

A Model to Analyze Single Parent Families in Taiwan

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"... we find that the single most important factor accounting for changes in family well-being was a fundamental change in family structure: divorce, death, marriage, birth, or a child leaving home. In other words, changes in the economic status of families are linked inextricably to changes in the composition of families themselves . . . Individuals may have more control over their economic status through decisions about marriage, divorce, procreation, or sharing households with relatives or friends, than they do about seeking more work or better-paying jobs."

Greg J. Duncan (1984:10)

This paper attempts to consolidate the findings of several research studies on single parent families in Taiwan (Shu & Lin, 1984; Shu & Chang, 1987; Shu, 1989). Our first study (Shu & Lin, 1984) utilized the government's labor force survey data to extrapolate some descriptive statistical results. In terms of our classification, we found that 8% of the families in Taiwan could be identified as single-parent families and that, strangely enough, their economic conditions (relative to the general population) did not appear as bad as their counterparts in the United States. We found that this was mainly because many single-parent families in Taiwan have multiple income earners and that the adult children contribute their incomes to the family pool, thereby upgrading the family's overall conditions. We speculated then that filial piety is the key to understand this phenomenon. Since secondary analysis of existing data had its limitations, we proceeded to interview in-depth some 40 single parents in the Taipei area. We (Shu & Chang, 1987)

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compared the situations of two groups of single parents, those who were on the caseload of the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) in Taipei, and those who joined Warm Life, which is a voluntary association comprised mostly of divorced women. The first group was certifiably poor, whereas the second was economically better off. We discovered that these two groups, in many respects, were extremely different. But, most of all, due to their lack of resources, the former group of single parents could not possibly escape from poverty for the foreseeable future, whereas the latter at least would have a fighting chance to improve their standing in society. We discussed our findings in terms of Maslow's needs hierarchy framework. Our third study (Shu, 1989) collected questionnaire data from 638 single parents in the Taipei area, and accomplished three objectives: (1) it compiled a body of baseline data on single parent families in Taipei; (2) its statistical results supported earlier findings based on qualitative data and presented in our second study; and (3) it generated several hypotheses that were grounded on the empirical conditions of single parent families in Taiwan.

In other words, the purpose of this paper is to reorganize systematically those findings and ideas reported previously, so as to construct a heuristic model for analyzing single-parent families in Taiwan. Our efforts are predicated on the premise that there are certain structural constraints typical to single-parent families in Taiwan, and one can either deduce testable hypotheses from such constraints or complement them with empirically grounded generalizations. While the model presented here is based on a Chinese population, we would maintain that it could be used as a first approximation to analyze single-parent families in other societies.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the phenomenal growth in single-parent families has been noted in many societies. For instance, as many as 20% of all households

in the United States are families headed by a single parent, usually a mother, and nearly half of the children born in the 1970's would have spent some years in single parent families before they reached the age of 18 (Demo & Acock, 1988). Available statistics indicate that the situation is similar in Canada, England, and other industrial societies (Schlesinger, 1985; Cashmore, 1985). Even in Latin America and Africa, studies (Kossoudji & Mueller, 1983; Clark, 1984) showed that there have been sizeable increases in female headed households in recent decades. Since to date most of the studies have been conducted in the United States, let us focus on the situation of the single parent families in Taiwan.¹

2. Assumptions and Constraints of the Single Parent Situation

(A) Assumptions

There are four simple assumptions used in our attempt to build the present model: (1) Single parents in Taiwan, as human beings, are rational, decision-making actors oriented toward maximizing their own interests; likewise, (2) in their daily actions, they are constrained by their values, needs, burden, and so forth; on the other hand, they are facilitated by their resources, support groups, luck, and other factors; and (3) by their action — or refrain from action — they demonstrate their priorities on salient issues, whether consciously stated or manifested otherwise. Finally, (4) while quantitative data could demonstrate causal relationships more convincingly, it is also important to understand the single parents' situation from 'their' subjective point of view.

(B) Structural Constraints

What are the structural constraints of single parent families? To begin with, let us point out that the single-parent family is a special family type;

and a model that analyzes the characteristics of single parent families ultimately is meant to highlight the impact of structural constraints on its incumbents. In other words, variables such as sex, age, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, values, etc., serve mainly to illustrate additional complications, but would not detract from the basic model. The model itself may be considered ideal-typical in the sense that it abstracts pure logical relationships implicated by given structural constraints, and/or reinforced with empirical results.

By definition, what is special with the single-parent family is that it has only one parent present; in order to facilitate logical imputations, let us also assume that there are no other relatives (grandparents, aunts, or other surrogate parents) present either. In other words, a single parent family, as conceived here, is strictly defined as made up of a single parent and his/her child(ren) only.

Functionally speaking, it can be asserted that there are certain 'givens' for maintaining any family: *making a living, household management, and childcare responsibilities* (Weiss, 1979). These may be considered minimal prerequisites for any modern family with children, regardless of size or structure. Whereas there are two parents in a nuclear family to share and divide these responsibilities, the single parent would have to shoulder them alone. The basic constraint is that *each person has precisely 24 hours each day*, no more, no less. Thus it is clear that, since the single parent is required to double as both father and mother, he/she would not be able to fulfill his/her role obligations as well as in the case of a nuclear family. The tasks would still be done, but none too satisfactorily, for the simple reason that the time spent on one task, e.g., income production, would mean time forsaken for another, such as childcare.

Furthermore, since everyday he/she has to apportion his/her time to meet various demands, it would be natural that in time he/she would *learn to prioritize his/her needs*.² What is, given his/her situation, subjectively

perceived as more important would be pursued, while what is less important (or feasible) would be ignored for the moment. Such a process assumes rational calculation on the part of the actor, taking into consideration what one's needs (food, shelter, job, love, companionship, etc.), extent of burden (for instance, number of dependent children), and means to achieve given goals are. Thus, even though each individual single parent never makes explicit his/her 'resource/burden factor', this concept is critical in analyzing the single parent situation.

One would also speculate that, being constantly preoccupied with meeting his/her various role expectations, the single parent would also be vulnerable to stressful situations more so than others.³ For instance, how would he/she act as both father- and mother-figure to the children, and expect them to distinguish between love and authority? Or how to perform well on the job while being able to take care of the children's needs? In short, as pointed out by Weiss (1979), the single parent is subject to various overload situations. Thus, structurally speaking, the single-parent family is *like a chair that is 'short of a leg'*, always in a state of disequilibrium. He/she is like a juggler (Dodson, 1987: 6; Halem, 1982: 84-5), somehow managing to finesse the demands of work, children, and home on any given day. Since there is never enough time, he/she either learns to scale down his/her expectations, or forsakes those that are considered less imperative. Some may pursue their career goals at the expense of the children, while others may abstain from dating or sexual relationships in order to devote themselves to their children.

Short of a parent figure, the *children would become correspondingly more significant within the family*. While the literature has not resolved the complicated issue of whether children in single-parent families would become 'disadvantaged' relative to those in two-parent families (Demo & Acock, 1988; Wilson & Hernstein, 1985; Blechman, 1982), the fact is that they miss 'something' compared to their counterparts.⁴ And if what is missing has to

be compensated, obviously this would be accomplished at the expense of either the single parent or the children. From the single parent's standpoint, he/she would have to double as the father or mother-figure, and thereby sacrifice to a certain extent his/her own needs. Indeed one may argue that this issue of personhood vs parenthood (McCoy, 1986) is most critical for a single parent family. How this issue is resolved would impact on many aspects of family life. In this paper, we can witness this issue manifested in terms of labor market conditions, childcare, remarriage, love or sex, social life, and so forth. For instance, we found that the majority of single parents in Taiwan are hesitant to venture into another marital commitment; we also found that many of them would abstain from sex.

On the other hand, it is clear that the parent-child bond is the most important. Indeed, structurally speaking, *the parent-child bond is the only relationship that exists within a single parent family*. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the role performance of the single parent is closely related to that of the children. To the extent that the children are his/her sole responsibility, how they turn out would in turn impact on his/her self image. If the children behave well, the single parent would feel that his/her sacrifices are justifiably rewarded: but if they become delinquent, then his/her self image may also be called into question, and may even interfere with his/her work. For instance, it has been said that children in single parent families tend to 'grow up faster' than others (Weiss, 1979). This is because he found that many single parents delegate certain household chores to the children, and oftentimes even recruit them in deciding family matters. The single parent, in effect, is training the children to become junior partners of the family. The parent-child bond thus would be constantly reinforced, and this would allow the children to become more independent relative to the parent, and to other children as well. Single parents in Taiwan, as we found out, are still fairly traditional minded. By and large they are more used to

protecting their children than delegating responsibilities. They would prefer doing household chores themselves than training the children (except in the case of girls) to do them; and their primary concern is that the children would do well in school. But this would also imply that the children in turn may grow up feeling obligated to their parents for all their sacrifices. Like the legendary 'Jewish mother' figure, the children are constantly reminded of how much indebted they are to their parents. As we maintained previously (Shu & Lin, 1984), we think this is how the norm of 'filial piety' is internalized into the mind of the children of single parent families: Through daily witnessing their parents sacrificing themselves in order to care for them, seeing their parents working hard everyday to maintain the family welfare, being constantly admonished to study well, and thus in time coming to the self realization that what one has is owed to the parents. As the children come of age, and as the single parent becomes old, what hitherto has been internalized as filial piety is now externalized in action; the children would voluntarily provide for their dependent parents, comply with their wishes, or ensure that they be taken care of.

The lack of another parent also means that certain domains of the single parent situation (such as remarriage, love, or sex) would become absent, and their fulfillment problematic. To the extent that a marital relationship would threaten the viability of the parent-child bond, which is most important in such a family to begin with, remarriage is a possibility often pondered by the single parent, but seldom materialized (Shu & Chang, 1987). Obviously, it would be ideal for the single parent to have both, i.e., to consummate a marital relationship that reinforces the existing parent-child bond. But when one is pitted against the other, how the single parent resolves the issue would depend on his/her own inclinations. Let us emphasize that, given the situation, it is likely that the prospective mate would bring more harm than good to the family. Indeed it is their situational constraint. When it comes

to remarry, to the extent that it requires time and energy to build up a meaningful relationship, often pitting the children against the family outsider, it is an issue often contemplated, but seldom realized, by the single parent.

Likewise, if one accepts Confucius' view that sex is as natural to human beings as food is, as most people nowadays would, then it is clear that another structural constraint of the single parent situation is that he/she would not have ready access to meet his/her sexual needs (Waller, 1958: 56-81; Weiss, 1975: 284-93; Weiss, 1979: 197-9; Spanier & Thompson, 1987: 187-208; Goode, 1956: 213-4). Given that society institutionalizes sexual behavior primarily within the marital contract, and that it is usually problematic for a single parent to remarry, how one copes with his/her sexual needs would be a constraint common to all single parents. In a sexist society such as Taiwan, single fathers at least could resort to legal prostitution, or would be treated more sympathetically if they maintain liaisons with other women. But the case would be different for single mothers. With legitimate access being unavailable, either they engage in illicit sexual relationships with men, which usually invite further problems, such as becoming 'the other woman' in somebody else's family (Richardson, 1985), suppress their sex needs, or maintain heterosexual relationships in between these extremes. At any rate, it is likely that they would be subject to gossip, ridicule, or even harrassments (Weiss, 1975: 160; Hart, 1976: 151-7; Spanier & Casto, 1979: 222; Goode, 1956: 198; Halem, 1982: 183-94; Waller, 1958). Incidentally, we found that abstinence is the stance most commonly adopted by our female respondents, even though Taiwanese society as a whole is becoming more tolerant of illicit behavior than previously. Regardless of which position is taken by single parents, however, the point is that this is an issue worthy of empirical investigation.

Indeed, to the extent that Taiwan is a sexist society, stigma and harrassments are problematic issues that female single parents must deal with in their daily lives. First of all, it may be said that society treats single

parents differently, depending on their sex (Goode, 1956; Greif, 1984; Halem, 1982). Stereotypes of single mothers abound, e.g., in traditional Chinese society, the widow was expected to remain chaste for the rest of her life, and her primary obligation for existence was to raise up the children. The legendary mother of the philosopher Mencius is probably the most often revered exemplar in this regard. In contemporary society, the divorcee is considered at fault, is presumed to be fair game by men, or husband snatcher by women. As a single parent, the societal emphasis is on her parenthood, whereas her singleness is downplayed. Thus it is taken for granted that she would provide for the family, do household chores, and care for the children. How well she can fulfill all these obligations is none of society's concern; but if she fails in any of these respects, or if she indulges in her personal interests at the expense of her family, she would become a subject of gossip or mockery. In comparison, there is considerable laxity in terms of behavior tolerated among single fathers. They are expected only as income providers, not as the children's nurturers; certainly it would be below their dignity to do household chores. Thus they are encouraged to remarry for the sake of the children, and exonerated if they occasionally stray into wantonness. In short, given the same prerequisites for maintaining a single parent family (income provisions, household chores, and childcare), if a female fulfils her obligations, it would be taken for granted; but if a male does the same, he would be considered exceptionally responsible. More likely than not, a single mother would be stigmatized on an a priori basis, whereas her male counterpart would be respected. On account of the absence of the masculine figure, the single mother is relatively unprotected, and thus also vulnerable to sexual harrassments from men, whereas such issues would be irrelevant to single fathers. In other words, given the same single parent situation, the female is prey to additional constraints, whereas the male would be granted laxity in terms of their socially permissible behavior.

The above discussion, we maintain, outlines a model for analyzing the single parent situation in Taiwan. And by "model", we mean a "pattern model" (Kaplan, 1964: 325-36), such that "as a reconstructed logic, . . . something is explained when it is so related to a set of other elements that together they constitute a unified system. We understand something by identifying it as a specific part in an organized whole (p. 333)." Thus, from our definition of a single parent family, logically one can easily impute that the single parent would be overwhelmed by his/her role obligations. Likewise one may also explain the single parent's remarriage dilemma by referring to his/her responsibility for the children, past marital history, the marriage market, and so forth. It is fair to point out that Weiss' contributions (1975, 1979) are critical in this regard. By abstracting the assumptions and constraints of the single parent family, we have sought, first of all, to recast his formulation into more concrete terms. Furthermore, our aim in this paper is to construct a model such that the various elements within this model would be empirically testable. Ultimately our objective is to move from a pattern model to a "deductive model" (Kaplan, 1964: 336-46; Hempel, 1965: 446). However, since it is our view that there is as of yet no model for analyzing single parent families, at the present stage it is logically more important to put forth an empirically grounded model first, than to test it. The constraints that we have identified in this paper can be said to be empirically grounded in the sense that they are based on prior research findings. The results that are presented in the following section serve either to reinforce these basic constraints, or clarify the significance of additional complications such as sex, age, socioeconomic status, and so forth. Lest it be misunderstood, it is important to note that in this paper our purpose is to present elements of a (pattern) model for analyzing single-parent families in Taiwan, and from such elements generate empirically grounded and testable hypotheses; it is not our intent — and certainly would be inconsistent were we to do so — to verify our own hypotheses in the present undertaking.

3. Results and Discussions

(A) Income and Poverty

We first found (Shu & Chang, 1987), on the basis of our unstructured interviews, that those single parents who were on CCF caseloads (and therefore documentably poor) were extremely different from those women who were in the Warm Life group. We concluded that single parents in the former group, in light of their lack of resources, probably would be trapped in poverty indefinitely, until their children come of age and can help relieve the parents' load; in the latter case, since these women were more resourceful, they would have a fighting chance to escape from their desperate situation.

Our survey results (Shu, 1989: 77-81) confirmed these preliminary findings. Without exaggeration, it can be stated that the situation of the poor single parents is *categorically different* from those who are not. They live in two different social worlds. Indeed our results (Shu, 1989: 117-28) indicate that income and/or welfare status are the most significant variables that impact on the conditions of single parents: The poor single parents are not just economically deprived. They are on welfare mainly because they have lower family income, more dependent children, no housing, little education, and are employed in the secondary sector of the labor market. But that is not all. If they are poor, chances are they would be working in jobs that are unstable, their financial burden would have become worse since becoming single parents, and they are under significantly more pressure to try to make ends meet — despite considerably lower living standards. They cannot expect much help from their support groups either, since their parents or siblings are probably just as destitute as they are. They would be more likely to consider their children immature, or less successful in school; in turn,

they would also evaluate themselves more negatively as single parents. Their health would also be worse, and they would be less satisfied with their daily life activities. The most urgent needs salient in their mind are practical matters such as money, children's schooling, housing, and jobs, whereas the more intangible concerns (e.g., social life, remarriage, love or sex, self adjustment, etc) are usually dispensed for the moment. Given their limited resources, they cannot afford to even buy lotto tickets in order to chance fortuitous opportunities. They have to make it one day at a time, and, in all likelihood, probably until their children grow up and become economically productive. Thus they have little future to look forward to for themselves, unless vicariously through their children. In conclusion, those who are on welfare not only are more needy, but their ability to improve their life chances would also be seriously circumscribed. They are aware of their limitations, but there is not much they can do about it.

Multiple regression analysis (Shu, 1989: 129-31), furthermore, found that the most significant determinants of poverty (i.e., on welfare) are the following variables: extent of family income, number of dependent children, whether the single parent has his/her own housing or not, education, and occupation. That is, those single parents who are on welfare would be significantly likely: to have less family income, more dependent children, no housing of their own, less education, and work in the secondary labor market. The same regression model based on females only yielded similar results, thus indicating a lack of significant sex bias in this model. Note that the first three determinants, income, dependents, and housing ownership, are the criteria adopted by the Bureau of Social Welfare of Taipei City to screen low-income applicants, and as such may be considered valid indicators of poverty.

(B) Labor Market Conditions

We also found (Shu & Chang, 1987) that those single parents who were on the CCF's caseload were more likely to be working at piece-rate jobs at or near their homes. We believed that even if they had wanted to, on account of their limited human capital, they could not possibly find attractive offers in the primary sector. On the other hand, working at or near their homes at least had the advantage of being able to take care of their children and doing the household chores more conveniently.

Again, this position was confirmed by our survey results (Shu, 1989: 167-9): Those single parents who were on welfare would be significantly more likely to work in their present jobs on account of such considerations as being near their homes or lack of alternative choices, whereas the non-welfare recipients would be more likely to find jobs that fit their personality, educational background, or salary considerations. Age is significant too. It was found that young single parents were most likely to work at jobs that were close to their homes, whereas those aged 55-79 were most difficult to find alternative jobs. And the younger they are, the more likely their work performance would be affected by their children. This is probably because young single parents are more likely to have dependent children who demand their attention, whereas the children of the older parents would be older, and therefore could help take care of their younger siblings.

(C) Support Networks

Studies on single parent families (Weiss, 1979; Halem, 1984; Spanier & Thompson, 1987) have often viewed the relatives as sources of support in case of need. In the case of the Chinese family, oftentimes there is the impression that the extended kinship system could marshall whatever resources necessary to help relieve the destitute, the disabled, or the disadvantaged. However, our results (Shu, 1989: 171) indicated that this

simplistic view needs to be qualified. For instance, let us examine why our respondents did not move in to live with their own parents at onset of single parenthood (e.g., due to widowhood, divorce, out-of-wedlock birth, etc), when they were under most trying circumstances and would be in need of support the most. And we found that those who were on welfare were significantly more likely to indicate that their parents had their own problems, or that they would lose face in doing so; however, those who were never on welfare would be more likely to indicate that they did move back, or cite other reasons. This finding confirms the simple truth *that the poor are likely to have poor parents as well*; those who are better off, of course, would also have more resourceful relatives. Furthermore, our results (Shu, 1989: 45-46) indicated that the extent of contact with their relatives did not seem to have much significant impact on the overall single parent condition. Indeed, only marital status and babysitting the children appear to be rather consistently associated with these support networks. Socioeconomic variables such as age, education, occupation, and income status are conspicuously absent here. In other words, it seems that the most important function these support networks could contribute to the welfare of the single parents is to help them babysit their children. To say that is not to say a whole lot.

(D) Salient Needs

Given the structural constraints of the single parent situation, and in particular our results regarding the sharp contrasts between the poor and those who are better off, it is not surprising to find that (Shu & Chang, 1987) the poor tend to concern themselves mostly on meeting their basic needs, such as food, lodging, childcare, and making ends meet; on the other hand, those better off would, in addition to the above needs, also be interested in pursuing their careers, social life, love and sex, as well as happiness. We first used Maslow's needs hierarchy framework to account for this dichotomous distinction between those who are poor and those who are not.

Our survey results (Shu, 1989: 202-10) further supported this distinction. Specifically, it was found single parents' most problematic concerns are closely related to their economic conditions: In ranked order, their most problematic concerns are money, children's schooling or problems, health, work or career, and assorted other problems. Furthermore, those whose financial conditions had worsened since single parenthood would tend to be more concerned with how to make ends meet, whereas those whose financial conditions had improved would be slightly more concerned with their career or children's problems. The same dichotomy is indicated in terms of their most urgent needs: In ranked order, these are money, children's schooling, housing, job referrals, social groups, medical care, psychological counseling, and others. What is important is that there are significant differences between the welfare recipients and those who are not: For the former, money is most urgently needed, followed by children's schooling, housing, and job referrals; but for the latter, children's schooling is most important, followed by money, housing, and social groups. Again, such results lend support to Maslow's thesis, namely that as people's basic needs are satisfied, they would then be motivated to pursue more lofty goals.

Research studies (Albrecht, Bahr, & Goodman, 1983: 125; Goode, 1956: 184-8; Weiss, 1975: 236) have found that the most critical period for single parents was the time of transition, i.e., immediately prior to or after the onset of single parenthood. It is during that stage, when they are subject to the most stressful life events (divorce or widowhood), when they are most vulnerable to nervous breakdowns, and when external resources are most needed, that tests the stamina of the persons involved. If the single parents could overcome the traumas happening in that period, then they would be on the road to successful recovery. We found that the worst time for those divorced or separated was in the past (i.e., before single parenthood), whereas the widowed would be more likely to consider the present their most difficult

period. Furthermore, those who were more depressed (very low, no confidence, or had suicidal thoughts) during that trying period would be more likely to consider themselves stigmatized as single parents, whereas those who were more assertive or optimistic would tend to think otherwise. In contrast, the single parents' present mood would also affect their future outlooks. Those who were presently depressed, compared to those who were not, would be less positive of their future.

In Taiwan, it is common for people to attribute their individual circumstances to fate. Where marital failures are concerned, this kind of self justification is even more often resorted to. Interestingly enough, our survey results did not find any significant relationships between our respondents' belief in fate and such variables as age, sex, marital status, income, education, occupation, and so forth. We could only account for this rather surprising finding to a simple explanation, namely that the belief in fate is deeply ingrained into the mind of Chinese single parents, so much so that it cuts across all boundaries. Likewise, we found that another issue related to predestination, i.e., whether they ever consulted fortune tellers within the past three years, was significantly associated with welfare status and income only. Again, variables such as education, sex, age, marital status, and so forth, are noticeably irrelevant. But, since income is significant, what the results indicate is that *poor people cannot afford to seek fortune tellers either!* To the extent that such things as fortune telling or astrological charts could soothe the psyche of those who are distressed, this means that the poor could not benefit from lay counselling either.

Indeed, given their constraints, what options would be available to single parents to possibly better their conditions? Other than labor market skills, support systems, and other tangible assets, lotto is probably the ultimate hope. But we found that welfare recipients are significantly less likely than non-recipients to have bought lotto tickets. It is sad, but it is true: Poor single

parents cannot afford to indulge in such chance factors as lotto either. In other words, if they are poor, then their options to improve their prospects would be further limited by existing constraints.

Even their future plans are affected by their present conditions: Those single parents who earned more than NT\$20,000 a month were likely to have some kind of plans for their future, whereas those who earned less than that amount would have to make it one day at a time. Furthermore, the more money they made, the more likely they would plan to build their own career; on the other hand, those who made less money would tend to invest their future vicariously through their children. Those single parents who were welfare recipients, those without their own housing, or whose economic conditions had worsened since becoming single parents were significantly more worried about their future prospects than those who were not; likewise, those who experienced heavy financial burden, were more money conscious or had less expenditures or incomes, were also significantly more pessimistic of their own future prospects than their counterparts. On the other hand, those who were more educated, whose children were more mature, or who considered themselves good single parents would be more likely to think that their future would be better; those satisfied with their daily work, housing, or leisure activities would also be more positive of their future prospects. Thus it is clear that those who are presently more desperate would also be inclined to worry more about their own future. Indeed it would be quite unthinkable to attribute otherwise.

Multiple regression analysis (Shu, 1989: 136-7) indicated that our single parents would be significantly more likely to believe their future would be better if they: had higher income, were never looked down upon by others, did not feel overburdened as single parents, did not feel lonely at the time of interview, or had children who were mature. These same variables individually are also significantly associated with this issue in terms of chi square

results, and it appears that gender bias is insignificant in this model. From these results, it is clear that how these single parents project themselves into the future is based on a realistic self-assessment of their current conditions. Thus, the following hypothesis can be simply stated: *Single parents project their future prospects on the basis of their current conditions.* If they are resourceful now, they would believe their future would be better; but if they are poor, they would have legitimate concerns to worry for their future.

A Hypothetical Interpretation: Given the above results, it would be difficult not to come to the conclusion, as we did previously (Shu & Chang, 1987), *that the poor single parents are straight-jacketed within the poverty syndrome for years to come.* There is little escape from this entrapment. If a typical single parent is subject to overload, then the *poor single parent* would be cast in a worse situation. The point is, they are not only economically deprived; they are also burdened in many ways by lack of resources. Let us just name a few relevant considerations. Typically, they are poor because they do not have the requisite educational credentials to enable them to acquire decent jobs. More often than not, they would have to work in the secondary labor market, usually as factory workers (part-time or piece-rate), janitors, street cleaners, restaurant helpers, household maids, and so forth. It goes without saying that they do not own their housing, and the rental payments would amount to substantial portions of their monthly income. Even more critical is the fact they have at least as many dependent children as those who are better off; and unlike the latter, chances are their support groups, such as parents or siblings, would not be able to help take care of, or even babysit for, the children. Thus they would have to provide for their children all by themselves. This accounts for why they are significantly more likely to work in jobs that are close to their homes; but, it also means that their opportunities in the labor market would be further restricted.

Let us use the '*mobility tree*' analogy⁶ to illustrate their entrapment (Shu & Chang, 1987). To begin with, those who are poor would start climbing the mobility tree from a lower baseline position than those who are better off; and, at the onset of single parenthood, would fall back even further than their counterparts. With limited labor market resources as well as a heavier burden, it is obvious that they could not climb the tree as fast as those who are more resourceful; and they would be more eager to grasp at any mediocre opportunities that would provide them a living but are in effect dead-end jobs. In other words, not only would the poor single parents start at the bottom of the mobility tree, they would also be more eager to branch off from the trunk of the tree earlier than the others. By the time they realize that they can climb no further along the branch, they have two alternatives: Either to retreat along the branch and start climbing along the trunk again, or to jump to the next branch. In labor market terms, the first strategy would demand that they forsake their human capital skills associated with their given jobs, and go back to school to acquire new credentials for social mobility; the second strategy means that they capitalize from their available skills and move to different jobs, or similar jobs at different companies. Even though the latter alternative may be more rewarding, it would also entail considerable amount of risks. With only limited resources, usually they dare not take the move, because a dead-end job to them is better than no job at all. Thus, paradoxically, the poorer they are, the less likely it is that they could afford the opportunity costs that might improve their future prospects, and thus the more likely it is that they would be stuck at their dead-end jobs.

In contrast, those who are better off at the onset of single parenthood would start climbing the mobility tree at high positions along the trunk, and could better afford to steer their course upwards. Like those who are poor, they would also experience momentary setback upon the onset of single parenthood, and they would also resume climbing as a matter of necessity.

But unlike their poor counterparts, even if they mistakenly branch off to dead-end positions, they can afford to jump to different branches. In other words, with more resources on hand, they could afford the opportunity costs involved in their upward mobility track. In time, the gap would grow even wider: The poor single parents would in all likelihood be stuck at dead-end jobs near the bottom of the mobility tree, whereas those who are more resourceful would continue climbing upwards.

(E) Children and Family

According to Weiss, the critical issue in examining the single parent situation is the *concept of 'overload'*. To begin with, there are three tasks basic to any family with children: how to make a living, care for the young, and do the household chores. In a nuclear family, the husband and wife couple can share the burden associated with these different roles, and allocate their time and energy respectively. But single parents have to shoulder these role obligations all by themselves, thus resulting in an overload situation. Indeed we found 48.4% of our respondents indicated that they were often overburdened as single parents. Moreover, the extent of burden as single parents is significantly associated with their extent of financial burden (Shu, 1989: 160). And the more they feel overburdened as single parents, the less positive they would view their future prospects (Shu, 1989: 179-80). One measure of their burden that we used is whether they would beat their children out of control. And we found that the more mature the children are, the less likely they would beat them.

Weiss (1979) has also contended that children in single parent families in the United States grow up faster, psychologically speaking, than other children. We (Shu & Chang, 1987) found that, on the basis of our unstructured interviews, children in single parent families were either more mature, or more delinquent, than their contemporaries. Our survey results (Shu, 1989: 172-3) also indicated that poor single parents would be significantly more

likely to consider their children as immature, whereas parents who are better off would evaluate their children in more indulgent terms. And those single parents who consider their children mature were also more likely to consider themselves good single parents, while those with not so mature children would evaluate themselves less so favorably.

In Weiss' study, one measure of children's maturity is whether they would help do household work. Structurally speaking, children in single parent families may be required to do housework in order to help relieve the parent's load. This point is also confirmed by our survey results (Shu, 1989: 174-6): Those children considered by their parents as mature would be significantly more likely, and those less mature less likely, to help do household chores. We used their school performance as another measure of their maturity. And we found that the more mature children would be more likely, while the less mature less likely, to study well in school. Incidentally, it may be added that the more financial burden is felt by the single parents, the more likely their children would not do well in school either.

Parents love their children. But what happens when single parents have to go out (for a date, a meeting, or to work overtime)? How are the children to be taken care of then? Would they stay home, go out anyway, or arrange to have babysitters (neighbors or relatives, etc) to take care of the children? This may be considered an issue of parenthood vs personhood (McCoy, 1987). Our survey results indicated that (Shu, 1989: 177-8) those who chose to stay home would be the least satisfied with their daily leisure activities, whereas those who decided otherwise would be more satisfied with their leisure life. Thus, some parents love their children so much that they would be willing to sacrifice their own interests, whereas others would do the opposite. But how they decided on this issue would also depend on the resources available. For instance, those single parents with less family expenditures would be more likely than others to have stayed home in that situation.

(F) Self Image of Single Parents

What makes a good single parent? This is a primary issue that we are interested in this study. Again, in terms of the issue of parenthood versus personhood, some would say that a good single parent is one who maintains the family and provides for the children even at the expense of sacrificing his/her own needs; but those whose priority is personhood would contend that in order to take care of the children or provide for the family, one would have to better oneself first. If the single parent improves his/her own lot, then the children would be better provided for accordingly. Proponents of the parenthood view would counter this argument by suggesting that, given the multiple constraints of a single parent, one cannot have the cake and eat it too: If the single parent devotes his time and energy to his job, then his children might be improperly cared for and become delinquent as a result. Obviously, there are merits in both positions. What is important is to examine which position is more tenable on the basis of the empirical results.

Summarizing from our study (Shu, 1989: 90-94), it is clear that this issue is multifaceted: We found that those who are worried, or those who have no plans, for their future would also be significantly more likely to rate themselves poorly as single parents. The more educated would evaluate themselves more favorably than the less educated; similarly, those who work in the primary sector (professionals, executives, or white collar) would rate themselves better than those in the secondary sector (sales, service, or manufacturing). Those who have more and/or steady income would rate themselves better than those who have less; conversely, those who experience more financial burden, or who are more money conscious, would rate themselves more poorly. In terms of intra-familial aspects, the more mature the children, the more likely it is that they would also rate themselves good single parents: likewise, the better their children perform in school, the more favorable are their self images. On the other hand, the more they

feel overburdened as single parents, the less likely it is that they would rate themselves favorably; and the more often they beat their children, the less likely it is that they would rate themselves as good single parents.

The point is, what are the most significant determinants of a single parent's self image? Multiple regression analysis (Shu, 1989: 132-3) found that there is a significant likelihood that they would evaluate themselves poorly if they perceived that they had been looked down upon by others, if their children are considered immature, or if their family income is low. Incidentally, chi-square results also indicated that these three variables are significantly associated with the single parents' self image; and the female-only regression model yielded similar results, thus implying that gender bias does not appear to be significant in this model.

A Hypothetical Interpretation: Without gainsaying the significance of other variables such as age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, and so forth, the model nonetheless highlights the impact of societal prejudice, the maturity of the children, and income, on single parents' self image. In other words, it would positively contribute to their mental health if they have mature children, or a high income. What was rather unexpected, and therefore all the more noteworthy, of this model is the unique significance of stigma impacting on the psychological well being of single parents. To what extent is this prejudice against single parents real in society is irrelevant here. The point is, close to half of our respondents believed that divorcees are looked down by others, and one-fourth of them personally felt that they had been stigmatized. It is also important to note that some single parents (especially females) would be more sensitive to other people's behavior and interpret their acts as prejudicial, whereas the same behavior may be conceived by others as rather innocuous. Let us recall W.I. Thomas' famous dictum, "If a person perceives a situation as real, it would be real in its consequences." In other words, if a single parent believes that he/she has

been victimized by societal prejudice, then this notion would result in psychological impact on his self image, as indicated by our results.

However, whether it be real or misconceived, the point is that if a single parent is 'successful', then it would be less likely for him/her to experience prejudice. Our results indicated that the more disadvantaged the single parents, the more likely they would feel that they had been looked down by others. Thus it appears to us that ultimately the single parents' self-image hinge on their extent of achievements, in terms of income, raising children, and so forth. Furthermore, since the more disadvantaged single parents would also consider their children more immature, what this implies to us is that the fundamental determinant of the single parents' self-image would be their socioeconomic status. If they are poor, their self-image would be significantly affected adversely; but if they are better off, then they would also rate themselves correspondingly better. Thus, our results suggest that in terms of the parenthood vs personhood issue, instead of devoting their exclusive attention to family and children, it would be wiser if single parents tilt toward pursuing socioeconomic standings in society. It is possible that those who place the welfare of their family and children on top of socioeconomic pursuits do so because they have no alternatives, e.g., those who are poor or unskilled; but our results indicate that those who choose to do so voluntarily would be in effect doing themselves and their children a significant disservice. With secular accomplishments (especially in terms of income), single parents would likely enjoy enhanced self-image, both in the eyes of others as well self-evaluation. On the other hand, those who are disadvantaged not only would evaluate themselves poorly, but their children as well. We do not know how poor single parents could possibly escape from their entrapment, but it is critical that they do.

(G) Remarriage

According to Cherlin's (1980) analysis, in the United States, one half of

the divorced women were remarried within five years of their marital separation. We could not find comparable statistics for the situation in Taiwan. What we (Shu & Chang, 1987) did find was that "To marry, or not to marry?" is an issue salient in the mind of many single parents. But their attitude is typically very ambivalent. While they recognize the benefits of remarriage, they are even more apprehensive of its potential drawbacks. Among those divorced, usually it is because they are still very aware of those nightmares associated with their previous marital failure, and thus consciously resist committing themselves to another relationship. The widowed, on the other hand, would still be sentimentally attached to the memories of their past beloved, or refrain from remarriage on account of traditionally sanctioned norms that honor the widow's chastity as a virtue. It is not that they have willingly forsaken remarriage prospects, but they are aware of the fact that, given their disadvantaged position in society, it is likely that remarriage would bring them more harm than good. Specifically, the paramount consideration in their mind is to protect their children: Given their constraints, it is a realistic concern that their mate may turn out to be a less-than-responsible parent figure, and as such would more likely inflict harm to the children than provide parental care. Our survey results (Shu, 1989: 185-7) also lend support to such an interpretation: 72% of our respondents believed that it would not be good for them to remarry given their circumstances, and that the most often cited (54%) reason for this belief is that it would actually hurt their children. Again, those on welfare were found to be more pessimistic about remarriage, and their prospects more likely to be affected by their children, than those who were not.

Multiple regression analysis (Shu, 1989: 134-5) found that those single parents would be significantly more likely to favor remarriage if they: had sex encounters during the previous year, believed that a remarried couple would be more considerate of each other, felt lonely at time of interview,

would beat children out of control, or had fewer people (including adults) in the household. What is conspicuously missing here are income factors. In other words, the single parents' economic status is irrelevant to determining their views on remarriage. Thus, besides our single parents' manifest account to protect their children from potential dangers in remarriage, what may be considered as their psychological needs (e.g., sex drive, spousal mutual considerations, loneliness, or inability to control oneself) turn out to be more significant than income, education, occupation, marital status, etc., in distinguishing those who favor remarriage from those who do not. One hypothesis that may be stated is: *Those single parents who are psychologically more needy would be inclined toward remarriage, whereas those more capable of suppressing their personal needs would forsake it.*

A Hypothetical Interpretation: If it can be maintained that the critical consideration in the marriage market is the match-up function, i.e., the qualifications of one party must be matched with, more or less evenly, those of the other in order to culminate in a marital bond, what this implies is that since the qualifications of a single mother would be greatly reduced by the presence of her children, her divorced/widowed status, past marital history, age, and so forth, her market value would be reduced accordingly. The key problem concerning a typical single mother's remarriagibility, we believe, is this: She tends to search for the kind of mate that, even if he is available, may not be interested in her. In other words, her prospective Mr. Right probably does not exist in reality. This problem of matching up interested parties is always present in the marriage market, but in the case of single parents would be felt even more acutely. On one hand, remarriage in principle would restore a single parent family to its structural balance, relieve the extent of pressures confronting the single parent, and is thus considered desirable. Subjectively, however, the single parent's remarriagibility is often limited by his/her own position in society (e.g., his/her socioeconomic

achievements), extent of his/her concern for children's welfare, his/her own assessment of potential mates, and so forth. Once bitten, twice scared! Those who have had undersirable marital histories would be understandably more critical with their prospective involvements. Also relevant here is the search process, i.e., a single parent must be actively involved in the marriage market to search for information, to establish networks, and to build up salient relationships. To the extent that he/she is often pressed for time, to participate actively in the market is often not feasible. In other words, remarriage is the end result of many decisions and events involving both parties, and any fortuitous turn of events would nullify the outcome. This explains why many single parents in Taiwan remain single for sustained periods of time.

Stigma, Harrassment, and Sex

In examining the related issues of stigma, harrassment, and sexual matters, first of all, it should be said that the question is not whether such phenomena exist, but to what extent and in what respects are they manifested in society. For instance, our survey results (Shu, 1989) indicated that 47% of the respondents (of both sexes) believed that the divorcees are locked down upon by others, and one out of every four females reported that they had been harrassed by men, mostly from among their neighbors, fellow workers, friends, or strangers. To this extent, it may be said that single mothers are vulnerable to sexual harrassments. And given the fact that a single parent, especially if female, would not have ready access to seek a mate for sexual fulfilment (or gratification), how he/she copes with this problem would merit serious examination. In other words, his/her sex life, or the lack of it, is a direct outcome of the structural constraints of the single parent situation and, as such, is a domain worthy of empirical investigation. Research studies (Weiss, 1979; Waller, 1930; Goode, 1954; Halem, 1982; Spanier & Thompson, 1987) have often alluded to this aspect of single parent families; and the how-to manuals for single parents (McCoy, 1987; Atlas, 1984;

Dodson, 1987) are even more explicit in offering guides or principles to deal with such issues.⁸ To date, however, what can be gleaned from the literature is mostly narrative accounts, and there is a need for statistical data to establish hypothetical generalizations.

By the same token, harrassment may also be construed as ramification of the single parent situation in a sexist society. In the United States, Halem (1982) has reported in her study several anecdotal accounts when, posing as a single parent, she experienced sexual advances from men first-hand. Lest it is mistaken that Taiwanese society is any less sexist, the incidents related to us would appear at least as graphic. We (Shu & Chang, 1987; Shu, 1989) found quite a few single mothers who confided to us their personal experiences in being harrassed. One case involved a divorcee when, somehow forgetting to bolt her door one night, she woke up and found her neighbor sharing her bed. A widow, who was working as a car washer in a poor neighborhood, had to half mask her face in order to forestall potential harrassers. But the typical situation would involve a male intruder, always semi-drunk, barging into the home of a single mother and making passes to her, until he finally gave up in frustration. Sexual harrassment at work is also a common phenomenon, which is why many single mothers would deliberately hide her marital status from her fellow workers. A dating situation, because it often requires correct interpretation of the subtleties involved in both parties' communication patterns, is also inducive to sexual harrassment.

In the course of our research, many single mothers informed us that they resented being stereotyped by others, e.g., as easily available to men, as potential husband-snatchers, or simply as marital failures. We were also narrated various stories of how they coped with their sex needs, how they wished others would treat them fairly, what they knew about other single women's liaisons with men, and so forth. From our perspective, we think

these phenomena are various manifestations of the structural constraints of the single parent situation in a sexist society (Hart, 1976; 151-7) and, as such, could be treated in the same vein.

(H) Stigma

Our survey results (Shu, 1989: 189-91) indicated that the more disadvantaged single parents would be significantly more likely to believe that divorcees are looked down by others. For instance, those on welfare are more likely to confirm this societal stereotype than those who are not; and those who affirmed this stereotype would also be the least satisfied with their leisure activities. Furthermore, those who felt that they had been personally stigmatized would be significantly more likely to validate this view. Let us add that the impact of this unpleasant experience is significant to the single parent's self image also. Thus it is sufficiently clear that this stigma is not only real, but also powerful.

Multiple regression analysis of this issue (Shu, 1989: 138-41) found that the most significant determinants are related to their parenting or work roles. Specifically, single parents would be significantly more likely to feel that they were looked down upon by others if they: had poor self image, had never worked since becoming a single parent, or worked only part-time, and left home without making proper arrangements (like getting a babysitter) for childcare. Further analysis indicated that single mothers, at least subjectively, would be more sensitive to being stigmatized than their male counterparts. But if one compares the situation of widows with that of divorcees, it is found that the widows' neighbors would have a supportive effect against her being stigmatized. On the other hand, divorcees would be conspicuously vulnerable to harrassment on this score. In other words, neighbors help the widows cushion against the stigma, but divorcees would be most sensitized to the twin issues of stigma and harrassment.

(I) Sexual Harrassment

On this issue, what is most interesting from our chi-square results (Shu, 1989: 50-51) is that it has no statistically significant relationships with such variables as age, education, income, occupation, salient needs, poverty status, marital status, and so forth. In other words, one might say that single mothers in Taiwan, regardless of their social class, whether divorced or widowed, young or old, on welfare or otherwise, are indiscriminately exposed to sexual harrassment. On the other hand, those who ever dated, or those who had sexual encounters, would be significantly more vulnerable to sexual harrassment than those who did not. Let us also add that the harrassers, by and large, were their acquaintances, e.g., neighbors, fellow workers, or friends.

Multiple regression results (Shu, 1989: 142-3) are even more revealing. Specifically, a single mother would be significantly more vulnerable to sexual harrassment if she: had sexual encounters during the previous year, had few support groups, was self-employed, frequently went out on dates, and worked in the secondary labor market. And for the divorcee, who after all would be expected to be most vulnerable to harrassments, the critical determinant is whether she had gone out on dates. If she dated, she would be considered fair game.

A Hypothetical Interpretation: One hypothesis that may be construed from these results would be as follows: In a sexist society such as Taiwan, a single mother (whether divorced or widowed) is presumed to be 'fair game' or even 'available' to men unless she specifically manifests herself otherwise. In other words, sexual harrassment is related to her social behavior as perceived by others, i.e., those who are thus interested.⁹ Since neighbors, fellow workers, or friends are strategically located to note her daily activities, they are among those most likely to take measures. After all, they would attribute that no harm is done by flirting with divorcees vis-a-vis virgins.

Thus they would pay particular attention to certain cues that would, to them, be interpreted as come-on signals. For instance, if she goes out on dates, or is known to have sexual encounters, she would be considered fair game; likewise, if she works in the secondary labor market, or is self-employed, some men would take advantage of the work setting to make advances to her; and if she is known to have few support groups, that would probably encourage some intruders also.

(J) Sexual Encounters

Several issues pertaining to the sex lives of the single parents were explored, and the following are the highlights of our survey results (Shu, 1989: 193-201): (1) There is a positive relationship between the issue of whether single parents are entitled to date members of the opposite sex and their education. That is, the more educated the single parents, the more likely they would respond to this issue affirmatively. (2) Those who are poor would be significantly less likely than the non-poor to confirm that a single parent has sex needs. (3) Among single mothers, those who approved of having sexual encounters with members of the opposite sex would be significantly more likely to have been hassled by men. (4) The widowed are more conservative than the divorced on the issue of whether it is permissible for a single parent to use sex to supplement family income, despite the fact that 46.8% of our respondents actually disapproved of commercializing sex under all circumstances. (5) Also, even though an overwhelming majority (61.8%) would not approve of single mothers to have one-night stands despite the women's liberation movement, those who dated more often during the previous year would be more liberal on this issue than those who did not — indicating a certain degree of consistency between attitude and behavior. (6) In terms of which type of lifestyle, with regard to the opposite sex, would be most appropriate to single parents, our results showed that 67.7% of our respondents would choose neither cohabitating nor maintaining sexual

liaisons with others, 17.8% would prefer having an affair but without involving cohabitation, and the remaining 14.5% would opt for other alternatives, including cohabitation with or without leading to marriage. Again, those who would abstain from sex most likely did not have any sexual encounters during the previous year, whereas those who had sexual encounters would be significantly more likely to prefer a certain kind of intimate sexual involvements. (7) Finally, in terms of their dating patterns, we found that 83% of them never went out at all during the previous year, and only 13% had dated at least once a month. In our previous study (Shu & Chang, 1987), we maintained that there is a close connection between going out on dates and the single parent's financial conditions, simply because poor people cannot afford to indulge in their own pursuit of happiness at the expense of their work or childcare responsibilities. Our survey results further indicate that those who were on welfare would be significantly less likely than those who were not to have gone out on dates. Again, a highly significant relationship between dating and sexual encounters is noted: The more often they have gone out on dates, the more likely it is that they would have had sex encounters. Incidentally, while the dating situation would be conducive to intimate sexual involvements, it may lead to potential sexual harrassments for single mothers as well.

In light of the high degree of consistency between their attitudes and behavior pertaining to their sex lives, ultimately the issue is: Given their structural constraints, what would lead some single parents in Taiwan to venture into sexual relationships with someone, while others do not? Our survey results (Shu, 1989: 97-99) indicated that, for example, the divorced would be significantly more likely to have been involved in sexual affairs than the widowed. Among females, harrassment is also significantly associated with their sexual encounters. But what is most striking is the consistent pattern revealed between the single parents' income conditions

and their sexual involvements: First of all, those whose most urgent need is money (relative to children) would be significantly less likely to have sexual encounters; those with low family expenditures, or on welfare, or who are money conscious, would also be significantly less likely to have sexual encounters; likewise, those who have had sexual encounters would also be more likely to have improved economic conditions since becoming single parents. In other words, the better the single parents' financial conditions, the more likely they would have had sexual involvements. It is possible that income is a significant prerequisite for sexual encounters, but it is also likely that one may use sex to enhance one's income.

To untangle this issue, multiple regression analysis (Shu, 1989: 144-6) found that single parents would be significantly more likely to engage in sexual encounters if they: did not believe in remaining chaste, had gone out on dates during the year before, were relatively young, or had rather high monthly expenditure needs. For single mothers, income and job became more significant. That is, she would be more likely to have engaged in sex if she had higher monthly income, or worked in the secondary labor market. What is common to both regression models is that most of the variance can be explained in terms of the single parents' belief in chastity or their dating pattern.

Our models fit with common sense accounts of what would lead some single parents to engage in sex, while others would not. It goes without saying that if the single parents believe in chastity, or do not date, then they probably would not have engaged in sex. Similarly, common sense would dictate that men are more likely to engage in sex than women, or the young more than the old; for females only, it also makes sense that if she thinks it is okay to use sex for money, or if she works in the secondary labor market, then she would be more likely to have affairs with men. What is at issue, though, is income. Given that, in a sexist society, it would be more problematic for

single fathers to use sex for money, it would seem fair that income is a precondition for their sexual engagements. But in the case of females, the close connection between income and sexual involvements may also indicate recursive effects. At any rate, what is indisputable is that those who are poor cannot afford sexual gratification, simply because they have more important concerns, e.g., work or childcare, on their minds.

4. Hypothetical Statements of the Model

On the basis of our results, and in terms of our model, the following hypothetical statements may be identified. Though they are based on empirical data, they are presented here as first approximations, and await further validation:

(A) Income, Poverty, Needs and Prospects

- A.1. The single most important characteristic impacting on the conditions of single parent families in Taiwan is their income and/or welfare status (Sec. 3.A). There are significant differences between those who are poor and those who are not, and they may be said to live in two practically different social worlds. Given the single parents' overload situation, they are constantly pressured into making trade-off decisions. Thus, the less resourceful single parents would by necessity be more concerned with basic needs such as food, shelter, and childcare, while those who are better off would be in a position to concern themselves more with social life, love and/or sex, achievement, or career goals. Such distinctions are analogous to Maslow's needs hierarchy framework.
- A.2. The more labor market skills (education, occupation, and so forth) at their disposal, the more likely these single parents could escape from entrapment; conversely, the less labor market skills, the less likely they could do so (Sec. 3.A).
- A.3. On the other hand, the more family burden (e.g., number of dependent children) they have to sustain, the less likely they could escape from entrapment (Sec. 3.A).

- A.4. Like climbing the mobility tree, the more net resources they have at their disposal, the more likely they can achieve upward mobility; and the less net resources they have, the more likely their social mobility would be deferred to the next generation. (Sec. 3.D).
- A.5. The health conditions of poor single parents are likely to be worse than those who are not, and they tend to be less satisfied with their daily activities (Sec. 3.A).
- A.6. Given their situational constraints, if they place their priority on socioeconomic achievements vis-a-vis family responsibilities, they would likely achieve socioeconomic gains at the expense of the children. Hence the significance of support groups: If, for instance, children in single parent families could be taken care of by relatives, then the single parents could be free to pursue socioeconomic gains during the critical juncture, and eventually raise the family's status; the welfare of the children need not be permanently sacrificed in this scenario. However, since those who are poor are also more likely to have less support networks (Sec. 3.C), they are thus less able to escape from poverty.
- A.7. Since a job away from home would mean that the single parent spend less time on household chores and childcare, this is a choice issue that confronts every single parent. As such, the kind of jobs most suited to single parents are service related jobs, insofar as these would allow them more flexibility in allocating their time and meeting their various responsibilities.
- A.8. Hence, poor single parents work in their jobs by necessity, whereas those who are more resourceful could have more options in the labor market (Sec. 3.B).
- A.9. Also, childcare constraints affect the work performance of young single parents more than the old (Sec. 3.B).
- A.10. The more resourceful single parents would look to themselves to improve their future prospects, whereas those less resourceful would depend on their children (Sec. 3.D).

A.11. Furthermore, given the lack of effective social welfare programs as intervention strategies, the chasm between poor single parent families and those who are not is almost insurmountable. In effect, poor single parents are trapped within the poverty syndrome until their children can become economically productive, whereas their middle-class counterparts at least would have a fighting chance to climb the 'mobility tree'. They are aware of their constraints, and the differences are manifest in terms of how they view their future prospects (Sec. 3.D).

(B) Marriage, Children, and Single Parenthood

- B.1 Lacking a father/mother figure, the single parent would have to work at least twice as hard in order to maintain his/her family. Moreover, given the parent-child bond as primary in such a family setting, it may be hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the role of the children and that of the parent. In other words, the performance of the single parent, among other things, would depend on the performance of the children; and vice versa (Sec. 3.E).
- B.2. Those who are more resourceful would be likely to evaluate themselves as better single parents than those who are not (Sec. 3.F).
- B.3. On the other hand, being stigmatized by others would also affect the single parents' self-image (Sec. 3.F).
- B.4. To the extent that poverty affects the self-image of the single parents, their children would also be negatively evaluated (Sec. 3.F).
- B.5. Children who are 'mature' would be more likely to study well in school, and help do household chores, than those who are not (Sec. 3.E).
- B.6. Children in single parent families are said to 'mature faster' than other children; but children in single parent families are also commonly associated with juvenile delinquency, school dropouts, drugs, and other behavioral problems. This is an issue that merits clarification. What is critical here is to distinguish the parent-child bond involved.

In other words, inasmuch as the other parent is absent, the bond between the single parent and his children becomes paramount within the family. If this bond is well nurtured and maintained, e.g., the single parent shows care and love to the children, and the latter come to understand that they are integral members of the family, then the children will mature faster than others. If, however, the children perceive that they are neglected or mistreated, they would manifest their problems in school, community, and so forth. From the standpoint of the single parent, this is manifestation of the personhood vs parenthood issue: Whether the single parent chooses to sacrifice his/her own interests for the sake of the children, or vice versa.

- B.7. For instance, those single parents who choose to stay home in order to care for the children would be less satisfied with their daily life than those who opt to go out (for a date, a meeting, or to work overtime) instead (Sec. 3.E).
- B.8. As another manifestation of the personhood vs parenthood issue, consider remarriage. Whereas remarriage would in principle restore a single parent family to its structural balance, and relieve the extent of pressures confronting the single parent, most single parents in Taiwan remain single for sustained periods of time. Because the welfare of the children is considered more important than their own interests, most single parents in Taiwan cannot afford to pursue, and would not subjectively persuade themselves to risk, remarriage as a solution (Sec. 3.G).
- B.9. The less resourceful the single parent, the less optimistic would be his/her view on remarriage (Sec. 3.G).
- B.10. Regardless of resources, however, the common barrier to remarriage is the single parent's insistence to look for Mr/Ms Right; given the reality of the marriage market, even if he/she is available, chances are the relationship thus developed would be asymmetrical (Sec. 3.G).

- B.11. On the other hand, the more psychologically needy the single parent, the more he/she would be inclined to remarriage (Sec. 3.G).

(C) Stigma, Harrassment, and Sexual Behavior

- C.1. In a sexist society such as Taiwan, single mothers are vulnerable to societal prejudices that in effect 'blame the victims' for their own conditions. In concrete terms, this means that among those who are divorced, the female is always perceived to be at fault, while the male is always exonerated 'for understandable circumstances'. In other words, female divorcees are more sensitive to stigmatization than their male counterparts (Sec. 3.H).
- C.2. The more disadvantaged the single parent, the more profoundly he/she would perceive the impact of stigmatization (Sec. 3.H).
- C.3. Single mothers in Taiwan are vulnerable to sexual harrassments, typically from their neighbors, fellow workers, or acquaintances, and regardless of their status in terms of education, income, occupation, age, marital status, and so forth. Instead, the distinguishing characteristic is availability. The more a single mother is perceived as available (e.g., has gone out on dates, has had sexual encounters with men, has few support groups, etc), the more likely she is subject to sexual harrassments (Sec. 3.I).
- C.4. Even though the sex drive may be considered universal to human nature, it is viewed by single parents in Taiwan as secondary to their concern for family and children. In other words, as in the case of remarriage, their sex life is typically repressed, and it would become manifest only when the family's material needs have been more or less satiated (Sec. 3.J).
- C.5. Dating not only is a significant predictor of sexual harrassments, but as a precursor to more intimate involvements, for sexual encounters as well (Sec. 3.J).

- C.6. The better the single parents' financial conditions, the more likely it is that they would have sexual involvements (Sec. 3.J).
- C.7. Also, those who are divorced would be more likely to engage in sexual relationships than those who are widowed (Sec. 3.J).

5. Conclusion

(A) Prospects of Single Parenthood

As we look forward to the coming decade, we can anticipate that more and more single parent families will come to be recognized in Taiwan. This conclusion is based on the following points: (1) With continued decreases in mortality, the proportion of those single parent families arising out of widowhood will also decrease. (2) But with the booming divorce revolution, more and more single parent families will occur as a result of marital separation. Likewise, (3) more divorced or separated mothers will demand custody of their children. (4) Due to the prevalence of the nuclear family, and widespread preference for neolocal living arrangements, future marital breakups (e.g., runaway spouses, unwed mothers, dual-career families maintaining separate households, etc.) would more likely result in the formation of new single parent families rather than reformation of the traditional stem family. (5) The net result of the above trends is that there will be less single parent families with adult children, and more female-headed families with dependent children. In other words, the needs of single parent families can be expected to increase in the future decade.

In our studies, we have consistently emphasized the constraints and entrapments of the single parent situation. It is as if we had come across the worst and most distressed segment of the population in Taiwan. Partly, this is because, in our attempt to highlight the common constraints confronting single parents in Taiwan, we may have inadvertently overlooked

those exceptional cases. But our bias, if any, is supported by the weight of the empirical evidence. In reality, of course, there are some single parents who have managed to cope with their problems successfully. And even for those most depressed, one could always indulgently remind them that there is a beautiful valley on the other side of the jungle (Dodson, 1987: 14). Other writers and researchers (Halem, 1984; McCoy, 1985; Weiss, 1979) have commented on the joys and freedoms of single parenthood. But, as Cashmore (1985: 270-82) pointed out, at best single parenthood would only yield 'captive freedom'. We also found that those who have improved their conditions since the onset of single parenthood would indicate that their worst time had been over, whereas those still circumscribed by their constraints would indicate otherwise. Thus there is a catch here: Those who took the course of single parenthood, whether deliberately or otherwise, have to be able to cope with their constraints first. If they succeed, they could then smugly review their accomplishments to date and conclude to their own satisfaction that they have become better persons as a result of becoming single parents. But what if they cannot cope with their harsh constraints? How then could they look forward to the rainbow? Indeed how could they possibly escape from entrapment? Despite the recommendations of those how-to-cope-with-single-parenthood manuals, we believe that making sacrifices may not be enough. For those single parents who are poor, who have sacrificed themselves for years, it is obvious that they could not possibly escape from their iron cage. Instead, the critical difference is resources, both tangible and otherwise. Hence the need for outside intervention.

(B) Social Policy Implications

As we maintained previously (Shu & Chang, 1987; Shu, 1989), the issue is not whether government should intervene to help single-parent families in Taiwan, but how best to help them. The issue of whether single parents would come to depend on public aid programs was raised. But to date,

thorough reviews of research findings have not provided us unequivocal conclusions (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; Heather & Sawhill, 1975). We also urged for public aid on humanitarian grounds, and based on the principle of justice. To rectify for past neglect, it is fair to divert portions of government monies from, say, national defense to the cause of single parent families. The point is, any social welfare program that does not recognize the special structural constraints of single parent families would not deliver effective outcomes; and one should move beyond the stance of benignly assuming their mere survival, and actively seek to free them from their entrapment. We should also begin to think of aid to needy families as "productive" investments. If left on their own, poor single parent families would remain poor for years. But if given proper kinds of help, they would have viable opportunities to break out of their vicious cycle, and, in turn, contribute direct benefits to society as a whole. Thus, we called for constructive job training programs on the one hand, and coupled with provisions for daycare services, housing, medical and other basic allowances on the other. Clearly, traditional subsistence level services would merely prolong the destitution of poor single parents indefinitely. Constructive programs, together with more generous allowances, instead could turn these dependent families into productive citizens.

Presently, let us revise our previous position and introduce a two-sector approach, namely the private and public sectors. Let us also distinguish different needs of single parent families corresponding to their different stages (Weiss, 1975: 234-53). Adapting from his framework, one may distinguish a 'transitional phase', i.e., at or immediately after onset of single parenthood, and a 'recovery phase', usually occurring about a year after becoming single. The relevance of this two-phase two-sector approach in terms of social policy is that it fits our dichotomous outcomes of the poor vs not-so-poor single parents. Our results would predicate the following terms:

1) Instead of benign neglect, both the private and public sectors should be more active in providing services for single parent families; and the government should take greater initiatives in helping poor single parents.

2) However, given the fact that presently resources in the private sector are diffused, it is incumbent on the government to help promote the development of voluntary associations that are targeted to the cause of single-parent families.

3) Within the private sector, one such instance is the CCF-Taipei, another is the Warm Life organization. By mobilizing community resources, these groups demonstrate that they could respond to the needs of single-parent families more effectively than public programs. Thus, public monies could be productively invested through programs developed within these organizations. The government could also promote the development of single-parent mutual-aid groups, e.g., Parents Without Partners.

4) The utility of mutual-aid groups like Warm Life is that they could provide their members services at reasonable costs. By banding together, they provide mutual support for each others, and also gain legitimacy vis-a-vis the society at large. Psychologically, individual members also could discuss their problems with fellow single parents, who can play the role of sympathetic listeners. These groups are also most functional during the 'transitional stage' of single parenthood.

5) Clearly, during the transition stage, both the poor and not-so-poor single parents would need help in order to cope with their trauma; and it stands to reason that the better they could cope with their problems during this stage, the more capable they would act as single parents later on. Thus prudent investment of public monies in intervention programs at this stage not only would be justifiable, but proven cost effective in the long run.

6) During the 'recovery stage', while most middle class single parents conceivably could cope with their constraints, our results indicate that poor

single parents would continue to need help. In other words, whereas such services as counseling or legal aid are most critical to single parents at the transition stage, those who are poor would need manpower programs, daycare services, and other basic maintenance programs as well.

7) The point is, any social welfare program that does not recognize the special structural constraints of single parent families would not deliver effective outcomes. Thus, in designing services, the underlying motto should be to "Give them a tool to fish", instead of "Giving them a fish every day." From this perspective, we would argue that traditional subsistence level services not only are callous and shortsighted, but, if cumulated over long periods of time, would prove more costly than constructive job training programs.

8) For implementation purposes, it would also be wise for the government to contract service delivery to community groups such as the CCF. The role of the government is to help fund appropriate programs and monitor their outcomes, while that of the private sector is to engage in service delivery. It would be more cost effective if this division of labor is adhered to.

(C) Limitations and Guides for Further Research

In this paper, we have attempted to develop a model for analyzing single-parent families in Taiwan on the basis of their structural constraints. We point out that the problems confronting the single parents are interrelated, and their impact may be seen as cumulative. Thus, for instance, we found out that income and/or welfare status is the single best predictor of their over-all conditions, so much so that it may be said that the poor and the not-so-poor single parents live in two practically different social worlds. In view of the conceivably growing numbers of female-headed families in Taiwan, and their impact on society in general, as well as the children in particular, it is clear that more rigorous and systematic efforts should be undertaken. For instance, the generalizability of this study has been seriously compromised

by our inability to design more representative samples. Thus far, our efforts have been focused on the Taipei area. What are the conditions of those single parent families elsewhere on the island? Also, we have sought to analyze single parent families from the viewpoint of the parents, partly on account of their strategic importance, but also due to practical considerations. But what about their children? If it is true that, as we have previously maintained, children internalize the norm of 'filial piety' through witnessing their parents' sacrifices on their behalf, then it becomes all the more important to study their children in their own terms. By the same token, we have overlooked deliberately the kin networks of these single parents, especially their ex-spouse. Finally, even though we have made extra efforts to sample single fathers, they are still grossly underrepresented in the present study. All these could serve as focal issues for further investigation.

The present model as presented here is based on our overall sample of single parents. Clearly, further refinements could be made by systematically differentiating the male vs female samples, the divorced vs the widowed, the old vs the young, and so forth. Also, we have confined our efforts to the conditions of single parents in Taiwan, but systematic comparisons with their counterparts in the United States or other societies are clearly warranted. The parameters are obviously different; there are many more single-parent families in the United States, and the issues involved are much more difficult to untangle. But comparisons not only could highlight differences; they could also validate common grounds.

Ultimately, the purpose of any systematic comparisons is to further the establishment of a grounded theory that adequately reflects the conditions of the single-parent family situation, in Taiwan or elsewhere. Our perspective has been guided by Weiss' framework, and we believe the skeleton of such a theory is presented here. The next step would be to integrate our first approximations to existing sociological theories, such that the single parent

family situation could be explained more fully. We hope this study may serve to stimulate more research efforts in this direction.

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Notes

1. For comparisons of the single-parent families in the United States and Taiwan, and some of the issues involved, see Shu & Lin, 1984; Shu & Chang, 1987; Shu, 1989.
2. Our survey results (Shu, 1989: 205) indicate that those concerns most salient in the mind of the single parents, in ranked order, are as follows:
 - 1) making ends meet, 2) childcare, including their schooling, 3) health, 4) work and career, 5) remarriage, 6) mental health, and 7) others, including love or sex. Clearly, single parents consider making a living much more important than remarriage, love, or sex. But the most distinguishing feature of the single parent is precisely this: that whereas in a nuclear family, there are two parents to allocate the tasks involved in fulfilling their needs, the single parent has to undertake them all, and thus by necessity has to prioritize his/her needs. If money is

most sorely needed, the single parent would have to devote his/her attention to making money, and, by implication, ignore those that are less salient, such as social life, love, or sex.

These results can be accounted for in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework. Specifically, a single parent by necessity would have to be concerned with the most basic physiological or safety needs first. That is, in order to provide food and shelter for the family, the primary concern is to make money; other concerns, such as social life, love, or sex, are momentarily relegated to secondary importance. As these needs become more or less satiated, i.e., as the family attains a satisfactory standard of living, then the single parent would feel relieved from his/her primary obligations, and can then free him/herself to pursue higher level needs accordingly. In practical terms, this means he/she can then more seriously examine remarriage prospects, join social groups or clubs, or activate those hitherto repressed, needs for love or sex. Furthermore, with these needs more or less secured, the single parent may even aim for self-esteem or self-actualization aspirations. The point is, we found that poor single parents are more preoccupied with their basic physiological and safety needs, whereas those economically better off would concern themselves more with remarriage, social groups, or career interests.

Note also that 'need' is to be distinguished from 'burden' (Duncan, 1984); need is subjectively evaluated, whereas burden may be objectively observed. For example, a single parent may have the need for food and shelter, social life, love or sex, and so forth; but his/her burden may be said to be heavy if he/she has several infant or handicapped children, compared to someone whose children may be already economically productive.

3. In this regard, Duncan (1984: 24) found that personality traits, e.g.,

attitudes such as achievement motivation, sense of personal efficacy, or orientations toward the future, etc., are relatively unimportant in promoting social mobility, but our interviews lead us to believe that single parents in Taiwan (especially females) become more competent after assuming single parenthood. We think this is because, by force of circumstances, they are compelled to assume more responsibilities, and thus in time develop survival competence regardless of personality differences.

4. Since the focus of this study is on the single parent, and not the children, we will analyze the children's situation only from the viewpoint of the single parents. This is not to say that children in single parent families are not important. Indeed research findings (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, et al, 1982) have made it abundantly clear that such children have many problems of their own.

Incidentally, our view on this issue is that whether children in single-parent families are 'normal' or not, obviously, would depend on the societal context. If the situation of the comparison group itself is changing rapidly — as in the case of contemporary United States, in which during a given year there are almost as many couples divorced/separated as there are married — then it would be likely to find no significant differences between children of single-parent families and those of others. But if single-parent families still remain a relatively small minority (as in Taiwan), and they are either ignored or looked down upon by others in society, then one would suspect that children growing up in such an environment would not be 'normal'. More likely than not, they would be stigmatized by their playmates in school or in the neighborhood, or they would have witnessed their single mother harassed by intruders. Whatever the contributing factors, what is most conscious in their mind would be the fact that they miss a father/mother figure, and thus are different from other children of their age.

5. Since the survey results presented in this paper are based on the authors'-unpublished project report, it is important to point out that the study in question sampled only single parents in the Taipei City area. Two different samples were used: A sample of low income families were identified from the caseloads of the City's Social Welfare Bureau and the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) of Taipei; using a two-stage stratified sampling design, various schools from the Taipei City's school district were selected, and rosters of single parents in respective schools were solicited from the school officials. The study successfully interviewed 638 cases of single parents. But due to practical sampling and fieldwork problems, no claim is made here that this sample would accurately represent the universe of single parents in question.

In order to save space, please refer to the appropriate tables and appendices reported in Shu (1989) for detailed results. To read Tables 1A-6A and 1B-6B in Shu (1989), note that an asterisk denotes a chi-square value significant at 0.01 level, and with lambda at least greater than 0.01. For multiple regression results on given variables (Tables 7-13b), the pool of independent variables is selectively drawn from those listed in Tables 1A-6A, with F value preset at 1.0, and with tolerance level at 0.05; in order to minimize computational errors, listwise deletion of missing data is adopted such that all means, standard deviations, and correlations would be based on the same universe of cases. Also, stepwise multiple regression procedures are employed until it yields the most 'efficient' results.

6. In this scenario, we assume that personality factors such as the achievement motivation, perseverance, aggressiveness, etc., are irrelevant. Obviously it would require motivation, hard work, etc., to achieve upward social mobility. But our point is precisely that, even if poor single parents wanted to, they could not possibly do so — on

account of the extent of burden they have to sustain. By the same token, the poor and occupationally immobile not by intent, but mainly because they could not afford to take chances.

7. Note that the utility of this variable may be influenced by social desirability factors, as indicated by the majority of the respondents saying that they seldom beat their children out of control.
8. For instance, in one such manual (Dodson, 1987: 181-4) the author recommends that in dating, do not abide by any rules, for rules do not fit any individual situation; instead, "listen to your own feelings."
9. Similar ideas on availability have been expressed by Richardson, 1985: 15; as well as anecdotal accounts drawn from the researcher's personal experience, cf. Halem, 1984: 183-94.

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分析台灣單親家庭的一個模式

徐良熙

摘要

本文的宗旨為建立一個台灣單親家庭的分析架構，並由此而設定研究假設以供驗證。

本文的研究資料主要是根據著者以往從事之研究，並參考國外相關的著作。其主要出發點是界定單親家庭的一些基本特徵，如單親因其角色負擔過重，故未能兼顧工作、家務、子女教養等責任。這些基本特徵可謂構成一個分析架構，若配以其他變項（如性別、年齡、教育、職業等等）則可引申出一些研究假設以供驗證。

最後，本文提供幾點意見以資增進單親家庭的福利。