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GENDER ROLE DIFFERENCES IN RELATION  
TO FAMILY OF ORIGIN

by  
Laura M. Moran

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 1, 2002

Approved by  
Professor

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## ABSTRACT

Laura M. Moran  
GENDER ROLE DIFFERENCES IN RELATION  
TO FAMILY OF ORIGIN

2001/02

Dr. John Klanderman  
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family of origin and an individual's gender role characteristics. Eighty undergraduate students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses at Rowan University participated in the study. Participants were asked to fill out the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and a demographic questionnaire in order to determine if differences in gender roles exist between students growing up in single parent families, those growing up in intact two-parent families, and those growing up in blended families. Data was analyzed by use of a two-way between ANOVA to determine if a significant difference exists between the groups with respect to family of origin as well as the sex of the participant. No significant differences were found among the groups. The mean scores for each group are discussed in relation to specific trends among the groups.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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## Chapter I

Gender is the social category of being male or female (Arnett, 2001).

Gender roles are the cultural beliefs of how roles in society are divided by gender. There are certain roles that are stereotypically female such as housewife, cheerleader, or nurse. There are also certain roles in society that are stereotypically male such as breadwinner, businessman, politician, or doctor. Past research on this topic has related gender roles to differences in achievement, self-concept, and future relationships, to name a few. There is a need to know how to transcend these gender differences and be able to relate to each other merely as human beings rather than as a man or a woman. One way to accomplish this is to have a clear understanding of where these gender role differences originate. The earliest exposure to cultural expectations is the family. Research on this topic in relation to the family of origin may serve to give some background to the reasons these gender roles exist in society and provide a starting point for further research in this area. Gender role flexibility may alter the future for some in various aspects of their lives.

### **Purpose**

Parents have been found to have major influence on the gender roles of their children (Witt, 1997). They are the first to socialize the children according to the expectations of society. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between family of origin and an individual's gender role characteristics.

### **Hypothesis**

An important way in which parents influence their children is through the gender roles they themselves exhibit in the household. These gender roles differ greatly

depending upon the makeup of the family of origin. The intact family may continue to socialize the child according to the traditional gender roles. Intact families divide the responsibilities between both parents and often do so according to traditional gender roles (Slavkin, 1997). In this way, the traditional gender roles of masculinity and femininity that are valued by society are reinforced in the home. The child from an intact family quickly learns the characteristics, responsibilities, activities, clothing and objects that are considered female or feminine as well as those that are considered male or masculine.

The socialization that takes place in a single-parent family may be very different. Single parents do not have the option of dividing the responsibilities with another; they juggle all the responsibilities of a family on their own. In this way, the single parent is exhibiting both gender roles through their behavior. When one person exhibits traits associated with both masculinity and femininity, the individual is termed androgynous (Arnett, 2001). Children of single-parent families do not experience the gender roles as they are valued by society. Roles which society deems as male or female are modeled in one parent. Their experience of gender roles as modeled in the home allows much more flexibility.

Children will be socialized regarding gender roles and the expectations of society depending upon their family of origin. It is this idea that the research question will be based on. Students who come from traditional families will be more likely to identify with characteristics of the traditional gender roles while students who come from single-parent families will be more likely to identify with androgynous characteristics.

## **Theory/Background**

Social constructivism has only recently been applied to gender. Under this view, both cultural factors and cognitive factors influence gender. Gender is one of the most important social categories in today's society. It is so important that it is one of the first categories individuals identify with at a very early age. Very young children learn the toys and clothes appropriate for each gender and which activities are appropriate for each gender (Beall, 1993). Babies are often dressed in pink or blue clothes. Girls are given dolls and expected to play house while boys are given trucks and expected to build things.

Piaget coined the term schema to describe the cognitive process through which individuals organize information about the world. The gender schema theory views gender as one of the primary ways that people organize the outside world. The terms "male" and "female" become the primary categories for activities, clothing, objects, and even personality characteristics. All external stimuli are immediately categorized under these two categories. These beliefs about what is considered "male" and what is considered "female" comes from the cultural expectations around us. It is also through these schemas that stereotypical types of males and females have come about. Through these schemas, men are perceived as aggressive and instrumental while women are perceived to be passive and emotional. Gender expectations differ across cultures and the categories differ alongside it (Arnett, 2001).

Sandra Bem is a leading psychologist in this field who takes the ideas behind this theory one step further. According to Bem, people not only use these cultural beliefs to categorize the world around them but they also apply these beliefs to themselves. They



shape their own behavior in order to conform to the cultural beliefs that they perceive. In this way, “cultural beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies (Arnett, 2001).”

There are certain ways in which these gender schemas become reinforced. One way is through perceptual biases such as selective encoding, selective recall, and selective interpretation. Basically, people find it easier to encode and recall situations based on the categories of male and female and to interpret situations based on the gender schema. For example, studies have shown that when subjects are not given a sex of a person being described, they will automatically organize the facts into male or female based on their schemas. The gender schema is also maintained culturally. There are differences in childrearing, clothing, speech, and behavior between the sexes. For example, parents do not treat boys and girls the same in raising them. These differences serve to produce differences between the sexes in order to fit the gender schema. The self-fulfilling prophecy that was previously discussed can also serve to maintain these schemas. Due to the expectations formed under the gender schema, certain behaviors are expected from each sex. Due to these expectations, we modify our own behaviors to conform to them. These modified behaviors can also evoke stereotypical behavior from others. For example, cultural beliefs in America stereotype men as less likely to be monogamous. Based on this belief, a woman may remain distant in a relationship causing the man to eventually break it off. She thinks he cannot be monogamous but it was actually the woman’s treatment towards the man that caused the breakup. Perceptual biases, cultural practices, and individual behaviors serve to reinforce the gender schemas in daily life (Beall, 1993).

## **Definitions**

**Sex** is the biological term for being either male or female.

**Gender** refers to the social category of being either male or female.

**Gender roles** are the cultural beliefs of how roles in society are divided by gender.

**Schema** refers to the cognitive process through which individuals organize information about the world.

**Gender Schema Theory** views gender as one of the primary ways that people organize information about the outside world. All external stimuli are immediately categorized under the categories of male and female.

**Androgynous** refers to an individual possessing traits associated with both masculinity and femininity.

## **Assumptions**

This research is based upon certain assumptions. The first is that the subjects provide accurate information regarding their traits and family of origin. The second is that social desirability did not occur during self-report of traits. A third assumption is that certain roles were displayed in the home based on the student's family of origin. This study assumes that intact families modeled the traditional roles of masculinity and femininity in the home through division of household labor according to gender. Single parent families, on the other hand, are assumed to be a model of one parent exhibiting both roles in juggling all of the responsibilities of a household.

**Limitations**

Since the research is taken at a university, the sample may not be representative of the population as a whole. Further studies may need to be conducted to test other socio-economic status or ages. There was very little cultural diversity in the sample so it may not be applicable to other cultures. The sample was not diverse in the types of families of origin with the majority of students sampled growing up in intact two-parent families.

**Overview**

In Chapter II, relevant research on this topic will be explored in order to provide greater understanding of this area. The design of the study will be described in Chapter III. The results of this study will be analyzed in Chapter IV. Gender role differences and the research that has been conducted in this area will be presented in detail in the following chapter.

## Chapter II

Gender roles have been changing in society in recent years so it would be assumed that the traditional gender roles would not still exist. However, a closer look at where these changes have taken place reveals a very different picture. In the workplace, women have made a tremendous impact in the once male-dominated jobs such as doctors and managers while a significant of males can also be found in traditionally female-dominated jobs such as nursing or as secretaries. While these changes are very important, they are still not the norm and women still do not earn as much as men do.

With so many women in the workplace, Cafferata, Horn, and Wells (1997) sought to find out if men are now picking up more of the household chores once thought of as “women’s work” such as cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, caring for the children, etc. Their main source of information for this study was the DDB Needham Life Style Study, an annual main panel survey conducted since 1975 with a response rate averaging about 80%. The sample consisted of male and female heads-of-household and was matched to the United States population based on age, income, and area of residence. The surveys did indicate that both males and females share the notion that an ideal marriage is one in which both partners work and both partners share in the responsibilities of the household. However, this ideal did not hold to be true in actuality. Only about 16-23% of men surveyed usually vacuumed, dusted, did the laundry, washed the dishes, or went grocery shopping. The remainder of the men only helped out in these chores every now and then (Cafferata et al, 1997). Basically, the surveys showed that the division of labor in the household remains the same in the traditional sense: women cook

and clean while men repair things and take out the garbage. So while women are adding new aspects to their lives, men are not helping out any more in the home.

The development of attitudes toward gender roles and personal gender roles are socialized in children through observance of these roles in the household. The following sections will explore current attitudes toward gender roles and the socialization that takes place in various households. The differences between intact families and single-parent families will be explored as well.

### **Attitudes toward Gender Roles**

Attitudes toward gender roles vary according to the sex of the participant and according to the experiences of the individual. Brose (2000) conducted a study to explore adolescent's judgements about how parental work and childcare should be distributed between the sexes. While adolescents generally felt it necessary for one parent to stay at home with an infant and not work, the parent most likely thought to fulfill this role was the mother. These types of judgements faded, however, as the child progressed in age. Adolescent males were found to be more traditional in their views on parental roles than adolescent females were (Brose, 2000).

Studies of gender role attitudes have also been conducted regarding those of college students and college graduates. It would be assumed that those with a higher education would show more nontraditionality in the roles assumed in the home. However, this is not necessarily the case. As in the previous study, males showed consistently traditional attitudes toward gender roles while the attitude of women was found to be related to their work experience. Women working full-time and part-time were found to have less traditional views than those who were homemakers (Cassidy &

Warren, 1996). College students were found to have traditional attitudes toward gender roles with males rating themselves as more achievement oriented and less affiliative/home centered than females (Chang & McBride-Chang, 1997; Pair, 1997). College students whose mothers were homemakers tending to have more traditional conceptions of gender roles providing further evidence of a link between work experience and gender roles (1997).

### **Parents' Influence on Gender Role Acquisition**

Gender role attitudes have been found to differ between individuals based on gender, religion, political ideology, and family background (Pair, 1997). The earliest exposure to the models of gender roles and thus thought to be the strongest influence in the acquiring of these attitudes are the parents. The information the child receives at an early age comes from the parents in the form of "parent-child interactions, role modeling, reinforcement for desired behavior, and parental approval and disapproval." Studies have found that the awareness of these differing roles in society is apparent as early as the age of 2. Studies have also found various ways in which the parent sends this message. Children are encouraged to participate in gender-specific activities and play with gender-specific toys with fathers reinforcing these stereotypes more often than mothers. Children's rooms are often decorated in gender specific ways. Even the assignment of household chores is often gender-specific, which leads children to link certain types of work with each gender. Parents generally treat sons and daughters differently. Parents send messages to their children in various ways about what is appropriate for each gender and these messages are internalized by the child very early on (Witt, 1997).

Children are affected by the models available to them and the pressures of the socialization around them. This has been supported by a cross-cultural study of children from Italy and Holland. In societies where sex-role norms are more traditional, there will be greater pressure for socialization according to these norms. More traditional sex-roles are apparent in Italy. Accordingly, the study found that Dutch children differentiate between the sexes in terms of toy and play preferences, personality and behavioral characteristics, and aggression and dependency less than Italian children do. The norms of the society are reflected in the attitudes of the children (Zammuner, 1987),

While the norms of the society as a whole are important in the socialization of children, the most important socialization factor is the model the parent portrays. Varied beliefs exist among parents. While many uphold the traditional roles, some parents are more egalitarian. Egalitarian parents are more likely to encourage opposite sex characteristics in their children while traditional parents are more likely to encourage same-sex characteristics. However, parents who have a high score on either masculinity or femininity are more likely to encourage that in their children (Antill, 1987).

Studies have also looked at how parents influence their children's attitudes by examining various aspects of home life. One aspect which has been measured to account for socialization toward gender roles is the division of household labor since this is an area which has been traditionally been divided up as "women's work" and "men's work." Cunningham (2001) "examines parental influences on three types of attitudes toward household labor and gender-differentiated family roles, including (a) the ideal allocation of stereotypically female household tasks to women and men, (b) support for gender differentiation in family responsibilities, and (c) the enjoyment of specific household

tasks.” A 31-year longitudinal study of mothers and children was conducted in order to examine this. An initial weakness of this study is that the fathers were not interviewed. Instead, the mothers provided all the information regarding how the household labor was divided. Therefore, information regarding the father’s role in the household may have been biased in some way either positively or negatively. The interviews were made up of questions relating to gender role attitudes about roles within the family, questions relating to the ideal division of housework specifically how four stereotypically female chores should be divided up between parents, and questions relating to task enjoyment. The mothers were interviewed in 1962 and 1977 and the children were interviewed in 1980 at the age of 18. The mothers were also asked additional questions regarding religion, income, work hours, etc. It was found that the 18-year-olds’ gender role attitudes were most significantly affected by the mothers’ gender role attitude during early childhood. The ideal division of labor in the household was found to be most strongly affected by the parental division of labor during the child’s adolescence. Therefore, in households where fathers helped out more, children were likely to associate more male support in the division of labor questions (Cunningham, 2001). This study did not look at the long-term outcomes of these findings.

A similar study was conducted to examine the outcomes of offspring who were the products of nontraditional families. Nontraditional families were identified in three ways: (1) “the number of hours employed for mothers, (2) the amount of housework done by husbands, and (3) the gender role attitudes of parents.” This study assumes that married couples tend to be similar in their gender role attitudes, which was supported by a correlation of .70 when comparing their attitudes. Very little evidence was found that



“mother’s participation in the labor force, husband’s participation in household tasks, and parents’ gender role attitudes had adverse or positive effects on offspring well-being.” It was found, however, that the children of nontraditional parents do tend to have nontraditional gender role attitudes, which again shows the strong influence of parents over the gender role attitudes of their children. A standardized beta of .15 was found between mothers’ and children’s attitudes. This number is consistent with other research that has been conducted (Booth, 1994).

While division of household labor is one avenue for the socialization of children according to gender roles, another avenue is storytelling to children. Stories can be an important way for teaching children about the expectations of society. Parents were recorded telling a story to their 4-year-old child and the stories were coded for strength of themes of affiliation, autonomy, and achievement. Gender of both parent and child and gender type of parent were examined in relation to the themes that were strongest in their story. Statistical significance was found for “gender of parent and child for autonomy themes. Fathers told stories with stronger autonomy themes than mothers,  $F(1, 112) = 7.644, p < .007$ , and boys heard stories with stronger autonomy themes than girls,  $F(1, 112) = 3.663, p < .05$ .” A significant interaction was found in relation to gender type of parent being either masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated and the strength of achievement themes in stories told to sons versus daughters,  $F(1, 102) = 3.15, p < .05$ . Parents of masculine or feminine gender type told stories with stronger achievement themes to sons while parents of androgynous or undifferentiated gender type told stories with stronger achievement themes to daughters (Fiese, 2000). This may have

occurred because parents of a non-gender type may be trying to change the typical stereotypes by teaching their children the opposite.

This study provides only a snapshot of family stories so the evidence should only be considered as a starting point for further studies. Each parent told only one short story to his or her child. In order to get a clearer picture of the socialization process of family stories, several longer stories should be examined from each parent to their child. This would provide stronger evidence for the family story as a socialization agent.

Various theories have also been proposed in order to account for parent's influence on their children's gender roles. One such theory is Chodorow's psychodynamic theory which emphasizes identification with the same-sexed parent as explanation of "girls' development of nurturance and boys' development of power." Another such theory is Whiting's social role theory that emphasizes the assignment of chores as explanation for these gender differences in development. Dickie, Eshleman, Borchere, Hoff, Klimek, and Nelson (1999) tested these theories in situations in which fathers are absent from the family. It was found that the social roles theory was more influential when the father was absent than the psychodynamic theory. With the father absent, it was found that the mother's nurturance influenced nurturing qualities in both sons and daughters challenging the psychodynamic theory. The social roles theory held true even with the father absent in that both sons and daughters performed more chores. However, it was found that the interpretation of these chores that was most important in influencing the children's self-perceptions which lends support to the cognitive theory of gender schemas (discussed in Chapter 1). The authors feel that children perceive themselves based on an interaction between all three types of theories(Dickie et al, 1999).

The experience of gender roles in relation to the family of origin is also beginning to be related to adult perceptions of family life. This is an important step in understanding where these adult perceptions originated and can aid in future interventions. Ivey and Yaktus (1996) “examined how family roles, gender of family leadership, beliefs about the consequences of maternal employment, and family history of parental division of responsibility related to young adults’ perceptions of family and individual family member functioning. Two videotaped family interviews, one in which the father was dominant and the other in which the mother was dominant, were rated by 107 undergraduate students. Relative to the views on family member functioning, the paternal model was favored by those whose family of origin was characterized by higher paternal involvement in household tasks and more traditional gender-related attitudes (Ivey & Yaktus, 1996).

A similar purpose was sought in another study: to examine “parental influence or specific attitudes toward marital and parental roles and nonspecific gender role attitudes.” Snyder, Velasquez, & Clark (1997) utilized a sample of 173 undergraduates (127 women and 46 men) and their parents. Scores were correlated for young adults and parents on Role Orientation (ROR) Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) and the Masculinity (M), Femininity (F), and Masculinity-Femininity (M-F) scales of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ). Young men were found to strongly correlate with mothers (.51) and fathers (.59) in attitudes toward marital and parental roles. Young women correlated less strongly in this respect, .37 with mothers and .18 with fathers (Snyder, Velasquez, & Clark, 1997). While both studies are correlational and cannot

point to a causal relationship, they provide a basis for counselors to examine family of origin.

Research has shown that parents' attitudes are significant predictors of children's attitudes. Mothers can be looked at as primary socializing agents for their children. Rollins and White conducted a study to test this statement in relation to mothers and daughters. Three different family environments were included in the study: traditional in which the mother was a homemaker, dual-work in which the mother worked outside the home in a nonprofessional job, and dual-career in which the mother worked full-time outside the home in a professional job. Mothers' and daughters' attitudes were shown to be significantly related but the attitudes were found to differ across the three groups with the dual career group have the least traditional attitudes. Bohannon & Blanton (1999) followed up fifteen years later to see if the attitudes evolved in any way and if they were still similar. The attitudes were still found to be similar; however, the attitudes evolved to a more nontraditional view which is representative of the changing view of society over the past 15 years. A key question, which is brought up by this data, is whether it is the mothers or the daughters who are the socializing agents as the daughter grows older (Bohannon & Blanton, 1999).

### **Benefits of Androgynous Gender Role Orientation**

Most of the literature examined thus far has dealt with how parents influence their children in forming their gender roles. The traditional roles of masculine and feminine can limit what opportunities children will have available to them in life. Sandra Bem was among the first to take the position that an individual could possess characteristics of both masculinity and femininity in the form of androgyny. Bem linked androgyny to social

competence and psychological well being (Haigler, Day, & Marshall, 1995). A lot more flexibility is available in relation to the androgynous gender role not to mention higher findings of self-esteem and higher levels of identity achievement. In order to be gender fair, it may be best to encourage the androgynous gender role. Since parents have such a strong influence on the acquisition of gender role attitudes, it may be wise for one parent to attempt to adopt the characteristics of the androgynous gender role in order to encourage the same in their children (Witt, 1997).

Other benefits of androgyny have been found as well. Families consisting of one or more androgynous parents rate higher in parental warmth and support (1997).

Orlofsky has linked androgyny among young adults to high levels of masculinity and femininity in both parents as well as with high levels of parental warmth and involvement. In contrast, young adults with traditional gender role characteristics were found to be related to parental rejection and absence of warmth or encouragement from either parent. A study conducted by Henry and Hampton found greater autonomy in young adults whose parents were both androgynous (Snyder et al, 1997).

Haigler et al (1997) conducted a study to test androgyny in relation to parental attachment. Androgynous individuals were expected to report higher parental attachment while undifferentiated individuals were expected to report lower parental attachment than the traditional gender roles. Two hundred eighteen college students were given a demographic questionnaire, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), and the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment – Revised (IPPA). The participants were classified according to the four gender role types: 23.9% as undifferentiated, 25.7% as masculine, 30.3% as feminine, and 20.2% as androgynous. A significant between-subjects effect for

gender role identity with regards to attachment was found,  $F(3, 210)=3.79, p=.011$ . Tukey's HSD test revealed that androgynous and feminine gender types scored higher on attachment while masculine and undifferentiated gender types scored lower. The researchers also expected to find that same-gender-typed individuals would have greater attachment to same-sexed parents while cross-gender-typed individuals would have greater attachment to opposite-sexed parents. No significance was found for this interaction. An existence was found between parental attachment and gender role identity. There is a weakness in this study due to the self-report measure used to measure attachment. It may not be the best measure in order to assess attachment (Haigler et al, 1995).

Some psychological researchers view toyboyism positively because they believe it leads to androgyny. This was not found to be supported in one study. Rather, toyboyism was found to be more strongly related to masculinity (Burn, O'Neill, & Nederend 1996).

Sandra Bem introduced the gender schema theory to explain how children learn gender roles. Since they're learned, this proposes that sex and gender stereotypes can be modified, resulting in a possible gender aschematic individuals. She developed a three-stage process to achieve this. Sweeney (2001) attempted to develop a treatment in order to modify gender roles. While no significant change was found, the change did tend to be in the desired direction so modifications of the treatment may be necessary (Sweeney, 2001).

## **Single-Parent Families**

Differences in socialization may exist in single parent or nontraditional families. Research by Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz indicates that children of gay and lesbian parents are less likely to adopt traditional gender roles as adults (Graham, 2001). While these types of families have not been researched much in this domain, families with one parent due to divorce or death have been studied more often.

Divorce may have an influence over gender roles experienced due to one parent leaving the family. The number of studies that examine this facet of family life is very small and results are very inconsistent. Divorce has been thought by many to produce egalitarian attitudes in children due to new roles taken by parents in such a situation. However, Amato and Booth (1991) found no significant effect between parental divorce or parental marital unhappiness and more liberal gender role attitudes. While a tendency for gender roles to become more liberal was found, it was not strong enough to be significant so further interpretations should not be made on this basis (Amato & Booth, 1991). A larger sample size may help in future research along these lines.

Not all single-parent families are alike. Attainments of children from widowed single-mother families are approximately the same as those from two-parent families, and substantially higher than those of children from divorced single-mother families. On items reflecting approval of nontraditional family behavior and gender role egalitarianism, responses of widowed, divorced, and never-married single mothers were generally similar. In addition, no differences were found in relation to psychological well being (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000).

## **Influence of Siblings**

Sex stereotyping of play activities does occur during childhood. Siblings of same-sex or opposite-sex could further influence the type of play during childhood and even the leisure preferences during adolescence. Undergraduates completed a Play Survey listing up to five favorite childhood and five favorite adolescent activities, information referring to sex of siblings and amount of time spent with them, and the BSRI. An association was found between sex of siblings and play and leisure preferences ( $r=.236$ ,  $p<.01$  for childhood;  $r=.203$ ,  $p<.05$  for adolescence). More gender stereotyping occurred in these activities if the participant spent time with a same-sex sibling than with an opposite-sex sibling. An association was not found between sex of sibling and gender role of the participant with one exception. An association was found for females with female siblings scoring high on femininity. This may only be due to the large amounts of time that female siblings tend to spend together throughout childhood and adolescence (Colley, Griffiths, Hugh, Landers, & Jaggli, 1996).

## **Comparisons of Different Families of Origin**

So far the literature reviewed has dealt with gender role acquisition through the socialization received in the family unit. Research has been conducted in order to compare the differences in the socialization that takes place in different family structures. Presently in society, family can consist of two parents, single parents by means of choice, divorce, or death, and even gay and lesbian life partners. Differences exist in the way each family functions so it is only natural to assume that differences will also exist in the acquisition of gender roles and even which gender roles each style teaches.



It has already been established that mothers are the primary socializing agent of the two parents. A mother's role becomes drastically different when she is the single parent and must be responsible for the father's role as well. Maxwell, Lundgren, & Lansky (1996) designed a study to examine the "mother's role behaviors within the family and the extent to which mothers report an androgynous gender identity." Three hundred forty mothers of college students were mailed surveys and 184 were received back. The mailing included a Systematic Multi-Level Observation of Groups (SYMLOG), the BSRI to assess gender identity, and a set of demographic questions. The SYMLOG included scales of dominance, submissive, friendly, unfriendly, instrumental, and expressive on which mothers rated their behavior within the family. It was hypothesized that divorced and married mothers would differ on the SYMLOG with divorced mothers being more dominant, unfriendly, and instrumental which are the scales most often associated with masculinity. Divorced mothers would be forced to be both father and mother in their household.

The exact opposite was found in the results. Married mothers scored significantly higher than the divorced mothers on dominance ( $F = 3.30$ ,  $df = 1,182$ ,  $p < .07$ ), instrumentality ( $F = 6.74$ ,  $df = 1,182$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and unfriendliness ( $F = 2.76$ ,  $df = 1,182$ ,  $p < .10$ ). It was also hypothesized that divorced mothers will be more likely to be androgynous than married mothers. Again, the direct opposite turned out to be significant ( $\chi^2 = 5.66$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .13$ ) according to the Chi-Square test. Divorced mothers in fact turned out to be mostly feminine in their gender identity while there was more of a mix found in the married mothers. Married mothers were evenly distributed among all four gender identities (Maxwell et al, 1996).

These results were directly opposite the hypotheses stated and directly opposite earlier research conducted relating to marital status and androgyny. Many reasons can be given as to why the direct opposite is true. However, there is a significant weakness in this study in relation to the sample size of divorced mothers used. One hundred and sixty-four mothers were included in the married sample and only 20 mothers were included in the divorced sample. Of the total number sampled, 89.1% were placed in one group while only 10.9% were placed in the other group. This hardly seems like a sample representative of the two groups being examined. A larger sample of divorced mothers may have significantly altered the results of the study.

Sandra Bem (1983) and Russell and Ellis (1991) found children who come from traditional families are more often labeled as either masculine or feminine while children who come from nontraditional families are more often labeled as androgynous. Androgynous characteristics have been attributed to psychological well-being as well as satisfaction, adaptability, and overall sense of well-being. Zweig (2000) designed a study to determine if there is a relationship between family of origin and gender identity. The participants were volunteers from a local university and a gay and lesbian organization that were divided into groups based on their family of origin. Three types were used in this study: traditional, single-parent, or homosexual. The participants completed the BSRI, the Sex-Role Attitudes Scale, and the Sex-Role Behavior Scale. In relation to the scores on all three scales, participants from a homosexual family of origin were the most likely to be labeled as androgynous followed by those from a single-parent family of origin. Those from a traditional family of origin were the least likely to be labeled as androgynous (Zweig, 2000). However, recruiting participants from a lesbian and gay

organization may bias the results for this aspect of the scale. The sample may not be representative of the population at large.

The Extended Satisfaction with Life Scale was also given in order to assess psychological well-being in relation to gender identity. According to Bem, androgynous individuals should score the highest on this scale. This was found to be true in this study with androgynous individuals scoring higher than the other three gender types (Zweig 2000).

Michael Lawrence Slavkin (1997, 1999, 2000) designed a study in order to assess gender role differences in students of single-parent and intact families. It is this study which most closely resembles the task at hand. The study explored the participants' personal gender role, the participants' ideal gender role, and the fit between their personal and their ideal in relation to single-parent and intact families. Slavkin also sought to distinguish the differences between mother-headed single-parents families and father-headed single-parent families. Future behaviors of individuals may be better understood if socialization differences according to family type can be better understood. One hundred and eight females and 61 male undergraduate students from the Midwest took part in the study. Of the students sampled, two were removed due to lack of information about their family of origin, 108 were from intact families, and 59 were from single-parent families. In order to control for confounding variables, the participants were paired based on gender, age, race, and socio-economic status. After the pairings, 90 participants (45 pairs) remained in the study. Students completed two forms of the BSRI and a demographic questionnaire. One form of the BSRI was used to rate their personal

gender roles while the other was used to rate their ideal gender role. Independent t-tests were run to test for five hypotheses (Slavkin, 1997, 1999; Slavkin & Stright, 2000).

Slavkin wrote numerous articles regarding this study and each article contained a different breakdown of the data. However, certain overall findings were apparent from his study. It was hypothesized that growing up in a single-parent family would lead to a greater degree of androgynous characteristics. In fact, those from single-parent families were found most likely to possess masculine gender roles ( $t(22) = 2.76, p = .01$  for males;  $t(48) = 4.34, p = .00$  for females) while it was the females in two-parent families who described themselves in androgynous terms ( $t(48) = 3.45, p = .00$ ). Even though other studies have found opposite results, Slavkin asserts it is because they did not attempt to control for confounding variables as he did.

In relation to the ideal gender role, the majority of the participants valued an androgynous gender role as the ideal regardless of family of origin. The androgynous ideal was apparent for 76% of the mother-headed single-parent families, 75% of the father-headed single-parent families, and 67% of the two-parent families. This may not necessarily be due to the type of family but may in fact be a direct result of the ideal valued by society at the present time. Differences between the ideal and the personal gender role do not exist for students from intact families while students from single-parent families are more likely to view themselves as different from the ideal.

The sample size was too small to find significance in some cases. In particular, the sample for the father-headed single-parent group was too small to determine any patterns at all. However, the fact that extraneous variables were controlled for was a major step. This study was able to explore the relations between family of origin and

gender roles. The next step would be to examine the processes that underlie these relations in order to assess how they are acquired. Slavkin calls for future research in observing the gender roles as they exist in the home environment of each type of family of origin (Slavkin 1999; Slavkin & Stright, 2000).

### **Summary**

Gender roles have been slowly changing in society but these changes do not constitute the norm. Attitudes toward gender roles have been found to vary according to the sex of the individual and according to the experiences of the individual. For samples of adolescents, college students, and college graduates, males were generally found to be more traditional than females in their views toward gender roles. Work experiences of the individuals' parents as well as the individual's own work experience was also found to be associated with attitudes toward gender roles. More traditional views are apparent for those whose mothers were homemakers as well as if the individual surveyed is a homemaker.

Parents are the earliest exposure to models of gender roles and the strongest influence in acquiring these attitudes. The parents' attitudes toward gender roles are reflected in the characteristics encouraged in the child. The results are similar attitudes of either traditionalism or nontraditionalism in the child. Young men were found to correlate strongly with mothers and fathers while young women correlated less strongly with their parents. However, other studies have found higher correlation with young women and their parents particularly with respect to their mother. The attitudes are encouraged in the children through division of household labor and stories told to them.

Differences may exist in single-parent families due to different roles taken by the parent. Attitudes are generally found to be more nontraditional than in intact families. A range of studies was examined which compared the different gender roles existent in various types of family of origin. However, the results were inconsistent with each other. One study found married mothers to be more androgynous than divorced mothers even though the opposite is often found. Another study comparing homosexual family of origin, single-parent family of origin, and intact family of origin found more instances of androgynous individuals in the homosexual and single-parent family of origin. Overall, the homosexual family of origin was found to have the most instances of androgynous individuals. Another study comparing single-parent and intact families of origin found individuals from single-parent families were most likely to possess masculine characteristics while it was actually females in two-parent families who were the most likely to possess androgynous characteristics. This final study was unique in that the author attempted to control for all extraneous variables, which other studies did not attempt to do.

While this research is very similar to the current study being conducted, the results are very inconsistent. In the following chapter, the design of the study will be discussed and the procedures to obtain the results will be laid out.

### Chapter III

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family of origin and an individual's gender role characteristics. This study was designed to determine if differences existed based on the type of family the individual grew up in.

#### **Sample**

Eighty undergraduate students (21 male and 59 female) enrolled in undergraduate Psychology courses at Rowan University participated in the study. Students participated on a voluntary basis during class time. The age range of the participants was 18 to 57, with the mean age being 21.8875. Of the students sampled, 61 were Caucasian, 2 were African American, 2 were Hispanic American, 1 was Native American, and 14 classified themselves as "other." The participants were asked to provide information about the structure of their family of origin. Of the students sampled, 62 students were from intact two-parent families, 13 students were from blended families (divorce and remarriage), and 5 students were from single-parent families. While blended families were not originally to be included in the study, they were later included due to the responses received.

#### **Measures**

Participants were asked to complete the Bem Sex Role Inventory and a demographic questionnaire. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was used to assess the individual's gender role. The BSRI consists of 60 personality characteristics: 20 masculine items (i.e., ambitious, self-reliant, independent, and assertive), 20 feminine items (i.e., affectionate, gentle, understanding, and sensitive to the needs of others), and

20 gender-neutral items (i.e., truthful, happy, and conceited). The participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (“never or almost never true”) to 7 (“always or almost always true”) how well each characteristic described him or her. According to the scores on masculinity and femininity, the individual was classified as one of four gender role categories: masculine (high on masculinity and low on femininity), feminine (high on femininity and low on masculinity), androgynous (high on masculinity and femininity), or undifferentiated (low on masculinity and femininity)(Bem, 1981).

Reliability estimates were conducted for the BSRI on two samples of subjects, both of which were undergraduate students at Stanford University. The first sample was conducted in 1973 and included 279 females and 444 males; the second sample was conducted in 1978 and included 340 females and 476 males. Reliability for the test was found to be very high. Internal consistency was calculated for females and males separately in each sample for scores on the Femininity scale, the Masculinity scale, and the Femininity-minus-Masculinity Difference score. These are the three scores found in the scoring of the test. Internal consistency was found to be very reliable ranging from .75 to .87. Test-retest reliability was computed for all three scores for a portion of the 1973 sample (28 females and 28 males). Again reliability was very high ranging from .76 for males describing themselves on the masculine items to .94 for females describing themselves on the masculine items(1981).

Social desirability was also checked on the test-retest sample. The Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability Scale was administered along with the BSRI. Correlations were very low (-.15 to .21) indicating that the BSRI scores are not measuring a general tendency to describe oneself in a socially desirable manner(1981).



The demographic questionnaire asked for background information on the participant such as sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the structure of their family of origin. Participants were asked to define their childhood family as intact two-parent, blended (divorce and remarriage), father-headed one-parent, or mother-headed one-parent. Participants were also asked to indicate how many siblings they have and the age and sex of each sibling.

### **Design**

This was an experimental study designed to determine if differences in gender roles existed based on the individual's family of origin. Participants were asked to fill out the BSRI and a short demographic questionnaire. This took about 20 minutes to complete. The BSRI assessed the individual's gender role while the demographic questionnaire assessed family structure as being either two-parent, single parent, or blended (divorce & remarriage). Data was analyzed to determine if any differences existed between the groups.

### **Testable Hypotheses**

Students who grew up in a two-parent family will be more likely to identify themselves as the traditional gender roles of masculine and feminine. Males from two-parent families will be more likely to identify themselves as masculine while females from two-parent families will be more likely to identify themselves as feminine. Students who grew up in a single parent family will be more likely to identify themselves as androgynous.

## **Analysis**

Analysis of the data was conducted using a two-way between ANOVA. The BSRI was scored according to two different scales, the Femininity scale and the Masculinity scale. The raw score obtained on each scale was then compared to the median raw scores of the normative sample. Based on the normative data on Stanford University students (both male and female), the medians are 4.90 for Femininity and 4.95 for Masculinity. Individuals who scored higher than the median for masculinity were classified as masculine while individuals who scored higher than the median for femininity were classified as feminine. Individuals who scored higher than the median for both were classified as androgynous while those who scored lower than both were classified as undifferentiated (Bem, 1981).

A two-way between ANOVA was used to determine if a significant difference existed on these scores between students growing up in two-parent intact families, single parent families, and blended families. These analyses were also conducted to determine if any significant differences existed between sexes. Separate ANOVA's were conducted for each of the two scores obtained on the BSRI, the masculinity score and the femininity score.

## **Summary**

Participants were asked to fill out the BSRI and a demographic questionnaire in order to determine if differences in gender roles existed between students who grew up in two-parent families, those who grew up in single-parent families, and those who grew up in blended families. Data was analyzed by use of a two-way between ANOVA to determine if a significant difference existed between the groups with respect to family of

origin as well as the sex of the participant. ANOVA's were conducted separately for the Masculinity scale score and the Femininity scale score each participant receives as a result of the BSRI. The results of the analysis will be given in the following chapter.

## Chapter IV

The central question of the study was whether differences in gender roles exist between students who grew up in two-parent intact families as opposed to students who grew up in a single parent family. It was hypothesized that students who grew up in intact two-parent families will be more likely to identify with the characteristics of the traditional gender roles while students who grew up in single-parent families will be more likely to identify with androgynous characteristics. Due to the number of students who reported growing up in a blended family, this third group was also added to the analyses. A two-way between ANOVA was conducted for each of the scores obtained from the BSRI with the independent variables being type of family of origin and sex of the participant. No significant difference was found to exist between any of the groups with respect to their scores on the Masculinity scale as well as the Femininity scale. Based on these results, it is necessary to accept the null hypothesis.

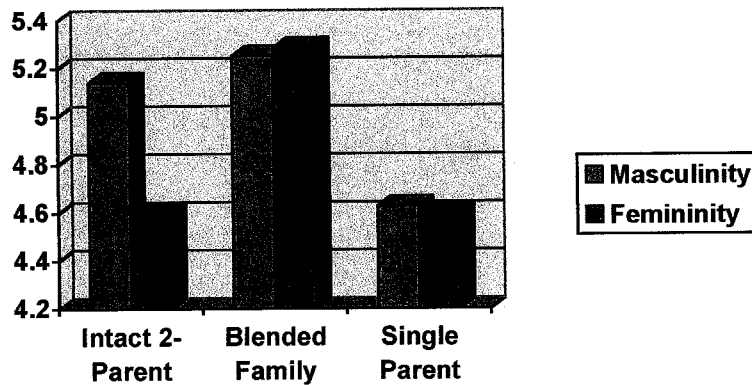
While the results of the study were not found to be statistically significant, there were certain trends apparent with regard to the mean scores. Table 4.1 presents means and standard deviations for the male participants with regards to their scores on the masculinity scale and the femininity scale. According to the median split method of classifying participants into a specific gender role based on the BSRI, the mean scores for males from intact two-parent families can be classified as masculine ( $M=5.1406$  for masculinity;  $M=4.5969$  for femininity). The mean scores for males growing up in a blended family leads to a classification of androgynous ( $M=5.25$  for masculinity;

$\underline{M}$ =5.2833 for femininity). Males growing up in single parent families can be classified as undifferentiated with respect to their mean scores ( $\underline{M}$ =4.6250 for masculinity;  $\underline{M}$ =4.6 for femininity). The differences among the mean scores for these three groups are also displayed in Figure 4.1.

Table 4.1. Means and standard deviations of the male participants on the BSRI.

	Intact Two-Parent N=16	Blended Family N=3	Single Parent N=2
Femininity	4.5969 .5898	5.2833 .2466	4.6 .7071
Masculinity	5.1406 .5704	5.25 .7263	4.6250 .5303

Figure 4.1. Means of male participants on the BSRI according to family of origin.



The trends among female participants are slightly different. Table 4.2 presents the means and standard deviations for the three groups of female participants with regards to their scores on the masculinity and femininity scales of the BSRI. The means scores for females from intact two-parent families ( $\underline{M}$ =4.7413 for masculinity;  $\underline{M}$ =5.1 for femininity) and those from blended families ( $\underline{M}$ =4.8250 for masculinity;  $\underline{M}$ =5.0950 for femininity) leads to a classification of feminine. However, females from single parent

families are classified as masculine according to their mean scores ( $M=5$  on masculinity;  $M=4.5333$  on femininity). These trends are shown comparatively in Figure 4.2.

**Table 4.2.** Means and standard deviations of female participants on the BSRI.

	Intact Two-Parent N=46	Blended Family N=10	Single Parent N=3
Femininity	5.1 .5694	5.0950 .5560	4.5333 .6449
Masculinity	4.7413 .6056	4.8250 .5624	5.0000 .3500

**Figure 4.2.** Mean scores of female participants on the BSRI according to family of origin.

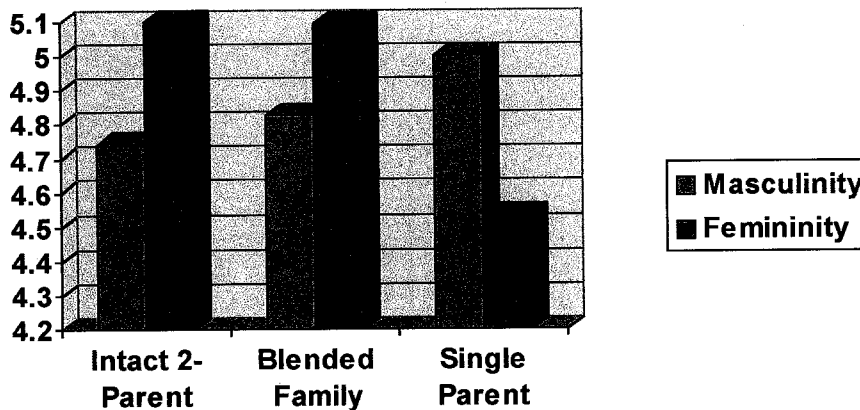


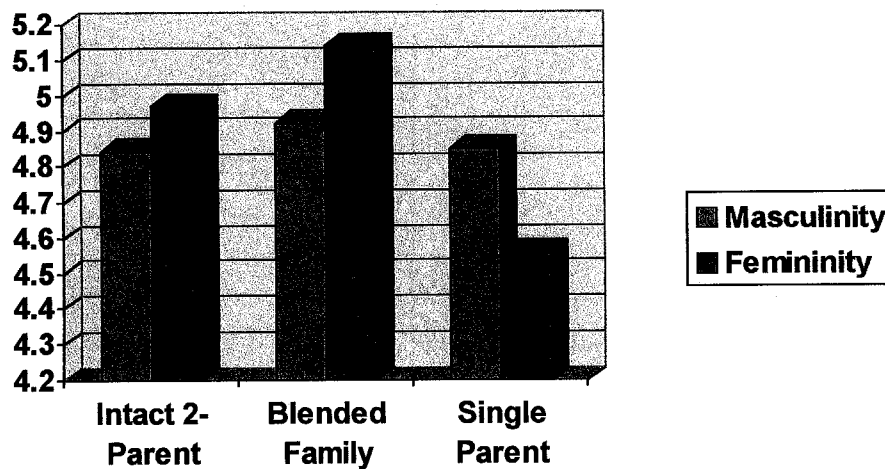
Table 4.3 presents the means scores and standard deviations for all the participants both male and female for the masculinity and femininity scores on the BSRI. According to the classification of gender roles on the BSRI, these means scores signify students from both intact two-parent families ( $M=4.8444$  for masculinity;  $M=4.9702$  for femininity) and blended families ( $M=4.9231$  for masculinity;  $M=5.1385$  for femininity) to be more likely to be classified as feminine while students from single parent families

( $M=4.8500$  for masculinity;  $M=4.5600$  for femininity) to be more likely to be classified as undifferentiated. Figure 4.3 presents the means scores in a bar graph for comparison.

**Table 4.3.** Means and standard deviations of all participants (male and female combined) on the BSRI.

	Intact Two-Parent N=62	Blended Family N=13	Single Parent N=5
Femininity	4.9702 .6115	5.1385 .4988	4.5600 .5781
Masculinity	4.8444 .6177	4.9231 .5999	4.8500 .4168

**Figure 4.3.** Means of all participants (male and female combined) on the BSRI according to family of origin.



### Summary

It was hypothesized that students who come from intact two-parent families will be more likely to identify with characteristics of the traditional gender roles while students who come from single-parent families will be more likely to identify with androgynous characteristics. Data was analyzed by use of a two-way between ANOVA

with the independent variables being family of origin and sex of the participant. Analysis showed no significant differences to be found between any of the groups. Based upon these results, the null hypothesis was accepted.



## Chapter V

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family of origin and an individual's gender role characteristics. An important way in which parents influence their children is through the gender roles they themselves exhibit in the household. These gender roles differ greatly depending upon the makeup of the family of origin. An intact two-parent household divides the responsibilities between both parents often doing so according to traditional gender roles while a single parent family displays one parent juggling responsibilities traditionally associated with both genders. It was hypothesized that students who come from traditional families will be more likely to identify with characteristics of the traditional gender roles while students who come from single-parent families will be more likely to identify with androgynous characteristics.

The literature supporting this idea is inconsistent in the results found. One study found married mothers to be more androgynous than divorced mothers even though the opposite is often found. Another study comparing homosexual family of origin, single-parent family of origin, and intact family of origin found more instances of androgynous individuals in the homosexual and single parent families with homosexual families having the most instances. Another study comparing single-parent and intact families of origin found individuals from single-parent families were most likely to possess masculine characteristics while it was actually females in two-parent families who were the most likely to possess androgynous characteristics. This final study was unique in that the author attempted to control for all extraneous variables, which other studies did not attempt to do.

Participants were asked to fill out the BSRI and a demographic questionnaire in order to determine if differences in gender roles exist between students growing up in two-parent families, those growing up in single-parent families, and those growing up in blended families (divorce and remarriage). Data was analyzed by use of a two-way between ANOVA to determine if a significant difference exists between the groups with respect to family of origin as well as the sex of the participant. ANOVA's were conducted separately for the masculinity scale score and the Femininity scale score each participant receives as a result of the BSRI.

Upon analysis of the data, no significant difference was found to exist between any of the groups with respect to their scores on the masculinity scale and the femininity scale. Based upon these results, it was necessary to accept the null hypothesis.

### **Conclusions**

Based upon the statistical analyses, no significant differences among the groups existed. However, based upon the mean scores for each group, students from intact two-parent families hold more traditional gender roles. Students from single parent families hold nontraditional gender roles with female mean scores signifying masculinity and male mean scores signifying an undifferentiated gender role. Students from blended families vary with the female mean scores signifying femininity and the male mean scores signifying androgyny. While there are slight differences among the groups, more research is needed in order to determine if those differences are in fact based upon the family of origin.

## **Discussion**

Based upon the results, the null hypothesis was accepted. Certain limitations in the study may have accounted for this insignificance among the groups. The sample size and representativeness was a major factor in the results found. Of the students who participated in the study, there were almost three times as many females as males. Out of 80 participants, 73.8% were female while only 26.3% were male. Therefore, the overall mean scores were skewed towards the females. Due to these circumstances, it is better to examine the mean scores for each sex separately.

Another limitation is that the majority of the participants were from intact two-parent families. Of the students sampled, only 16.3% reported their family of origin to be blended and only 6.3% reported their family of origin to be single parent. Splitting up this group into male and female leaves for an even smaller group. Such a small sample cannot be reliable as representative of the population. The only group of some size was the students from intact two-parent families. Examination of their means shows that they fit the traditional gender roles as hypothesized for this study. A larger and more diverse sample with equal numbers of participants distributed among the three groups would have yielded more reliable results.

## **Implications for Future Research**

In examining various groups of family type, it would be advantageous to test a sample of equal proportions. A larger sample would undoubtedly yield more reliable results. However, an equal number of participants for each family type would yield more comparable results.

It would also be interesting to measure the types of roles exemplified in the home. This study assumed that certain roles were displayed in the home based on the student's family of origin. It was assumed that intact families modeled the traditional roles of masculinity and femininity in the home through division of household labor according to gender. Single parent families, on the other hand, were assumed to be a model of one parent combining the roles in juggling all of the responsibilities. These assumptions may not be true in all households. One recommendation for future research is that it be designed to gather information about the roles the child observed in their household and relate it to the gender roles of the individual as a young adult.

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