote how strongly

they agreed or disagreed with this statement: "I have had to give up other activities that I enjoy." The affirmative reply of seventy (70%) percent of the cluster is fair testimony to the persistence of conventional values among minority female heads of household. In this sample, conventional moms who cling to old fashioned mores often find it hard to fulfill indicator (b) "Delegation of Authority." Indeed the lack of statistical significance displayed in Table No. 6.10 can be attributed to the fact that a majority of participants are not inclined to relinquish their personal supervision of parental duties.

Unfortunately, traditional norms often clash with the demands of modern sexuality and single parenting. However, this infinite point of divergence does help to delineate the difference between yesterday's vs. today's maternal guidelines. Years ago, society emphasized duties at home over and above other activities outside the household. Wives and mothers strove to earn respect and admiration by keeping a nice clean house. In the past, families were larger and most mothers were expected to stay home while being supported by a strong and providing male figure. This central theme of the 'American Dream,' wrote Jessie Bernard, made "home a sacred place, even for non-believers and agnostics it was a secular temple, a place for social altruism."²⁷ In her book, The Future of Motherhood, the author also notes that this is merely an idealization of the maternal role which epitomized the terms: "loving, gentle, tender self-sacrificing, devoted, limited in interest to creating a haven for her family. The mother adored for her self-abnegation, her altruistic surrender, even for her self-immolation, was a nineteenth-century Victorian creation."²⁸ Much of these precepts have been reversed by the new societal imperatives of the now generation. For the first time, said Professor Bernard, "they are protesting the false aura of romanticism with motherhood is endowed." Now the secret "millions of

²⁷. Jessie Bernard, The Future of Motherhood: (New York: Penguin Books Inc., 1974, 1975), p.11

²⁸. Ibid., p.12.

women have ... shared, and silently endured--a proud guilt; they love their children, but they do not love being mothers."²⁹

As a result of feminist ideals, a sizable portion of affluent Caucasian females have been liberated from fear and taboos of the past. By contrast, many black single mothers continue to harbor remnants of the archaic notions about old fashioned mothering. In particular, two aspects of yesterday's abiding precepts seem to have filtered down through the ages: first, the obligation of service, and second, an altruistic outlook. Both of these ideations demand the gift of self to immediate kin and the generalized other. Those who labor under this impression may believe that being a parent is tantamount to carrying out a function ordained by God Almighty. Accordingly it is, therefore, improper to relinquish any significant part of this divinely inspired role to anyone else.

Essentially, for the aforementioned reasons, conventionally 'home oriented mothers,' may not be as inclined to lower her standards of performance at home even when conflicted. This deduction seems well grounded in the lack of statistical significance results accrued from cross tabulations of key variables in Tables No. 6.11 and No. 6.12. This proclivity remained steady and consistent until altered by cross tabulation of L.S.D. (lower Standards of performance) by Role Performance (see Table No. 6.7). More positive changes were obtained by cross referencing of L.S.D./D4 with depression, as shown in Table No. 6.13 and No. 6.14. In all of the preceding statistical T/test of melancholia tends to have a direct impact upon the polarities of negative (-) vs. positive (+) attitudes toward the execution of maternal obligations. In Table No. 5.17 (Chapter V) over three-fourths (3/4) or 75% of depressed participants are also more critical about their performance as as single parents. Overall melancholia elicits negative results when correlated with other variables.

²⁹..Ibid. p.14.

TABLE 6.11 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT HOME BY PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT; CONTROLLING FOR ATTITUDES OF WORKING MOTHERS - VALUE = 4.00

APPRAISED ROLE PERFORMANCE	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH	LOW
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	41 %	59 %
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	59 %	41 %
	100 %	100 %

PHI : .18367

SIGNIFICANCE: .06902

TABLE 6.12 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT HOME BY PERCEPTION OF ROLE CONFLICT; CONTROLLING FOR SINGLE STUDENT/ WORKING MOTHER'S ATTITUDES

LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT	
	HIGH	LOW
(DISAGREES -) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	44 %	75 %
(AGREES +) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	56 %	25 %
	100 % (16)	100 % (08)

PHI : .295666

SIGNIFICANCE: .14750

TABLE 6.13 - LOWERING STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING FOR WORKING MOTHER'S ATTITUDES

LOWERS STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK **LEVEL OF DEPRESSION**

	HIGH	LOW
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	71 %	32 %
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	29 %	68 %

100 %

100 %

PHI : .3866

SIGNIFICANCE: .0001

**TABLE 6.14 - LOWERING STANDARDS
AT WORK BY DEPRESSION REACTION**

STANDARDS AT WORK	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
(AGREES +) LOWERS STANDARDS AT WORK	70 %	32 %
(DISAGREES -) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS AT WORK	30 %	68 %
	100 % (43)	100 % (60)

PHI : .37623
CRAMER'S V: .37623

SIGNIFICANCE: .00013

The propensity to Lower Standards of Performance is most closely linked with traditional models as opposed to transitional forms. Higher degrees of depression encourages conventional parents to L.S.D. at work more often than at home. This principle can be clearly visualized by comparing results of Table No. 6.15 and Table No. 6.16.

**TABLE 6.15 - LOWERING STANDARD AT WORK
BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING FOR
TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO MOTHERHOOD
VALUE = 2.00**

LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
(AGREES +) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	72 %	39 %
(DISAGREES -) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT WORK	28 %	62 %
	100 % (25)	100 % (26)

PHI : .33694

SIGNIFICANCE: .01612

Value - 2.00 = Classic (most)
Traditional Approach to Motherhood

**TABLE 6.16 - LOWERING STANDARDS AT HOME
BY DEPRESSION REACTION; CONTROLLING FOR
TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO MOTHERHOOD
VALUE = 1.00**

LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	ESTIMATED DEGREE OF DEPRESSION	
	HIGH	LOW
(DISAGREES) DOES NOT LOWER STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	42 %	53 %
(AGREES) LOWERS STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AT HOME	58 %	47 %
	100 % (19)	100 % (34)

PHI : .10395

SIGNIFICANCE: .44920

*Value - 1.00 = Less or Least
Traditional Approach to Motherhood

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Reviewing The Results of Research

From all indications, a larger percentage of this sample reported lower rates of perceived role conflict than those reflected in surveys of white women. This outcome is closely linked to two social facts: First: An historical precedence of higher incidence of births out-of-wedlock among unmarried females in the subculture; by the late 60s, at least four or five generations of black provider mothers had already been exposed to the difficulties of working and rearing children without a male partner. Second: A higher percentage of labor force participation among African American women regardless of marital status.

Inasmuch as sixty-five (65%) percent of mothers in this study are products of one parent families, they usually have friends, aunts, sisters and other relatives who live in or operate female headed households. Consequently, the familiarity and widespread acceptance of combining work and single parenting minimizes the emphasis they place upon managing multiple social and maternal obligations outside the bonds of holy matrimony. Even today, socialization of most young African-American females continues to nurture the deep-seated need to be strong and to be independent. While a majority of unmarried single black mothers seem capable of absorbing emotional shock and enduring the strain of juggling multiple tasks, they are not immune to the negative side effects of 'suffering in silence.' However, such stoicism often becomes the precursor of depression among a large percentage of the respondents who do feel frustrated and conflicted in performing varied and sometimes competing obligations; many of them have a tendency to turn unreleased tensions inward, upon themselves.

Although counter productive, this type of behavior is usually affected in the face of what may be viewed as insurmountable odds. "According to the latest research this kind of distress should be defined as as bad stress. Bad stress is triggered . . . by feeling that one's decisions are useless, that life is overwhelming and beyond personal control."¹ This principle can be graphically depicted through the direct correlations between the perception of role conflict and depression discussed in Chapter five. Further confirmation of this relationship can be improved by three-way cross tabulations between these two variables when controlling for role performance. Data displayed in Chapter three also clearly establishes the presence of a positive link between single mothers' good self evaluated performance by low levels of perceived role conflict by depression reaction to role strain.

Results from other tests of working hypothesis provides quantitative evidence that age and experience do not necessarily make an exceptional or more efficient single parent. The homes of mothers over thirty-five years may or may not be more orderly or more stable. Limitations of sample size caused age intervals to collapse. Nevertheless, other disclosures can be presented as conclusive findings i.e., a) There is no statistically significant relations between respondents' self evaluated role performance and age. The results of other two-way cross tabulated tables might suggest that a positive attitude toward motherhood is enhanced by less conflict. Indeed, more moderated responses help to ameliorate normal pressures which are encountered in the course of executing maternal duties. b) While it is true that most minority female heads of household are less conflicted, a fair percentage of the sample appears to be disturbed by a combination of higher levels of role conflict and higher levels of depression. Furthermore, respondents so inclined to be easily frustrated and highly sensitized to stressful situations are also more likely to suffer episodes of depression on a more constant and frequent basis.

¹. R. Kreigel and M. Kreigel, Op. Cit., p.17.

c) In this study, age is treated as an independent variable. It subsequently altered scores of significance between key variables when used as a controlling factor. For example, the outcome of statistical tests revealed that two-thirds (or 82%) of young single black mothers who registered high levels of perceived role conflict also experienced more symptoms of melancholia. The introduction of age also raised scores of association from .199 in two way tables to .379 accrued from cross tabulations of perception to role conflict by depression reaction by age of single mothers. Lack of statistically significant scores in test for respondents over thirty-five years seem to suggest that women in this age bracket are not as prone to exhibit an extreme reaction to role strain, but only where moderate to somewhat minimal degrees of depression are evident.

Questions about unwed black mothers' self appraised ability to cope with the multiple demands of single parenting were handled by three way cross tabulations of perception of role conflict by estimated degree of depression controlling for self evaluated role performance. This procedure changed the percentages of sample's response. In these statistical tests, scores of significance increased to .002 for mothers over thirty-five years of age. In this category, ninety (90%) percent of those women who poorly appraised their maternal roles also experienced a great deal of depression as well as heightened sense of frustration and conflict. By contrast, depression seems to have little or no influence upon respondents under twenty to thirty-four years in regard to the assessment of their role performance. Only seventy five (75%) percent of them register high levels of perceived role conflict.

A comparative analysis of findings in chapter five does seem to warrant making a serious reconsideration of variation in age categories as a decisive factor which is useful in graphically depicting the distinctions in attitudes toward motherhood role and the performance of that role among urban minority female heads of household. Obviously, mature single mothers' definitions and orientation are different and they appear to be more

concerned about the quality of their performance. Older women in the sample seem to be more sensitized to their failures as parents, and they, perhaps, feel a stronger sense of responsibility to be accountable. Certainly, this particular age group, especially matriarches like Madam GeGe do have sufficient cause to feel dispirited or blame themselves for the failures of their less responsible adult children.

Overall, the foregoing results do tend to dispel or at least discredit archaic presumptions such as: a) That age and maternal stability and/or capability are somehow linked together. Some findings do raise questions about the widespread notion that younger single mothers are less well educated, less experienced and less financially secure. Youth and competency in performance of maternal duties need not be antithetical attributes. b) That experience (measured in years of practice) and age, naturally give older black single parents an extra edge in coping with the traumas of providing and mothering. No empirical evidence could be found to substantiate this proposition. While emotional maturity can help in the attainment of a sense of balance in life, it carries no other immediate guarantees. Despite the lack of statistically significant data (see Appendix), the self evaluated role performance of older and younger mothers alike is equally critical. c) That most minority females, especially older heads of household are domineering, matriarchal, stoic or stronger than other women.

The characterization of black single mothers as described in supposition (c) is representative of imagery which has persisted through legendary prototyping. Such colorful ascriptions are more an outcome of myth and tradition than age per se. Although the ideal of an "old fashioned mother" is slowly fading, remnants of yesterday's role models have continued to evolve into the present. However, because some older black single parents tend to cling to traditional values, they are more likely to respond to cues of past societal conditioning. The preceding postulates are considered cogent since they enhanced the qualitative aspects of empirically based findings.

Role Conflict And Stress

In the final analysis, age is not the only factor essential to the matrix of being an adequate copier. For a single black mother to successfully 'have it all,' entails more than just juggling chores or keeping up with the harsh pace of running back and forth between home and office. It is more a matter of having sufficient resources, help, and energy to carry out a good strategy. A review of the thesis will reveal that the sample's conflicts did not stem so much from combining dual and triple duties, as becoming proficient at the hard choices of setting priorities, securing and maintaining a stable support system, and managing time pressures.

Because of the nature of the color of the black experience, any serious consideration of black single mothers' coping mechanisms must probe beyond examining their methods of planning time or establishing routines. Indeed, it is one of the main contentions here that a combination of urbanization, adverse socio-economic changes, sexism and racism have set the stage for 'situations of conflict,' which exacerbate the normal pressures endured by most minority heads of household. This study has been focused to take a careful look at the strategies they develop in order to help them deal with the distressful conditions under which most of these women live, work and raise families without a male partner. A close assessment of the specific remedies of 115 women interviewed soon revealed that a majority of them tend to use defensive methods of managing multiple and sometimes competing social duties.

At first glance, the gravity of this deduction is not apparent. In fact, initial analysis of frequencies show a fairly even statistical breakdown of the sample into closely matched categories. Only after repeated cross tabulation of data did it become obvious that three fourths (3/4) of these women are inclined to ease tensions by using two basic strategies i.e., D4 (Lowers standards of performance at home and D5 (Lowers

standards of performance at work.). Through consistent application of these two coping tools, alternately combined with D2 (Organization) and D3 (Planning), a plurality of participants are able to work out a viable balance between the expenditure of time and energy. The outcome of this equation is largely contingent upon individual patterns of reflexive responses to varied stimuli. Each mother's personal level of perceived stress, as well as her role definitions are inversely tied to ultimate choices of coping mechanisms.

No empirical evidence was uncovered to show a direct path from the moment at which a particular predicament is acknowledged and the single mother's decision to take action to alleviate the discomfort of role conflict. In other words, the spurious relationship between perception to role conflict and the formation of an appropriate coping mechanism, makes it hard to establish a direct link between these two variables. Consequently, visible indexes of single mothers' reactions to role strain were located in overtly expressed feelings of anxiety which are usually manifested as frustration, depression and/or guilt.

Such emotional relief or release may be concretely reflected in the self-evaluated role performance. In this study, perception of parental functions were defined subjectively from the actors or actress standpoint. In essence, performance is the measure of an ideal type construct of the "perfect Madonna image," against which each respondent rated herself. Because the end product of maternal labor cannot be judged purely in quantitative terms, most minority heads of household felt ambivalent about assessing the effects of their role playing as single parents. Under these circumstances, depression and/or guilt are both natural outcomes of internal and external discord. Seventy-seven (77%) percent of the sample felt no guilt but depression was commonly experienced by at least sixty-five (65%) to seventy (70%) percent of this subgroup. Thus, self-blame and melancholia often cause many single black mothers to feel inadequate about their ability to handle multiple obligations.

APPENDIX

TABLE No. 5.1

**FREQUENCY R.S.V.P. for IMPLEMENTATION
of Coping Mechanisms D4 and D5**

	Lower Standards of Performance @ Home D4	Lower Standards of Performance @ Work D5
Does Not Lower Standards of Performance		
Strongly Disagree	16%	22%
Disagree	20%	21%
Somewhat Disagree	13%	10%
Total	49%	53%
Lowers Standards of Performance		
Strongly Agree	13%	11%
Agree	19%	13%
Somewhat Agree	19%	23%
Total	51%	47%

**TABLE NO. 5.5 - DEPRESSION REACTION TO
ROLE CONFLICT BY AGE OF MOTHER**

ESTIMATED LEVEL OF DEPRESSION	AGE OF MOTHER	
	20-34 YEARS	35 YEARS & UP
HIGH	43%	39%
LOW	57%	61%
	100% (54)	100% (51)

PHI: .0343

SIGNIFICANCE: .7251

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