

RELATIONSHIPS IN STEPFAMILIES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The high divorce rate and the concomitant growth in single parent families are no longer headline news. The general public as well as family professionals are aware of the high divorce statistics of the past quarter century. In general the divorced are not rejecting marriage because within five years of a divorce 75 to 80 percent re-marry (Glick, 1984). Americans are slowly taking note of another family form that has emerged--the growing population of remarried families.

According to Jacobson (1979), professionals have paid little attention thus far to the needs and problems of stepfamilies which are formed from these remarried families. Social scientists are just now beginning to realize that only limited literature is available for this group.

Remarried families not only do not have literature to aid in resolving problems or making adjustments, they also do not have societal guidelines or support groups to guide them through periods of transition and adaption that are available to divorced persons and single parents. The institutionalized strategies for assistance in the process of forming one family out of two previously independent family units are not present. Instead many professionals are trying to use the nuclear biological family models for stepfamilies. Cherlin (1981) asserts that

the lack of institutionalized guidelines and ways of resolving issues become problems for marriage satisfaction in remarried or stepfamilies.

In recent history the "norm" has been the nuclear family, and other types tend to be labeled as deviations from the norm. It has been assumed that the couple would remain married and the children's entrances and exits are the only personnel changes in the family. These expectations have been challenged by the great increase in divorces and remarriages in the last several decades.

Consistent terminology for remarried families has not been established. Prosen and Farmer (1982) view this lack of terminology as indicative of the problems. Terms used include a variety of names: blended family; reconstituted family; stepfamily; merged family; and remarried family or "rem." The relationships in the family do not conform to a simple family construction. There is father and children with new mother, mother and children with new father, father and children with new mother and children. Persons who remarry have problems that do not exist for those in first marriages.

Remarried families may not be visible to professionals because outwardly they resemble the nuclear family. Clinical experience and research discern that these families have unique problems and needs. Several authors conclude (Dolan & Lown, 1985; Jacobson, 1979; Shulman, 1972; Visher & Visher, 1979; Walker, Rogers, & Messinger, 1977) that trying to superimpose the nuclear family model on remarried families is actually detrimental to them because it places expectations that are difficult if not impossible to fulfill. One of the reasons the newly remarried family does not instantly develop into a harmonious family unit is the children involved probably have divided loyalties and

affections. The members of remarried families may very well be part of other family units.

The assumption, for an example, that the stepmother needs to play the mother role and feel instant love for her new stepchildren is unrealistic. First of all love takes time to develop, and secondly the mother of the children may be threatened that she will be replaced in her mother role. The previous spouse may have an impact not only on the relationship of the new spouse and stepchildren but also the couple's relationship (Lofas, 1985). It is obvious that new social roadmaps need to be developed for the remarried families (Berardo, 1982).

The negative stereotyping of stepfamilies is not helpful for their development. The most maligned stepperson is the stepmother who is portrayed as wicked throughout the world. Stepmothers are portrayed as wicked in such fairy stories as "Hansel and Gretel," "Snow White" and the universal favorite, "Cinderella." According to Visher and Visher (1978) using the terminology reconstituted, remarried, combined or blended is an attempt to get away from the negative step nomenclature but "step" for individual people has remained. The Vishers point out that "step" relations have no greeting cards which may infer society's discomfort with step relationships. There are birthday cards for granddaughter, grandson, aunt, uncle, nephew, niece, etc., but stepparents have birthdays too.

The nuclear family has enjoyed the support of cultural norms to the point that variations in family structure have been compared as a "deficit" model in early research (Bowerman & Irish, 1962; Walker, Rogers, & Messinger, 1977). Subjects from nursery school to adulthood

in different family structures are compared with such variables as self-concept, mental health, delinquency, independence, and eventual marital happiness. A majority of studies conclude that alternate family structures contribute to later problems.

According to researchers (Blechman, 1982; Esses & Campbell, 1984; Ganong & Coleman, 1984), these early studies have poor research designs. Many of the supposed adverse effects of nontraditional family structures might disappear if the methodological problems are corrected. The samples are often small and extraneous variables such as educational level, low income, and social status are not taken into account. Recent literature has been more positive about various family structures than earlier studies. Perhaps this is because the number of people in different family structures continues to increase.

One of the fastest growing family types in America today is remarried families. Since many divorces include children, remarriages often involve a stepchild-stepparent relationship. Almost 35 percent of all children can expect to be part of a remarried family in the 1990s. Many prognosticators of family life predict larger numbers of stepfamilies. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1983) estimate that individuals may find themselves living in no less than 10 different family settings over a lifetime. Glick (1989) speculates that well over one-half of today's young persons in the United States may become stepsons or stepdaughters by the year 2000.

If current trends continue 55 percent of remarriages will end in divorce. Survey findings indicate that children from a prior marriage increase the probability of divorce in remarriages (Becker, Landes, & Michael, 1977). "Often the newly remarried encounter resistance to

efforts to organize the new family from their children as well as other relatives" (Dolan & Lown, 1985, p. 37).

The challenge of uniting portions of two family units into one through marriage is enormous. The needs of the remarried families differ from the nuclear, biological family. Various authors (Bernstein & Collins, 1985; Dolan & Lown, 1985; Jacobson, 1979; Mills, 1984) call for research of stepfamilies. Professionals in education, law, and counseling want research data on stepfamilies so that they will be better able to assist this growing population. This study will contribute to the research knowledge of the remarried and their stepfamily relationships.

Purposes and Objectives

One of the purposes of this study is to explore the marital relationship in stepfamilies. Another purpose is to explore the satisfaction with stepparenting and the incidence of conflict over child-rearing in these families.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) Assess the marital satisfaction of stepparents.
- 2) Assess the satisfaction of the stepparents with their parenting role.
- 3) Assess the degree of conflict they experience in the stepparenting role.
- 4) To determine whether marital satisfaction, stepparenting satisfaction or stepparenting conflict are related to demographic variables and/or stepparenting characteristics such as ages of the children in the stepfamily.

5) To interview stepfamilies to get a clearer picture of the stepparenting experience.

6) To make suggestions to professionals regarding future research projects and counseling.

Hypotheses

H₁: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction in remarried individuals (as assessed by Dyadic Adjustment Scale) and closeness of parent-stepchild relationships (as assessed by Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale).

H₂: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction in remarried individuals (as assessed by Dyadic Adjustment Scale) and the following demographic variables: 1) age of stepchildren, 2) number of children and stepchildren, 3) sex of children and stepchildren, 4) educational level of respondent, 5) income level of respondent, and 6) incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses by respondent.

H₃: There is no significant relationship between the parent-stepchild relationship (as assessed by Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale) and the following demographic variables: 1) age of stepchildren, 2) number of children and stepchildren, 3) sex of children and stepchildren, 4) educational level of respondents, 5) income level of respondents, and 6) incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses by respondents.

H₄: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction in remarried individuals (as assessed by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale) and conflict over childrearing (as assessed by the Conflict over Childrearing Scale).

H₅: There is no significant relationship between conflict over childrearing (as assessed by the Conflict over Childrearing Scale) and the following demographic variables: 1) age of stepchildren, 2) number of children and stepchildren, 3) sex of children and stepchildren, 4) educational level of respondents, 5) income level of respondents, and 6) incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses by respondents.

H₆: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction in remarried individuals (as assessed by Dyadic Adjustment Scale) and the following stepfamily characteristics: 1) children living with respondent permanently or occasionally, 2) responsibility for discipline of children given to stepparent, 3) comfort with the degree of responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent, 4) similar views held on childrearing practices by respondent and spouse, 5) degree of support for the stepparent from the biological parent, 6) degree of support from the respondent's extended family, 7) degree of support from spouse's extended family, 8) degree of support from children, 9) having own children and stepchildren, and 10) whether the respondent was assuming the stepfather or stepmother role.

H₇: There is no significant relationship between satisfaction with stepchildren (as assessed by Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale) and the following stepfamily characteristics: 1) children living with respondent permanently or occasionally, 2) responsibility for discipline of children given to stepparent, 3) comfort with responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent, 4) similar views held by respondent and spouse on childrearing practices, 5) degree of support for the stepparent from the biological parent, 6) degree of support

from the respondent's extended family, 7) degree of support from spouse's extended family, 8) degree of support from children, 9) having own children and stepchildren, and 10) whether the respondent was assuming the stepfather or stepmother role.

Hg: There is no significant relationship between conflict over childrearing (as assessed by Conflict over Childrearing Scale) and satisfaction with stepchildren (as assessed by Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale).

Limitations

The following limitations are recognized. The sample is not random; is rather small, and is made up of predominantly members of the upper class socioeconomic group. Therefore, the results of the study may not be generalized to the general public. The majority of the respondents reside in Texas although a few respondents are now living in other states.

In order to be included in the study, the respondent must have been remarried, or married to a person in a second marriage, and be a stepparent.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature is divided into five parts. They are: 1) an overview of remarriage, 2) marital satisfaction in remarriage, 3) marital status and well-being, 4) stepparenting roles, and 5) empirical studies in remarriage.

An Overview of Remarriage

Jessie Bernard (1956) in her classic book Remarriage: A Study of Marriage asserts that although there are people who continually fail in one marriage after another, they are a minority. If one takes a sample of remarried people at any one time, most are as satisfied in their remarriage as are those in their first marriage. She suggests that remarriages have advantages in that the first marriage may be seen as an apprenticeship for remarriage, and couples in remarriages have higher motivations, more realistic expectations, greater age, and maturity.

According to Furstenberg (1980) remarriage is not a new pattern in the kinship system of North America and western Europe. In times past mortality was higher and remarriage served to restore the domestic unit to its original nuclear structure. While it may be reassuring to recognize that remarriage is not a new unfamiliar social pattern, Furstenberg warns that viewing the current reconstituted family as a variation on that of the past will cause problems. The differences in

remarriages caused by death and remarriage caused by divorce are not trivial. There is a structural difference between the two forms of remarriage. In the case of remarriage after divorce the parent augments rather than supplants the biological parents, but in remarriage after death the parent replaces the deceased parent. Having "more than two parents" introduces a host of issues not provided for in the nuclear-based kinship system.

American society does not seem ready for the divorce and remarriage trends. Experts did not even foresee the rapid rise in marital dissolution. A generation ago who would have predicted that in the latter part of the twentieth century half of all marriages contracted would end in divorce (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984). Remarried families formed from divorce are now a substantial minority which has a paucity of societal guidelines in the form of legal and nonlegal norms and terminology appropriate to second marriages (Cherlin, 1978; Clingempeel, 1981; Clingempeel, Brand, & Levoli, 1984; Furstenberg, 1980; Visher & Visher, 1978; Walker, Rogers, & Messinger, 1977).

Bohannon (1970) writes of the difficulties associated with the lack of socially acceptable and clearly defined role relationships in the reconstituted or remarried family. Price-Bonham and Balswick (1980) write that ambiguity of status contributes to adjustment difficulties for the remarried couples especially when there are children involved. This same idea is reiterated by Westoff (1977) when she stated that

the family can no longer be thought of as a neat, incapsulated entity, simple and easily definable . . . we have been taught to think of family as the biological family, (parents and children related by blood ties) well, that's not the family any longer. That's only one kind of family. (pp. 2-3)

Walker and Messinger (1979) suggest the following differences:

The modern remarriage family lacks several of the boundary maintaining conditions available to the first marriage family. It lacks the common household residence of natural parents and children and, likewise, the common household locus of parental authority and often of economic subsistence. In the remarriage family with children from a previous marriage, parental authority as well as economic subsistence may be shared with the former spouse of one or both adult partners. Similarly, the likelihood of filial affection being concentrated within the remarriage household is minimal. The affections and loyalties of children in a remarriage family are often divided, even torn, between two parental households. Furthermore, the remarriage family lacks much of the shared family experience, the symbols and the rituals that help to maintain the psychic boundaries of the first remarriage family. (p. 186)

Furstenberg (1980, 1982) posits that through divorce and remarriage parents are added so that these families resemble an extended family system rather than a nuclear family. Dramatic changes have taken place in the last two decades but norms, social institutions, customs and attitudes in the United States have not yet adjusted to reflect these changes (Bohannon, 1970; Cherlin, 1978; Mead, 1970). According to Furstenberg (1980) as a result of the high divorce rate approximately nine out of ten remarried persons are previously divorced. There is also evidence that first marriages are not as problematic as remarriages following divorce (Glenn & Weaver, 1977).

Many complex factors are involved in a second marriage because it entails the joining of two, three or more families whose family life has been disrupted by either death or divorce. Various researchers report the presence of less discord and stress in first marriages than in remarried families (Fast & Cain, 1966; Visher & Visher, 1978; Weingarten, 1980). The process by which the remarried family system stabilizes and regains its forward developmental thrust is considered to be extremely stressful (McGoldrick & Carter, 1980). The remarried

family system has such stress that it adds an entire additional phase to the family life cycle for those involved, one which is often resolved only with great difficulty. Becker, Landes, and Michael (1977) suggest this task is often so difficult that the presence of stepchildren is associated with an increased probability of separation and divorce in the remarriage.

Visher and Visher (1978, 1979, 1982, 1988) make many contributions to the theoretical literature on the remarried. They describe myths that operate in the remarried family, the first myth being that the remarried family functions in the same manner as the nuclear family.

According to Visher and Visher (1979) the nuclear family is an intact family consisting of father, mother and children and no longer exists when there is a separation between mother and father due to death or divorce. The failure of counselors to recognize that the nuclear family has been dissolved leads to confusion and painful situations in the remarried family. The remarried family does not have the stability and cohesiveness of the nuclear family because one of the parents is no longer part of the family but may exert control from the outside. Counselors may help stepparents learn to cope with the lack of control in many areas and recognize the difficulties and help them delineate the areas of control.

The second myth the Vishers report is that the death of a spouse makes stepparenting easier. While it may be difficult to be compared with an ex-spouse, it is almost impossible to compete with the idealized dead parent. Schulman (1972) relates that in natural families difficulties can arise when children have wishes, fantasies and hopes which tend to cause overexpectation and disappointments. In the remarried

or reconstituted family the fantasies, hopes and projections tend to be played out more intensively and in a more complicated way. The loss of a parent creates greater vulnerability in the child and tends to stimulate the fantasy of the perfect mother or father.

The Vishers illuminate the myth that love happens instantly in the remarried family. Although logically most people realize that love grows and develops but many spouses expect the new stepparent to immediately love his or her stepchildren (Schulman, 1972; Simon, 1965). According to Goodman-Lezin (1985) this myth falls mainly on the step-mother who is viewed by society to be the primary provider of nurturance and affection as well as the one who is responsible for the interpersonal functioning of the stepfamily.

Another myth which is similar to the "myth of instant love" is the "myth of instant adjustment" (Jacobson, 1979). Most people about to become stepparents do not anticipate the problems or hard realities they must face in a remarriage. The realities include the fact that not just two but several lives are involved in this new arrangement. The previous spouse will have an impact on the couple as well as the stepchildren. Whether or not the individual has done his grief work about the original marriage and let go of the first spouse will influence the remarried relationships. The children may hope to break up a remarriage because they hope their biological parents will marry each other again. In addition, the children may be jealous of the new spouse who might take the parent's time, attention and love from them. People often think that magic will occur and love will produce instant adjustments.

Many people do not realize that intense conflictual feelings or their denial are common predicaments in remarried families (McGoldrick & Carter, 1980). Goldstein (1974) uses the term "pseudomutuality" which is defined as a denial of hostile feelings and their expression between family members. This collusion among family members comes from an intense fear that the second marriage will go the way of the first. The denial of hostile feelings prevents resolution of conflicts which may result in a family permeated by a constant tense feeling of hidden anger and malaise.

Marital Satisfaction in Remarriage

The marital satisfaction of first marriages has had very extensive research, but comparatively little research has been done on the success of the remarriage of persons who have been divorced. Glenn and Weaver (1977) note that the research on satisfaction in the remarried tends to be fragmented. Albrecht, Bahr, and Goodman (1983) relate that from the research available, one could reach three conflicting conclusions: 1) remarriages are happier than first marriages; 2) remarriages are equally as happy as first marriages; and 3) remarriages are less happy than first marriages.

Support of the first argument can be found in the research of Knaub, Hanna, and Stinnett (1984) who found high scores on family strength and marital satisfaction in their study of remarried families. Albrecht (1979) also found high marital satisfaction in his study of the remarried and suggested part of the reason could be that the respondents were older, more mature and experienced.

Glenn and Weaver (1977) using national survey data determined that marital happiness of remarried persons is generally the same as intact first marriages. An increased divorce rate does not indicate a decline in the marital happiness of remarried persons relative to that of persons who have never been divorced.

Several researchers give statistics for the conclusion that remarriages are less happy than first marriages. Glick (1980) notes that remarriages are more likely to be terminated than are first marriages. Cherlin (1978, 1981) argues that there are problems in remarriages that are absent in first marriages. The problems are created by a more complex family structure and less guidelines for solving problems. It can also be argued that the experience of once having gone through a divorce makes it easier to do it again if the next marriage or marriages do not work out.

Halliday (1980) argues that the divorce rate is not necessarily an indicator of the success rates of second marriages. He feels that a significant proportion of the population does not have recourse to divorce due to marital unhappiness in first marriages because of religious and other restraints on divorce. Many of these restraints are removed for the remarried, making it more likely they will terminate a "bad" marriage.

Furstenberg (1980) in his Pennsylvania study found that the view of the remarried was that remarried people are less likely than people in first marriages to stay in unhappy marriages. Furstenberg and Spanier (1984) discovered that remarried people reported greater flexibility in the division of household tasks, a greater degree of emotional exchange between husband and wife, and more shared decision

making than was true in their first marriage. In general the remarried couples related to each other more individually rather than adhering to defined sex roles.

Furstenberg (1980) points out that it is difficult to determine whether the differences reported in first and second marriages are actual or perceived. Remarried couples would want to think that things are different from their first marriage and so may overstate the positive features of their current relationship and exaggerate the negative aspects of their previous union. Even if the differences are not real, one may remember W. I. Thomas' powerful insight that if situations are defined as real, they become real in their consequences.

Furstenberg and Spanier (1984) and Schlesinger (1977) feel that remarried individuals have a special advantage over persons marrying for the first time, apart from age and maturity, in their familiarity with the institution of marriage. The Central Pennsylvania interviews showed that individuals put their experience of their first marriage to work in their second marriage. Weingarten (1980) suggests that remarried individuals do not have more problems with their spouses, perhaps because they enter marriage with more realistic expectations and more modest objectives.

Glenn and Weaver (1977) in their study of marital happiness of remarried, divorced and never divorced found no substantial difference in reported marital happiness between divorced and never-divorced respondents but noted a statistically significant difference between divorced and never-divorced females, suggesting that remarried females are not as satisfied with marriage as remarried males. In addition, they concluded that the prospects for the divorced males to remarry

successfully are better than for remarried females. Men and women remarried at the same rate until females reached age 35 and males reached age 50. After these ages the remarriage rate for women declined while the rate for men increased.

Marital Status and Well-Being

In recent years researchers exploring the relationship of marital status to well-being have discovered considerable evidence linking divorce to higher rates of such diverse phenomena as psychiatric hospitalization, physical illness and disease mortality, suicide, homicide, and alcohol abuse (Carter & Glick, 1976; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Kitagawa & Hauser, 1973; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977; Redlick & Johnson, 1974; Wechsler, Thums, Demone, & Dwinell, 1972). Bloom, Asher, and White (1978) attempted to account for this empirical relationship by reviewing the literature on divorce and distress.

Four major hypotheses were offered by Bloom, Asher, and White for the explanation of the association between divorce and distress. The first, a pre-existing pathology model postulates that "healthier" individuals are more likely to remain married than physically or emotionally handicapped persons. This perspective suggests that it is not that marriage is good for people in and of itself but that it is the healthiest people who maintain the marital role. The second hypothesis indicates that physical or emotional problems arising subsequent to marriage will likely increase the probability that a given marriage will be terminated by divorce. It is implied from this model that marriage can be sustained only by individuals who remain "fit." A third hypothesis argues health protection operates as a part of an

intact marriage. The implication is that living with a spouse is health promoting because it either assists a person in getting prompt and efficacious attention for disorders that would become more pathological if left unrecognized and unattended or it reduces vulnerability to debilitating disorders. The fourth hypothesis is a "crisis" model. It posits that marital disruption is a severe crisis which can precipitate disorders in people who are vulnerable to but not manifesting problems within their current lifestyle.

Within a crisis framework, it is recognized that divorce evokes a high level of stress because divorce confronts individuals with major emotional losses in conjunction with legal problems, new concerns about jobs, money, children, family and friends; and disruptions of familiar habits, activities, and routines. However, Bohannon (1970) and Weiss (1975) mention that while divorce may be initially overwhelming to the person it can ultimately promote positive change through confronting the individual with demands (or opportunities) to develop new and adaptive ways of dealing with life. Crisis theorists and researchers claim that personal growth and development may be the result for many who successfully cope with the new role and skill requirements of being divorced (Chiriboga, 1979; Salts, 1979). This crisis model would suggest that as a result of coping and adaptation as time elapses after a divorce, the subjective well-being of numbers of divorced persons would improve.

A fifth explanation of the link between divorce experience and distress is the institutional model which notes that a crisis view of divorce does not provide a complete picture. The institutional model has recently delineated first marriage, divorce, and remarriage after

divorce must be looked at as distinct statuses which present individuals with unique challenges and stresses. The "divorce situation," viewed from the institutional model is problematic in its own right; but the "remarried situation" is uniquely stressful in and of itself because of problems with the former spouses, with potential stepchildren and absentee children (Price-Bonham & Balswick, 1980).

According to Weingarten (1985) scores of research studies show that currently married persons have lower disability rates than currently divorced adults. This is regardless of previous marital history which may include the physical and emotional problems among those who divorce and remarry. The impact of remarriage as a distinctive marital status needs to be understood given that the majority (80%) of divorced persons remarry within five years after the divorce. The research comparing first married and remarried respondents has not supported either a "premarital" or a "postmarital" disability hypothesis because the adjustments for the two groups are remarkably similar (DeMaris, 1984; Glenn, 1981; Larson & Allgood, 1987; Weingarten, 1980; White, 1979).

In her study of marital status and well-being, Weingarten (1985) compared first married, currently divorced and remarried adults. Her earlier study only dealt with well-being of first married and remarried respondents and did not take into account length of time between divorce and remarriage, and sex or education. When comparing divorced and remarried she discovered that the divorced are significantly more likely to report that they are "not too happy," less likely to report that the present is the happiest time of life, and more likely to view the past as much happier than the present. However, the currently

divorced adult and the remarried adult were remarkably similar on measures of well-being that did not include evaluations of personal happiness.

When comparing the divorced and intact first married respondents she found that while being divorced had certain enduring negative consequences for subjective well-being, these effects were confined to certain dimensions of well-being instead of being evenly distributed among them all. The first married and their remarried counterparts were considerably more exuberant about life than the respondents who are currently divorced.

Another of her findings is consistent with the trends in the life crisis literature in that respondents had high scores on well-being and were more similar to first married than divorced respondents. Social scientists interested in crisis intervention have emphasized that individuals confronted with overwhelming life events require time to recover but the coping well with the crisis may foster considerable personal growth.

Stepparenting Roles

The Stepfather Role

The work of Emily and John Visher (1978, 1979, 1982, 1988) has been revolutionary in providing theory for conceptualization of work with the stepfamily. They see the role of the stepfather in our society as ambiguous. The father's role is typically financial and educational. If there is a biological father elsewhere, the stepfather may be left with a partial role or no role at all. According to the Vishers the

stepfathers without biological children have the best chance to do well with stepparenting. Although these stepfathers are inexperienced they do not carry guilt about their own children that stepfathers whose children reside with former spouses must feel over leaving their children. In an alternate situation, if the noncustodial parent marries a woman without biological children she may not comprehend the depth of feelings involved over children.

The Vishers believe that stepfathers have three very important tasks in the stepfamily. They are: 1) establishing a place for himself in an already existing group, 2) dealing with unrealistic expectations, and 3) working out family behavior rules. Early in the stages of stepfamilyhood the rules by which a family will behave must be worked out (Visher & Visher, 1979).

Stern (1978) studied issues of discipline in 30 stepfather families and deduced that stepfathers must be integrated into the family before they can take on a disciplinary role. Before he can take over as instrumental head of the family group, he must be a part of the family. The study relates that for stepfather families a time period of one-and-a-half to two years is required to develop a set of norms about family behavior which allow the stepfather to function as its "psychological head." A most important finding from this study was that the stepfathers had a much better chance of becoming a loved and respected part of the family if they moved slowly, making a friend of the stepchild before attempting to discipline.

The Stepmother Role

The stepmother role differs from the stepfather role whether or not

the woman has biological children. Visher and Visher (1979) claim that the most important difference between the roles is the typically held, unrealistic expectations that stepmothers commonly have of themselves.

Stepmothers expect themselves in varying degrees to:

- (1) Make up to the children for the upset caused by the divorce or death in the original family.
- (2) Create a close-knit happy family in an attempt to return to the nuclear family.
- (3) Keep all family members happy and contented.
- (4) Be living examples that the wicked stepmother myth is untrue.
- (5) Love their stepchildren instantly and equally to their natural children and receive love from their stepchildren instantly. (p. 50)

In our society it falls to the woman to create the emotional climate whether in stepfamily or biological family. It is the mother who usually feels responsible for the emotional well-being of each person in the family.

The stepmother who has no biological children has a particularly difficult role. She may enter the household believing she will immediately have the family that she has not yet experienced. She may not realize she is an outsider trying to break into a pre-existing group and become its expressive leader (Visher & Visher, 1988).

The Vishers believe that the remarried mother who is a stepmother has problems but they are different in degree and kind to the woman who is stepmother and not biological mother. Having two sets of stepchildren makes a more complex family; but when both adults are parents as well as stepparents, they share both roles. The sharing of roles may bring understanding. In addition, the sharing of the experience of previous partners gives the whole stepfamily relationship better balance (Visher & Visher, 1988).

Other studies support the Vishers' impression that the role of the biological mother is less difficult than the role of stepmother (Duberman, 1975; Nadler, 1976; Sardonis-Zimmerman, 1977). Nadler in her study compared three groups of women: fulltime stepmother, part-time stepmother, and biological mother in intact families. The stepmothers had more negative feelings about family relationships, experienced far more interpersonal conflict, and lived in families with more conflict between members. More conflict was found in the areas of roles, relatives, finances and family life. Nadler concluded these difficulties came from the lack of support from family and society to the stepmother who was trying to manage the role of stepparent and to satisfy personal needs.

In a study comparing biological mothers in intact families and stepmothers (some of whom were biological parents) Sardonis-Zimmerman (1977) found stepmothers to be more confident than biological mothers. She outlined three developmental stages for the stepmother as she enters the family. The first stage is generally happy and hopeful, either because of a genuine liking, or denial of dislike of the stepchildren. In the second stage negative feelings surface and conflict begins. The woman may fear that these negative feelings could portend the end of her relationship. Often she works harder at being a good stepmother. The third stage is the crisis stage for the stepmother can no longer hide her feelings. The relationship of the partners is tested as the conflict erupts.

Empirical Studies in Remarriage

The study of remarriage began with Bernard's (1956) classic

assessment. She used census-type statistical material, questionnaires filled out by persons who were intimate with the remarried couple and individual case material to study 2,009 remarriages. After assessing differences in equilibrium, solidarity, conflict and competition in remarriages with and without children, Bernard concluded that followup marriages attain about the same success as other marriages. She indicated that divorce weeds out the poor marriages of the remarried population and that stepparent-stepchild relationships may, in many cases, be healthy overall and mutually supportive.

Difficulties indicated include strain from stepparent-stepchild relationships, and financial strain resulting from obligations to more than one family. Another difficulty she mentioned was the fact persons generally carry their "risk factors for poor marriage" from one marriage to the subsequent marriage or marriages.

The positive influences of remarriage include more realistic expectations of marriage, greater maturity and experience and the ability to profit from past mistakes. It should be noted that Bernard had no direct contact with remarried couples themselves.

Duberman (1975), in one of the earliest empirical studies, explored the relationships within the remarried family. Her subject population were 88 families randomly drawn from a marriage licence bureau in Cleveland, Ohio. The subjects included stepfather families, stepmother families and remarried childless couples. The majority of the families were stepfather families. This was a descriptive study and Duberman created the instruments used in the study. Using open-ended questions, she constructed indices of: family integration, parent-child relationship, husband-wife relationship, stepsibling

relationships and attitudes of individuals outside the family system.

Duberman's study was of a correlational nature, exploring the quality of the husband-wife relationship and 1) parental age, 2) religion, 3) educational level, 4) social class, 5) residence of the children, 6) age and sex of the children, 7) parents' prior marital status, 8) existence of children born into the remarriage, and 9) the residence of the children from the previous marriage. Husband and wife were asked to rate his or her relationship with the child and to evaluate the children's relationship with the stepparent. The parent-child relationship score was obtained by the investigator evaluating the parents' comments. A Family Integration Score was found using the spouse's ratings of closeness with the family combined with the investigator's rating based on discussion and observation.

Compared to previous research Duberman (1975) found generally more positive stepparent-stepchild relationships. Duberman reported that the relationship between the stepparents and stepchildren greatly influenced the overall integration of the remarried family. She also reported that stepmothers experience greater difficulty in establishing and maintaining good relationships with their stepchildren than do stepfathers. The explanation suggested for this finding is that stepmothers spend more time with the children. She found that the presence of a noncustodial biological parent had a negative effect on the stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Frank Furstenberg, Jr. and Graham Spanier (1984) collaborated on a book, Recycling the Family, that has become well-known in the family field. The book comes from research that they designed on remarriage. Furstenberg got the idea for a study of the transition from divorce to

remarriage in the summer of 1977 at the Philadelphia airport as he stepped off a plane and was greeted by a shower of rice and confetti. Ahead of him was a middle aged couple whose friends were gathered to welcome them home. A sign waved by one of the friends said "Recycled Lovers." Furstenberg relates that at that moment he decided to work on a proposal that ultimately became the book Recycling the Family.

Furstenberg instigated a pilot study of the remarried using Philadelphia marriage records. He hoped to use the pilot study for baseline information for a potential sample for inclusion into the proposal on remarriage. Enough individuals for the sample could not be found because most had moved from the address listed in the records and could not be located easily. At this point Furstenberg proposed to Spanier that they conspire in following up Spanier's sample begun in 1976 of case study interviews with recently divorced men and women. Spanier, in 1977, had collected a considerable body of cross sectional data, allowing for the possibility of a future longitudinal study but made no plans for such a followup. The eligible respondents included persons known to be living within a 50 mile distance of Centre County, Pennsylvania. Spanier had located and interviewed 210 of the 900 potential respondents which is only 23 percent of the designated population. This response rate is low but is consistent with the results of other studies of marital dissolution.

Spanier reported that the results from central Pennsylvania cannot be generalized because of the sampling procedure but the sample has certain strengths. It is extremely diverse in social class, religion and age. Most previous investigations had been clinically based or known to be a special subgroup of the formerly married such as a self-help group.

The interviewers were trained women residents of Centre County, hired by the Institute of Survey Research. A mailed questionnaire was used to verify all of the interviews. The reports from the mailed questionnaires revealed information that validated the responses in the face-to-face interviews and showed that the respondents were generally very satisfied with the interview. Followup case studies conducted by Furstenberg and Spanier of 25 of the remarried respondents and their new spouses provided further corroboration of the veracity of the responses.

The couples were interviewed together rather than separately as in the first interviews. From this interview Furstenberg and Spanier discovered how much the couple had communicated to each other about the individual interviews. The communication styles ranged from couples who did not discuss the first interviews to those who had extensive conversations, comparing notes on each of their responses. These interviews differed not only in having both spouses present but also Furstenberg and Spanier employed a loose structure, letting the couple "tell their story."

Furstenberg and Spanier (1984) revealed that the second interviews which they called the delayed probe interviews guided the subsequent analysis of the data. The themes of the chapters in the book emerged in the course of discussion of the information collected in the structured interviews. Many of the ideas explored in the analysis came from the interplay of the two types of data.

One of the findings of the study is that most individuals cope rather well with the strains of divorce and remarriage. These results parallel the findings on the effects of divorce on children that have

shown that the short-term trauma is often quite considerable but that the long-term effects are much less severe (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Most individuals, whether children or adults, given time are able to adapt to unexpected life changes. It would be interesting to explore the mechanisms which individuals employ to mobilize personal and social resources in the process of negotiating unscheduled transitions.

According to Furstenberg and Spanier the custody issue has resurfaced as both a practical matter for families who have experienced marital disruption and a policy dilemma for the courts and service providers who must deal with problems of child care. In most cases the results are not satisfactory to either the children or parents involved. Furstenberg and Spanier discern that the parenting pattern after divorce is for the nonresidential parents to opt out altogether. The pattern is that the contact between the nonresident parent and child dwindles to an occasional visit. Mothers who were nonresident usually kept more in touch with children than nonresident fathers. Usually residential parents claim that the outside parents are not being responsible, while outside parents feel excluded and unappreciated. Remarriage further complicates the situation by expanding the demands on the parents and by introducing additional actors. The data from central Pennsylvania relates that remarriage may add or relieve strain between the formerly married partners. Often there is a realignment of family priorities. Nonresidential parents frequently withdraw altogether, turning their attention to their second family. It appears that sociological parenthood takes precedence over biological parenthood. Successful coparenting between biological parents was extremely rare in the central Pennsylvania data.

Furstenberg and Nord (1985) describing the results of a national survey of children from maritally disrupted families, characterized the pattern of child care after divorce and remarriage as "a system of child swapping" whereby fathers exchange one set of children for another.

The central Pennsylvania data described the kinship system established by divorce and remarriage as somewhat different for adults and children. Adults, as they move from one marriage to the next, trade one set of relatives for another. The chapter on intergenerational relations reveals that families ratify the marriage by extending temporary kinship to in-laws. The relationship with the blood kin could be jeopardized if the in-law is not recognized as a kinsperson.

Children have the reversed situation. They do not usually exchange kin as they move to a different family. Presumably, blood ties take precedence over the ties to their stepparent. However for the relationship with kin to be effective still requires contact and material support. The intergenerational relations link between the child and his or her noncustodial parents' extended family may be disrupted by the withdrawal of the noncustodial parent. Conversely close bonds with the extended family of the stepparent may be forged from frequent contact. Typically children do not forfeit relations but rather add on relations. As a result after a divorce and remarriage they acquire an expanded kinship network.

As a result of these changes for the children they acquire a large pool of adults. A child may have six grandparents and maybe more. An intriguing question is how will the adults-grandparents in particular manage the competency claims of biological and steprelations. The

central Pennsylvania data suggests that distinctions are sometimes ignored in order to avoid conflict.

Furstenberg and Spanier relate that their purpose is to discover how families respond to situations that are culturally uncharted. They believe that the solutions the families invent provide a clue to the emerging rules of behavior. These rules depict what the family is today and what it is likely to become in the future.

Using a family systems theoretical base, Goodman-Lezin (1985) studied stepmothers and their satisfaction with the stepmother role and their general well-being. The research sample consisted of 65 full- and part-time stepmothers and 65 stepchildren. The age span of the stepmothers was 22 to 65 and the age span of the stepchildren was 10 to 16. The data was collected in one hour visits to the family home.

Multiple regression analysis was used by Goodman-Lezin to relate predictor variables: 1) the extent to which the stepmother had achieved healthy differentiation from her family of origin; 2) marital satisfaction; 3) the extent to which the biological father invested the stepmother with parental responsibilities; 4) the degree of other life stress experienced by the stepmother; 5) the amount of conflict existing between the biological parents; 6) the amount of conflict in the stepmother-stepchild relationship as perceived by the stepchild; and, 7) the stepchild's adjustment to the biological parents' divorce to stepmother adjustment and general well-being.

The most powerful predictor of stepmother satisfaction was the extent to which the biological father invested the stepmother with parental responsibilities and thereby created a parental unit. Goodman-Lezin suggested this finding has important clinical implications

because it points to the need of strengthening the bond between the biological father and stepmother. It is common for biological fathers in remarried families to try to shield their children from the stepmother or to protect the stepmother from their children. Goodman-Lezin indicated that this protection strategy may induce a wedge between the stepmother and stepchild who may become increasingly reluctant to allow a bond with the stepmother to develop. The stepchildren may come to view their stepmother as powerless and useless in their lives. This further exacerbates the difficulties in the stepmother's attempts to establish and maintain a meaningful and solid bond with her stepchild.

Another clinical concern from the study would be around the issue of the differentiation from the family of origin by women who are trying to function effectively within the complex parental role of stepparent. The woman who has not mastered basic issues of differentiation from her own family may have more problems assuming the parental function of relating to the stepchild. According to Goodman-Lezin clinicians should keep in mind these issues when assessing the distress and dysfunction reported by many women in remarried families.

Correlations were found by Goodman-Lezin between the level of conflict in the stepmother-stepchild relationship and the stepchild's adaptive responses to the impact of his/her parent's divorce. She speculated that the more adaptive the child's response to the parent's divorce, the less conflict is experienced by the child in relationship with a stepmother.

Additionally, a correlation was found between the amount of conflict existing between the biological parents of the stepchild and the level of conflict in the stepmother-stepchild relationship. This

suggests that the greater the conflict that exists between the biological parents, the greater the conflict is experienced by the stepchild in his/her relationship with the stepmother. This finding adds support to previous research (Ahrons, 1981; Ahrons & Perlmutter, 1982; Hess & Camera, 1979) that the quality of the postdivorce parental relationship is an important factor in the child's postdivorce adjustment which even includes the child's ability to experience healthy relationships within the context of the remarried family.

Finally, two incidental findings from the study are worth mentioning. The amount of time the stepmother actually spent with the stepchild correlated significantly and negatively with the stepmother's general well-being which indicates that the less amount of time the stepmother actually spends with the stepchild the better her general well-being. This finding strongly implies that functioning in a stepmother-stepchild relationship is very stressful.

The other finding related to the stepmother's well-being was the stepchild's having been in psychotherapy which was positively and significantly related to the stepmother's sense of general well-being. This suggests that the psychotherapy for the stepchild may have value and contribute to positive functioning within the context of the stepmother-stepchild relationship.

Part of Goodman-Lezin's contribution to the study of stepfamilies comes from the scales she developed in conjunction with her study. Reviewing the literature she found only one possible instrument to measure the stepmother's level of satisfaction with her stepchildren. Clingenpeel, Brand, and Levoli (1984) had adapted and reworded the Parent Report of Child Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1979) to reflect

a stepparent's (rather than the biological parent's) perception of his or her relationship with his or her child. Goodman-Lezin reported that no reliability or validity had been established for the scale. She found a subscale, Dissatisfaction with Children, that had a high established reliability, .90 (Snyder, 1981). The subscale was a part of Snyder's Marital Satisfaction Inventory and he approved her adaptation of the scale to extend the use of the scale to the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Goodman-Lezin changed the wording of the items only as far as using the stepfamily nomenclatures and changed the format of the instrument from a true-false scale to a 4-point Likert scale. This revision established an appropriate measurement of the level of stepparent satisfaction with his or her stepchild. A Cronbach's alpha was assessed by analyzing the data generated and was .90 (Goodman-Lezin, 1985). The next chapter has more on the scale and the scale can be viewed in the questionnaire, items 59-80 (Appendix A).

Goodman-Lezin reviewed the literature for an instrument specifically designed to measure the extent to which the biological father is willing to entrust the stepmother with real parental responsibilities. She selected the Conflict over Childrearing Scale to adapt because of its high established reliability and validity as a measure of the amount of conflict existing between spouses and distribution of power regarding parenting. The Conflict over Childrearing Scale was a subscale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) (Snyder, 1981). Goodman-Lezin obtained permission from Snyder to adapt his original scale by changing the wording to reflect a stepparent-stepchild relationship.

In revising the scale she also changed the format from a true-false scale to a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree in order to provide a method of assessing conflict over childrearing as a continuous variable. The change in wording to reflect the stepparent-stepchild relationship extends the use of the CCR to populations involving stepparents and stepchildren and establishes an appropriate measurement of the degree of conflict between the biological parent and stepparent regarding parenting of the stepchild. More information on the Conflict over Childrearing Scale may be found in the next chapter and the scale itself is in the questionnaire items 81-99 (Appendix A).

Charles Hobart (1987) studied parent-child relations in 232 remarried families and 138 first married families from a large Canadian town. He used "snowball sampling" and limited the study in remarried families to those that had at least one prior-marriage child under the age of 18. Interviews with each husband and wife were conducted utilizing a questionnaire (a semantic differential technique) made up of 13 opposite-sounding adjectives applicable to interpersonal relationships. The purpose was to obtain information from the respondent on his or her relationship with each of the five possible categories of children. These categories included: shared children, his in-living children, his out-living children and her out-living children.

The items were scored to comprise the Semantic Index of Relationships (SIR). Responses were summed in such a way that a high score indicated a positive relationship, while a low score indicated a difficult one. Hobart utilized the statistical procedure of ANOVAs to test the significance of the contributions of the sex of the parent and

the characteristics of the child (parentage, age and sex) to the variance in the SIR score indexing the parent's relationship with the eldest child. Hobart (1987) formulated four hypotheses that were supported statistically. They are:

H₁: Parents in remarried families will have more positive relationships with their shared children than they will with their nonshared children.

H₂: Mothers will have more positive relationships with her children than with their stepchildren, but there will not be a corresponding difference for fathers in remarried families.

H₃: Stepmothers will have less positive relationships with their stepchildren than will stepfathers.

H₄: Parents will have less positive relationships with older than with younger nonshared children in remarried families, and this difference will be greater than that for shared children in first-married families. (p. 262)

The data showed that in every case the highest, most positive scores were for the shared children in the remarried family. The scores for shared children did not differ from the scores of the parents in first-married or nuclear families for husbands and wives. The self-child scores of wives were significantly higher for her than for his children. Hobart concluded that because of the centrality of the mother-child relationship as compared to the father-child relationship, there can develop in many remarried families a system of "first-class," "second-class" and "third-class" children. (First-class being those born to the couple, second-class those born to the mother and third-class those born to the father.)

This research suggests that relationship dynamics may be quite different in remarried as compared to nuclear families, with differences in spousal perceptions of relationships more consequential in the remarried families. Husband's characteristics were found to be more consequential for differences in perception of relationships and thus for adjustment in remarried than in nuclear families. Hobart (1987)

discerned that remarried husbands were more attentive to relationship concerns than were first marriage fathers. A summary of his observations could be that remarried family dynamics are distinctive.

The concept of marital adjustment has taken an important place in the study of marriage and family. Despite widespread criticism of marital adjustment and related concepts (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Sabatelli, 1988; Spanier & Cole, 1974) it is the most frequently studied dependent variable in the field (Spanier, 1976).

After being critical of marital adjustment scales and research Spanier (Spanier, 1972, 1973; Spanier & Cole, 1974; Spanier, Lewis, & Cole, 1975) decided to attempt to improve the measurement of marital adjustment by integrating nominal definitions, operational definitions and measurements in a more consistent manner than had been done previously. Spanier also decided it would be efficacious for the scale to include nonmarital cohabitating couples.

In the development of his Dyadic Adjustment Scale Spanier used items from past scales (Burgess & Cottrell, 1939; Locke, 1947; Locke & Karlsson, 1952; Locke & Williamson, 1958; Locke & Wallace, 1959; Nye & MacDougal, 1959; Orden & Bradburn, 1968; Terman, 1938). The process Spanier (1976) used is outlined in 12 steps as follows:

- 1) All items ever used in any scale measuring marital adjustment or a related concept were identified. This search produced a pool of approximately 300 items.

- 2) All duplicate items were then eliminated from the original pool of items, thus leaving for further analysis all items previously used at least once.

- 3) Three judges other than the principal investigator examined all items for content validity. Items were judged unacceptable and eliminated if a consensus existed that an item did not meet content validity criteria. Items had to be relevant for relationships in the 1970s and

judged to be indicators of marital adjustment or a closely related concept, as defined by Spanier and Cole (1974). This preliminary screening of items was necessary to avoid presenting the respondent with too lengthy a questionnaire.

4) Approximately 200 remaining items were included in a questionnaire with a standard complement of social background variables. Among the questionnaire's 200 items were several new items which were developed to tap areas of adjustment which I thought had been ignored in previous measures. In addition, sets of items and scales previously used were expanded in order to make them more complete. Finally, to test the hypothesis that alternative wording in a fixed-choice dyadic adjustment scale might produce different results and unpredictable response sets, approximately 25 items were included with alternative wording in the question and in the fixed-choice response categories.

5) The questionnaire was administered to a purposive sample of 218 married persons in central Pennsylvania. The sample consisted primarily of working and middle class residents of the area who worked for one of four industrial or corporate firms which agreed to cooperate in the study.

6) Questionnaires were mailed to every person in Centre County, Pennsylvania, who had obtained a divorce decree during the 12 months previous to the mailing. These respondents were asked to respond to the relationship questions on the basis of the last month they spent with their spouses. Ninety-four usable questionnaires were obtained from approximately 400 persons whom we were able to locate.

7) A small sample of never-married cohabiting couples was given the questionnaire to determine potential problems in question-wording and applicability of the scale for non-marital dyads. These data are not part of the scale construction analysis.

8) Frequency distributions were analyzed and all items with low variance and high skewness were eliminated.

9) Questions with alternative wording, structure, and category choices were further examined. Where differences in response variation were significant, items with the lesser variation were excluded.

10) Remaining variables were analyzed using a t-test for significance of difference between means of the married and divorced samples. Items which were not significantly different at the .001 level were eliminated. Fifty-two variables remained following application of this stringent criterion.

11) Remaining questions with alternative wording were re-examined and items with the lowest t-value were excluded. Forty items remained at this point.

12) The remaining 40 variables were factor analyzed to assess the adequacy of our hypothesized components, and make a final determination of items which were to be included in the scale. Thirty-two items remained after eight were eliminated due to low factor loadings (below .30).
(pp. 17, 19)

Several advantages of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale are apparent. They are that it is an overall measure of dyadic adjustment. The 32-item scale can be completed in just a few minutes, can easily be incorporated into a self-administered questionnaire and is only two pages in length. The scale can also be easily adapted for use in interview studies.

The development of subscales by Spanier makes it possible for researchers with more limited needs to utilize parts of the scale. For example, only the 10-item subscale on dyadic satisfaction could be used if that is the specific interest of the researcher. The format of the scale allows for easy scoring.

Spanier does not claim to have adequately dealt with the problems of social desirability and conventionality in his scale. He suggests, however, that these limitations may have been overstated. Murstein and Beck (1972) and Dean and Luscas (1974) controlled for conventionality and social desirability and found that their findings were not significantly changed by the controls.

Another problem not solved is whether the Dyadic Adjustment Scale would be considered a measure of individual adjustment to the relationship versus adjustment of the dyad as a functioning group. Some scale items appear (notably 32) to assess the person's adjustment to the

relationship; but others seem to assess the respondent's perception of the adjustment of the relationship as a functioning group.

More on Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale such as three types of validity and the reliability may be viewed in Chapter III. The scale is in the questionnaire items 27-58 (Appendix A).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the methods used in the research. It explains the research design, sample and instruments to be used in studying stepfamilies. In addition it shows the method of collecting and analyzing the data.

Research Design

The descriptive research method is to be used for this study. The survey method which is one of the most frequently used methods in social science research will be utilized. Kerlinger (1964) claims it is commonly used to study social structure and obtain opinions and attitudes of individuals. The survey method is a relatively efficient way to gather a large amount of data in a short time period. In order to clarify some of the answers of the respondents to the questionnaires and get more in-depth information interviews will be employed. Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) state that the interview is an indispensable research tool yielding data that no other research tool can yield.

Selection of Subjects

The author wrote a letter to the Hockaday classes of 1955-1965 asking for volunteers who would participate in research on stepfamilies. Hockaday is a private preparatory girls' school in Dallas, Texas, that

has a boarding department. As soon as a minimum of 70 eligible volunteers was collected the questionnaire was mailed to them. A return envelope was enclosed for the purpose of returning the questionnaire. The individuals in this group would be in their forties and fifties at the present time. Since women tend to marry older men the age range may be widened by the stepfathers in the sample. The socioeconomic class is expected to be upper middle and upper class because Hockaday is an exclusive school. The percentage of graduates from Hockaday attending college is estimated to be approximately 100 percent.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a questionnaire which included the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale (Goodman-Lezin, 1985) and Conflict Over Childrearing Scale (Goodman-Lezin, 1985). In addition the questionnaire was developed to gather demographic information and information concerning stepfamily characteristics.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) developed by Graham Spanier (1976) was used to measure marital satisfaction. The 32 item scale has four empirically verified components of dyadic adjustments which can be used as subscales: Dyadic Satisfaction, Dyadic Cohesion, Dyadic Consensus, and Affectional Expression. The process Spanier utilized in development of the scale will be explained. Three hundred items from other marital adjustment scales were analyzed and 200 items with strong content validity were selected for further testing. Alternative wording in questions was used. Forty items were factor analyzed and eight were dropped because of low factor loading, leaving the 32 item scale.

Content validity was established using three judges. Criterion-related validity was established using a divorced sample which differed significantly ($p < .001$). Construct validity was partly established by correlation with the Locke-Wallace marital scale (1959) which was the most frequently used scale for marital adjustment at that time. Correlation between the scales was .86 among married respondents and .88 among divorced respondents.

Spanier used a conservative estimate of reliability, Cronbach's Alpha (1951) which is a variant of the basic Kuder-Richardson formula (Anastasi, 1968). The reliability for the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was .96.

Goodman-Lezin (1985) used the Dissatisfaction with Children (DSC) subscale from the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) developed by Snyder (1981) to create the Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale (DSSC). The original items of the Dissatisfaction with Children Scale were rewritten for use with the remarried family system. The Dissatisfaction with Children Scale was chosen because of its high validity and reliability. The content of the 22 items on the DSC center around four factors: 1) Dissatisfaction with demands of childrearing (19%), 2) Disappointment with children (24%), 3) Lack of common interests or activities with children (26%), and 4) Children are inconsiderate or disrespectful (31%). Test-retest reliability for the DSC is reported to be .90 (Snyder, 1981). The revision extended the use of the DSC to populations which involved stepparent-stepchild relationships and therefore was used to establish a measure of the level of stepparent satisfaction with his or her stepchild. Goodman-Lezin (1985) performed a Cronbach's Alpha on her data and found an alpha coefficient of .90.

A low score on the Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale indicates basically a high level of satisfaction and a positive relationship between the stepparent and his or her children. This is based on the assumption that children contribute to the individual's sense of personal satisfaction and fulfillment as well as to the happiness of the marital relationship. A moderate elevation in score reflects dissatisfaction and/or disappointment with either themselves, the children, or, in addition, the general demands of childrearing. High scores on the DSS are indicative of a high level of dissatisfaction and severe disruption in the stepparent-child relationship (Goodman-Lezin, 1985).

The researcher utilized Goodman-Lezin's Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale but on the advice of her statistician reversed the scoring, clarified and stated positively some of the items. With this data a high score on the scale indicates high satisfaction with stepchildren. A low score indicates low satisfaction with stepchildren. A Cronbach's Alpha on the data was .93.

The Conflict Over Childrearing Scale was adopted by Goodman-Lezin (1985) from a subscale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1981) for use with the remarried family. The wording of the original items of the CCS were changed to reflect a stepparent-stepchild relationship. The instrument was chosen because of its high established validity and reliability. It is an instrument which measures the amount of conflict existing between spouses and the distribution of power regarding parenting.

The 19 items in the CCS are based on four factors: 1) The spouse's lack of interest in maintaining an active parental role in childrearing

(23%); 2) Unequal or unfair sharing of the responsibilities for childrearing (24%); 3) Disagreement about discipline of the child (26%); and 4) Childrearing conflicts as a major source of marital discord (27%). A low score on the CCS reflects both parents participating in childrearing responsibilities and able to reach mutual decisions regarding discipline. It also reflects a positive interaction between the parents regarding their role and responsibilities as parents. Goodman-Lezin performed a Cronbach's Alpha on her data and found an alpha coefficient of .92.

The researcher utilized Goodman-Lezin's Conflict over Childrearing Scale but on the advice of her statistician restated some of the items and reversed the scoring so that a low score indicated more conflict between spouses. A high score indicated less conflict between the spouses. A Cronbach's Alpha was performed on this data and an alpha coefficient of .92 was found. Goodman-Lezin gave written permission for use of both her scales.

The demographic information in the questionnaire included items regarding the stepparent's age, occupation, income, level of education and religiousness. Other demographic information gathered included age of stepchildren, number of stepchildren, sex of stepchildren, and education for parenting.

Stepfamily characteristics incorporated into the questionnaire were amount of time the stepchildren spent with the stepfamily, similarity of views on childrearing, and the presence of own children and stepchildren in the household. Other stepfamily characteristics included were degree of support for stepparent from various family members.

Data Collection

Letters were sent to all members of the Hockaday classes of 1955-1965 asking if they would be willing to participate in research on step-parenting. In order to be qualified for the study one spouse had to have been divorced and remarried with children involved. A self-addressed postcard was enclosed for their name, address, and phone number, and they were to mail it back if they were willing to serve as respondents. When the names and addresses were returned on the postcard, then the questionnaire was mailed. The envelopes were numbered and when they were returned the questionnaires and envelopes were separated. The name was checked off the list using the envelope number. After one month a second questionnaire was sent to those who had not responded. Seventy questionnaires were sent out and 44 were returned making the response rate 63 percent. Follow-up interviews were conducted with part of the stepparents in order to gather more personal information about the experience of stepparenting. Interview questions developed by the researcher can be viewed in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Responses to the questionnaire were coded and entered into a computer. The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) statistical package was used for the analysis of the data.

Frequency counts and percentages were produced for all descriptive variables. Means were calculated for the variables for which they would be meaningful.

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were used to measure the relationship between each of the three scales and each of the demographic variables -- age of the youngest stepchild, age of the oldest stepchild, number of stepchildren, number of children, education, income and number of parenting or child development classes. Analysis of variance was utilized to measure differences in means for each scale and the demographic variables - sex of children and sex of stepchildren.

Correlation coefficients were used to measure strength of relationships in hypotheses 6 and 7. F tests from the analysis of variance procedure were used to test for differences in means for the demographic variables having more than two categories in hypotheses 2, 3, and 5. Finally t tests for two independent samples were used to test for differences in means for stepfamily characteristics in hypotheses 6 and 7.

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were used to measure the strength of the relationships between the demographic variables and the three different scales -- Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Conflict over Childrearing Scale, and Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale. Correlation coefficients were also used to compare the scales with each other.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Description of Subjects

A detailed description of the 44 subjects who participated in this study is presented in Table I. In order to be eligible for the study, the respondent had to have experienced stepparenting. Persons in the sample had previously attended Hockaday School or were related in some way to one of the graduates of the school. The stepmothers composed almost 80 percent of the sample, with the stepfathers composing 20 percent. The largest age category was 41-50 years (68.2%) and the smallest age category was 51-60 years (6.8%). Twenty-five percent of the respondents were in the 30-40 years category. Their stepchildren totaled 91 and ranged from 8 years to 40 years. The majority (79%) of the stepchildren ranged from 16 to 29 years old.

All of the subjects had attended college, 86.4 percent had at least a college degree and 59.1 percent of the subjects had done graduate study.

The majority (65.1%) have resided most of their lives in cities of over 100,000 with 18.6 percent living in cities from 25,000-100,000. Only 4.8 percent were in the rural residence classification.

The primary source of income of the greatest proportion of the families was salary and commissions (66.1%). Inherited savings and

TABLE I
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUBJECTS

Characteristics of the Subjects	N	%
Sex		
Stepmother	35	79.5
Stepfather	9	20.5
Age		
30-40 years	11	25.0
41-50 years	30	68.2
51-60 years	3	6.8
Education		
Some college	6	13.6
College graduate	12	27.3
Graduate study	10	22.7
Graduate degree	12	27.3
Business or Trade school	0	0
Professional training (medicine, law, etc.)	4	9.1
Residence most of life		
Farm	1	2.3
Non-farm rural residence	1	2.3
Small town (population under 2,500)	0	0
Large town (population 2,500-24,999)	5	11.6
Small city (population 25,000-100,000)	8	18.6
Large city (population over 100,000)	28	65.1
Primary source of family income		
Inherited savings and investments	4	10.3
Earned wealth and investments	4	10.3
Profits, royalties, fees	4	10.3
Salary, commissions	26	66.7
Hourly wages, weekly checks	1	2.6
Total household income		
Under \$25,000	0	0
\$25,000-\$50,000	6	14.0
\$51,000-\$100,000	11	25.6
\$100,000-\$150,000	14	32.6
Over \$150,000	12	27.9
Employment		
Yes	37	84.1
No	7	15.9

TABLE I (Continued)

Characteristics of the Subjects	N	%
Present Marital Status		
Divorced	2	5.7
Remarried	32	91.4
Separated	1	2.9
Degree of Religious Orientation		
Lowest	7	17.9
Low	5	12.8
Middle	13	33.3
High	8	20.5
Highest	6	15.4
Number of Stepchildren		
1	11	25.0
2	19	43.2
3	7	15.9
4	7	15.9
Child Development or Parenting Classes		
0	16	44.4
1	7	19.4
2	4	11.1
3	6	16.7
4	1	2.8
5	2	5.6
Living Situation of Stepchildren		
Live with	22	52.4
Visit half time	6	14.3
Visit holidays and summer	8	19.0
Visit rarely	6	14.3

investments were the primary source of income for 10.3 percent of the respondents, 10.3 percent had earned wealth, and 10.3 percent had profits, fees and royalties. Almost 40 percent of their income came from other than salary or wages. The largest proportion (32.6%) were in the \$100,000-\$150,000 category, and 27.9 percent were in the over \$150,000 per year category. Most subjects (84.1%) were employed with 15.9 percent not being employed.

The present marital status of the overwhelming majority was remarried (91.4%) and 5.7 percent were presently divorced. The separated classification included 2.9 percent.

In assessing the religiosity of the sample, the respondent had to rate him/herself on a five-point scale. The two lower classifications were combined into low (1-2) category. The two higher classifications formed the high (4-5) category. The middle classification was moderate (3). There were 35.9 percent in the high group, 33.3 percent in moderate group, and 30.7 percent in the low group.

The years of stepparenting varied from 1 to 18. The number of stepchildren per respondent varied from one to four. The majority (43.2%) had two stepchildren. The majority of the stepchildren (52.4%) lived with the family full time with 14.3 percent living with them half of the time. Nineteen percent visited on the holidays and summers.

Although as a group they were highly educated, they had in general very little exposure to child development or parenting courses. Approximately eight percent had four or five courses, and 44.4 percent had no parenting or child development courses. Almost 64 percent had one or no course in child development or parenting.

Examination of Hypotheses and
Discussion of Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction in remarried individuals (as assessed by Dyadic Adjustment Scale) and closeness of parent-stepchild relationship (as assessed by Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale).

The Pearson r correlation analysis indicated a significant ($p < .001$) positive relationship between closeness of parent-stepchild relationship and marital satisfaction in remarried individuals. This suggests that parents who are more satisfied with their stepchildren have higher marital satisfaction. Duberman (1975) found that the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship varied directly with the quality of the husband-wife relationship. See Table II.

TABLE II

PEARSON r CORRELATIONS FOR DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE, DISSATISFACTION WITH STEPCHILDREN SCALE, AND CONFLICT OVER CHILDREARING SCALE

Dyadic Adjustment Scale	Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale .52*	Conflict over Child-rearing Scale .62**
Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale	Dyadic Adjustment Scale .52*	Conflict over Child-rearing Scale .77**
Conflict over Child-rearing Scale	Dyadic Adjustment Scale .62**	Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale .77**

*.001

** .0001

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between marital satisfaction in remarried individuals as assessed by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the following demographic variables: 1) age of stepchildren, 2) number of children and stepchildren, 3) sex of children and stepchildren, 4) educational level of respondent, 5) income level and 6) incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses by respondent.

The Pearson r correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between marital satisfaction and the demographic variables except for the number of child development or parenting courses experienced by the respondents. The relationship was a negative one significant at the .02 level, which means that the fewer classes an individual experienced the higher the marital satisfaction. The results may be seen in Table III. Perhaps the reason for the negative relationship between marital satisfaction and classes can be explained by assuming that the classes are designed for the nuclear family model. Several authors suggest that the stepfamily should not use the nuclear family model for their functioning (Berman, 1980; Cherlin, 1978; Dolan & Lown, 1985; Lofas, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1979; Wald, 1981).

An F test from the analysis of variance procedure indicated no significant differences in marital satisfaction according to the sex of the stepchildren although the respondents who had female stepchildren had a higher mean score on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between parent-stepchild relationships as assessed by the Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale and the following demographic variables: 1) age of children, 2) number of children, 3) sex of children, 4) educational

TABLE III
 PEARSON r CORRELATION OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES TO DYADIC
 ADJUSTMENT SCALE, DISSATISFACTION WITH STEPCHILDREN
 SCALE, AND CONFLICT OVER
 CHILDREARING SCALE

	Dyadic Adjustment Scale	Dissatisfaction with Step- children Scale	Conflict over Child rearing Scale
Age of youngest stepchild	.21	.12	.36*
Age of oldest stepchild	.18	.21	.40**
Number of stepchildren	.09	.18	.30*
Number of own children	.23	.23	.05
Education	-.01	.04	.04
Income	.21	.20	.08
Parenting classes	-.40*	-.39*	-.19

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

level of respondents, 5) income level of respondents, and 6) incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses by respondents.

The Pearson r correlation analysis showed no significant relationships between satisfaction with stepparenting and the demographic variables except for the incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses by respondents. The relationship was a negative one significant at .02 level. This indicates that the fewer the classes an individual had taken the higher the satisfaction with stepchildren. The results may be viewed in Table III. A possible explanation for the finding is that the parenting courses deal with parent-child relationships in the nuclear family. The relationship between stepparent and stepchild differs from the biological parent-child relationship (Cherlin, 1978; Jacobson, 1979; Maddox, 1976; Roosevelt & Lofas, 1976).

An F test from the analysis of variance indicated no significant differences in satisfaction with stepchildren according to the sex of the stepchildren although it approached significance. The respondents who had female stepchildren or a combination of male and female stepchildren had higher mean scores on the Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale. A higher score indicates greater satisfaction with stepchildren. This finding may disagree with Santrock, Warshak, Lindbergh, and Meadows (1982) who found less warmth and more anger in girls in stepfather families.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction in remarried individuals (as assessed by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale) and conflict over childrearing (as assessed by Conflict over Childrearing Scale).

The Pearson r correlation analysis indicated a positive significant ($p < .0001$) relationship between marital satisfaction and conflict over childrearing. See Table II. This indicates the respondents with less conflict over childrearing had higher marital satisfaction. Goodman-Lezin (1985) used conflict on childrearing as the dependent variable and marital satisfaction as the independent variable and found that remarried individuals with higher marital satisfaction had less conflict over childrearing.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant relationship between conflict over childrearing (as assessed by the Conflict over Childrearing Scale) and the following demographic variables: 1) age of stepchildren, 2) number of children and stepchildren, 3) sex of children and stepchildren, 4) educational level of respondent, 5) income level of respondent, and 6) incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses by respondent.

Two groups were formed in order to test the influence of age of stepchildren. The first group contained the age of the youngest child in each family which ranged from 8-33. The Pearson product moment correlation indicated a positive significant ($p < .02$) relationship between conflict over childrearing and the age of the last born stepchild in each family. This means as the stepchildren in the group got older there was less conflict between the spouses. See Table III.

The second group contained the age of the oldest stepchild in each family which ranged from 9-40. A positive significant ($p < .01$) relationship was found between conflict over childrearing and the age of the first born stepchild in each family. See Table III. This means that as the stepchildren got older there was less conflict between the

spouses. Nadler (1976) was one of several researchers who found that there was less conflict when stepchildren are younger but she was testing conflict between stepmothers and stepchildren rather than conflict between spouses.

It could be that in the stepfamily the biological father and mother are more protective of younger children causing more conflict with the stepparent over the younger children. As the children get older the biological parent would be less protective because they would see the older child as less vulnerable to pressure from the stepparent. Two of the stepmothers who were interviewed indicated they were less protective of older children and thus had less conflict with their spouse over older children. The ages of the stepchildren did not relate significantly to the marital satisfaction or stepchildren satisfaction scales.

Another explanation is found in the ages of the stepchildren in this sample. The younger age group had children ranging from 8 to 28. Most children by age 20 no longer live at home so there is less conflict. The range in the oldest age group was from 9-40 with the majority being in their twenties and thirties which is usually regarded as a time of less conflict between parents and children because the children have left home and have children of their own.

A positive significant ($p < .05$) relationship was found between conflict over childrearing and number of stepchildren. Less conflict was experienced when there was a larger number of stepchildren (Table III).

An F test from the analysis of variance procedure indicated a significant ($p < .01$) difference between mean scores on the Conflict over Childrearing Scale with male stepchildren compared to female stepchildren and both male and female stepchildren. Stepfamilies with all male

stepchildren had more conflict than those with all female stepchildren or both male and female stepchildren. A low score on the Conflict over Childrearing Scale indicates more conflict. See Table IV.

TABLE IV
DIFFERENCES IN CONFLICT OVER CHILDREARING ACCORDING TO SEX

Conflict over Childrearing	Mean	F	p
All stepchildren female	48.0		
All stepchildren male	36.05	7.5	.01
Both male and female stepchildren	51.22		

Hypothesis 6: There is no significant relationship between marital satisfaction (as assessed by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale) and the following stepfamily characteristics: 1) children living with the respondent permanently or occasionally, 2) responsibility for discipline of children given to stepparent, 3) comfort with the degree of responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent, 4) similar views held on childrearing practices by respondent and spouse, 5) degree of support for the stepchild from the biological parent, 6) degree of support from the respondent's extended family, 7) degree of support from spouse's extended family, 8) degree of support from children, 9) having own children and stepchildren, and 10) whether the respondent was assuming the stepfather or stepmother role.

The Pearson r correlation analysis indicated a significant ($p < .05$) positive relationship between marital satisfaction and comfort with the degree of responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent. This indicates the more comfortable the respondent felt with responsibility, the higher the marital satisfaction. There was also a significant ($p < .001$) positive relationship between marital satisfaction and similar views on childrearing, which means the more similar the views of the two adults on childrearing, the higher the marital satisfaction. The results can be viewed in Table V.

A significant ($p < .02$) positive relationship was shown between marital satisfaction and degree of support from the spouse's extended family (Table V). It is noteworthy that a significant relationship was not found between marital satisfaction and the degree of support from the respondent's own family. Perhaps the stepparents hold the spouse responsible for the support or lack of support from his/her family. The stepparents with high support from the spouse's family had high marital satisfaction.

The degree of support from the biological parent to his/her own child was not significantly related to the marital satisfaction of the stepparent. Weston (1986) found in her study a significant positive relationship in marital satisfaction of the stepparent when the biological parent was supportive of the child. Family theorists disagree on the influence of the biological parent in the remarried family. Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1976) relate that the cooperation of the former spouse has a positive influence on the children's emotional adjustment. On the other hand, several researchers believe that the remarried family has more difficulties when the former spouse

TABLE V
CORRELATIONS OF STEPFAMILY CHARACTERISTICS TO DYADIC
ADJUSTMENT SCALE AND DISSATISFACTION
WITH STEPCHILDREN SCALE

	Dyadic Adjustment Scale	Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale
Responsibility for discipline given to stepparent	.05	.17
Comfort with degree of responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent	.30*	.51***
Similar views on childrearing practices by respondent and spouse	.47***	.58****
Degree of support for the step- child from the biological parent	.14	.21
Degree of support from respondent's extended family	.18	.29*
Degree of support from spouse's extended family	.36*	.32*
Degree of support from children	.21	.37*

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

**** $p < .0001$

continues to relate (Messinger, 1976; Sager, Brown, Crohn, Engel, Rodstein, & Walker, 1983; Visher & Visher, 1979).

Whether the respondent was assuming the role of stepfather or stepmother was not significantly related to marital satisfaction. A note should be made of the fact that there were only nine stepfathers in this sample. This finding was not expected because Skyles (1983) found in her research that stepfathers had higher dyadic adjustment than stepmothers. In addition Goodman-Lezin (1985) and Rhyne (1981) reported that in general women had lower dyadic adjustment scores than men. In this present study the mean scores of stepfathers and stepmothers were the same (109) on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

T tests were used to test for differences in mean scores on marital satisfaction (Dyadic Adjustment Scale), living situation, composition of family, and whether the respondent was stepmother or stepfather. None of these variables were significantly related. Ambert (1986) discovered higher marital satisfaction in stepmothers whose children lived with them rather than visited which differs from this study.

Hypothesis 7: There is no significant relationship between satisfaction with stepchildren (as assessed by the Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale) and the following stepfamily characteristics: 1) children living with respondent permanently or occasionally, 2) responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent, 3) comfort with responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent, 4) similar views held by respondent and spouse on child-rearing practices, 5) degree of support from the biological parent, 6) degree of support from the respondent's extended family, 7) degree

of support from spouse's extended family, 8) degree of support from children, 9) having own children and stepchildren, and 10) stepfather or stepmother.

The Pearson r correlation analysis revealed a positive significant ($p < .001$) relationship between satisfaction with stepchildren and comfort with responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent. The results can be seen in Table V. This suggests that stepparents who are comfortable with the responsibility they are given for the discipline of stepchildren are more satisfied with their stepchildren.

Satisfaction with stepchildren was positively and significantly ($p < .0001$) related to the respondent having similar views with their spouse on childrearing practices (Table V). This means that stepparents who share similar views to their spouses on childrearing are more satisfied with stepchildren. Goodman-Lezin (1985) found that stepmothers were more satisfied with stepchildren when the stepmothers were given responsibility for discipline of stepchildren and had the father's approval of their childrearing practices.

The degree of support from the biological parent was not significantly related to the stepparent's satisfaction with stepchildren. Weston (1986) found that in stepfather families support from the biological parent was associated with higher levels of remarried satisfaction.

The degree of support from the respondent's extended family was positively and significantly ($p < .05$) associated with satisfaction of the stepparent with stepchildren which means satisfaction with stepchildren was higher when the person's extended family gave higher support. See Table V for results. Support from extended family was

not significantly associated with marital satisfaction shown earlier.

The degree of support from the spouse's extended family was related not only to marital satisfaction but it was also related to satisfaction with the stepchildren at the ($p < .05$) significance level. See Table V. This means that the stepparents with higher support from their spouse's extended family had higher satisfaction with stepchildren.

The degree of support that the stepparent felt from their own children related positively and significantly ($p < .05$) with their satisfaction with stepchildren (Table V). This same relationship did not exist with marital satisfaction of stepparents. Those stepparents who felt higher support from their own children were usually more satisfied with their stepchildren.

The t tests were utilized to test for differences in mean scores on satisfaction with stepchildren and composition of the family. No significant differences were found. Ambert (1986) discovered stepmothers had more positive experiences when stepchildren lived with them rather than visited. Goodman-Lezin (1985) found just the opposite.

The stepfathers' mean scores on the Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale was 54.33 compared to 46.12 for stepmothers. Although the t-test did not show a significant difference in the two mean scores, the relationship approached significance ($p < .07$). A low score on the scale indicates a lower level of satisfaction with stepchildren. The present study does agree with earlier research studies. Duberman (1975) and Bowerman and Irish (1962) found that stepmothers exhibited greater difficulty than stepfathers with the stepparent role. Duberman (1975) also found that stepmothers over 40 had the most difficulty

with their roles. Twenty-five percent of the stepmothers in this sample were over 40.

The literature is replete with researchers and theorists who suggest that the stepmother role is inherently more difficult and less satisfying (Draughon, 1975; Duberman, 1975; Goodman-Lezin, 1985; Jacobson, 1979; Nadler, 1976; Sardoniz-Zimmerman, 1977; Schulman, 1972; Visher & Visher, 1979). Clingenpeel, Brand and Levoli (1984) in their research with stepparents were surprised to find that in their sample stepmothers were not less satisfied in their roles than stepfathers.

Hypothesis 8: There is no significant relationship between conflict over childrearing (as assessed by the Conflict over Child-rearing Scale) and satisfaction with stepchildren (as assessed by Dissatisfaction with Stepchildren Scale).

The correlation analysis revealed a positive significant ($p < .0001$) relationship between the conflict over childrearing and satisfaction with stepchildren. This suggests that stepparents that had more satisfaction with stepchildren had less conflict over childrearing.

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

In response to the question, "What has been the most enjoyable part of being a stepparent?" three stepparents wrote they enjoyed being a stepgrandparent. Another response was "watching a stepson change from a sick, failing ninth grader to a straight A student." Other positive responses included the chance to nurture children, to watch children develop, and to have experiences with a child of the opposite sex from their own children. Not all of the responses were positive. Six people wrote "Nothing!" in response to the enjoyable

part of being a stepparent. Two of the stepmothers wrote that the only enjoyable part was being married to the father of their stepson.

Discipline, was the single response given most often by stepparents to the question of "What has been the least enjoyable part of being a stepparent?" Several stepparents indicated that the teen years were very difficult. Dealing with the ex-wife was mentioned several times as was watching the mother and father still playing games with each other and hurting the child. Two stepparents mentioned the problem of less time and energy because of dealing with stepchildren. Being left with 98 percent of the decisions for raising my kids-- education, activities, support and nurturing was another negative response. Several quotes which follow further describe the stepparent's negative feelings about their experience.

Knowing what was the right or wrong thing to say or do.

Suffering the nastiness the youngest child inflicted upon both of us when she went off the beam.

The expense of time, especially when you have a selfish husband who wants expensive things such as an airplane.

Feeling responsible without having authority.

With the older boy, I had to bail him out of jail several times. Went thru drug treatment with him. He has lied to me, stolen from me, etc.

I was literally thrown into the situation where I had no choice but to open my home and heart to two children who for all practical purposes had been abandoned by their mother. She has had no contact with them for three years. Not having "a choice" is one of the hardest things about how I feel.

To the question "What advice would you give a person who is considering becoming a stepparent?", several respondents suggested that a person who is a stepparent should play the role of friend and not try to be a parent to the child but be supportive of the natural parent.

Other stepparents suggested that the relationship begin as friends and in time move to parenting. One respondent suggested the stepparent realize that stepchildren have divided loyalties and you can never "replace" the other parent. On the opposite side, one respondent wrote that you should think of the stepchildren as your own.

Counseling was suggested by several respondents in order to agree on rules and explore how to deal with situations where spouses don't agree. Open communication about expectations and responsibilities was advocated by several respondents. Support from the spouse was mentioned as a necessity in dealing with stepchildren. Four respondents wrote as their advice "don't" become a stepparent. Some quotes from the respondents are listed. All of the quotes may be viewed in Appendix B.

It's the toughest part of a new marriage. Blended families remind me of trying to put two jigsaw puzzles together to make one picture . . . very tricky! Takes lots of work.

Be honest/face facts/don't expect perfection/be sure you have the self-confidence to handle unusual situations and relationships/be adult.

To talk to several stepparents and stepchildren and to have premarital counseling and to take a stepparenting course.

Open communication --true commitment to your spouse and letting the children know the marriage comes first.

Have a solid relationship with your husband-to-be and always try to agree on discipline of the children.

Responses to Personal Interviews

Two of the stepmothers revealed that the conflict over the stepchild began almost immediately. As soon as the marriage took place the stepchild was sent to them much more often than the established

past pattern with the father. They both felt taken advantage of by the mother and her husband. In one case the son had visited with his father two weekends a month but as soon as the remarriage he came every weekend and two nights during the week.

Other issues that caused conflict were related to rules and responsibilities. In general the stepmothers felt their husbands were not strict enough with teenagers. This seemed particularly true for children who visited rather than lived with the couple. One stepmother said "He plays the role of the rich uncle with his children." The conflicts with the stepchildren and stepparent were often issues of lack of responsibility on the part of the stepchild. In addition there were problems with the stepchildren not going by the rules - such as not coming in on time.

The high incomes of most of the respondents may be why only one respondent answered "no" to the question, "Are you satisfied with the amount of financial resources you have for supporting the new family arrangement? A stepfather reported that he had supported his former wife and children through college and was now supporting his stepchildren because their father refused to help. He said he really resented paying over \$12,000 a month for the drug treatment for his oldest stepdaughter because he was nearing retirement age and needed his money.

Two of the respondents reported they were very happy with the amount of financial resources for the new family arrangements because they had signed prenuptial agreements. Whatever was spent by their spouse on the stepchildren did not influence the money available to them. In addition, the financial resources were available for anything they wanted to do or have.

When asked about sexual issues in the remarried or stepfamily situation various answers were given. Several stepfathers and stepmothers reported no sexual issues they were aware of. All but one of those interviewed shared that they became sexually involved with the present spouse before the marriage. When asked if the children were aware of the sexual relationship, two of the respondents said they were open with the children about their sexual relationship.

One of the stepmothers indicated that her openness became a problem later because her college son asked to bring a girl home for vacation. He related that he, like his mother, wanted to be open about his sexuality and have his girlfriend sleep in his bedroom. Her husband objected to this arrangement.

The stepmother was still glad she had been open about sexuality with her sons because she felt comfortable telling her oldest son who was 15 at the time that his new stepsister might try to seduce him. The stepsister was 22 at the time and had a reputation for many sexual encounters. Her son laughed at the time but later asked, "Mom, how in the world did you know she would come on to me?"

The father was not aware of his daughter's promiscuity. At one point when the family was all on vacation he suggested a bedroom arrangement that included his daughter now 28 years old together with his youngest stepson who had just turned 17. Although she did not tell her husband why, she rearranged the bedrooms so her son would not be in the same bedroom with his 28 year-old stepsister.

One of the female respondents called me the day after her interview and asked if I considered incest or molestation a sexual issue. When I said yes, she divulged that after both divorces she discovered

her former husbands had been sexually involved with her daughter. In the first marriage the father of their oldest daughter had committed incest with her. In the second marriage the stepfather had molested the younger daughter. In the original interview the respondent had recounted her lack of sex drive as a problem toward the end of both marriages.

Another female respondent revealed that her daughter got counseling after the second divorce and after a counseling session told her that in the session she had discussed molestation from her stepfather. The respondent revealed that the stepfather developed a problem with drugs soon after the marriage and that drugs probably played a part in the molestation. In addition she described herself as a practicing alcoholic who was unaware at the time of the molestation.

The answers to the question, "Was the first or second marriage more sexually satisfying?", were equally mixed with half choosing the first marriage and half choosing the second marriage as more sexually satisfying. Most of the respondents deliberated before answering the question. One respondent said, "No question. It is the second marriage. If this marriage was not so satisfying sexually I would not tolerate his son."

To the question, "Do you feel your spouse treats your children the same as his/her children?" most replied that the spouse was more lenient and loving to his/her own child. However, one stepparent said she understood why he was nicer to his own child and that over the years he had become more understanding to her children. Another stepparent indicated that she resented his open preference of his children and his criticism of her children. From these interviews it would

appear that perceived unequal treatment of children and stepchildren can be a problem between the spouses.

When asked, "Do you live in a different home than the one which was occupied by either family before the remarriage?" most of the respondents replied they had moved into a different home for both families. Several of the respondents said this was a sacrifice on their part because they liked their first home; but decided it would be better for all concerned to have a new place where no one had "territorial" rights. Two of the three who stayed in a first home and had the other stepparent and stepsiblings move in with them were not entirely happy with the situations. The problems seem to arise out of sharing rooms.

In the case of the third stepparent who stayed in her own home, she was very happy with the living arrangement. Perhaps this was because his children were older and did not move in with them so no adjustments had to be made. When asked if his children felt left out, she replied, "They never complained and my husband didn't ask for space for them." She also mentioned they had a mother and two sets of grandparents in the area to stay with. In addition she said she didn't even enjoy his children for meals so didn't want to encourage long visits. The husband was not interviewed so it was not possible to ascertain if there were negative feelings on his part about moving into his wife's home. If he had had negative feelings then that would account for all the families represented in the interviews having had problems with occupying the home of one spouse instead of finding a new home that no one had claims on or feelings of "territorial" rights.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationships in stepfamilies including the husband-wife relationship, the stepparent-stepchild relationship, and the influence of the two relationships on each other. To achieve this purpose, a questionnaire was administered in order to assess marital satisfaction, satisfaction with stepchildren, and conflict over childrearing. The researcher utilized instruments that had already been developed and added additional items to assess demographic information and stepfamily characteristics. In order to clarify some of the information from the questionnaire and obtain more in-depth information the researcher conducted 10 interviews of stepparents in the sample. The interviews varied in time from one to two hours.

The subjects participating in this research were nine stepfathers and 35 stepmothers who had been students or related to students at Hockaday School in the classes of 1955-1965. Hockaday is a girls' preparatory school in Dallas, Texas, with a boarding department. The largest percent (32.6%) of the subjects listed their income as being between \$100,000-\$150,000. The second largest percent (27.9%) of the subjects were in the over \$150,000 category. All the subjects had attended college with 27.3 percent having a graduate degree. In general the subjects were wealthy and educated.

The response rate to the questionnaire was 63 percent. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and means. Correlation coefficients, analysis of variance, and t tests were used to test the eight hypotheses.

Findings of Study

1. There was a positive relationship between closeness of the parent-stepchild relationship and marital satisfaction in these step-families.

2. There was a negative relationship between marital satisfaction and number of child development or parenting courses experienced by the respondents.

3. The relationship between satisfaction with stepchildren and the incidence of experiencing parenting or child development courses was negative.

4. Differences in conflict over stepchildren were found according to the sex of the stepchildren. Those parents with all male stepchildren had more conflict over stepchildren than those with all female or both male and female stepchildren.

5. There was a positive relationship between lower scores on Conflict over Childrearing Scale and marital satisfaction.

6. A positive relationship was found between lower scores on the Conflict over Childrearing Scale and the age of the stepchildren. There was less conflict when the family had older stepchildren.

7. A positive relationship was found between lower scores on the Conflict over Childrearing Scale and number of stepchildren. Less conflict was experienced when there was a larger number of stepchildren.

8. A difference in means on the Conflict over Childrearing Scale was found between families who had all male children and those who had all female children or children of both sexes. Families with all male children had more conflict over childrearing.

9. A positive relationship was found between marital satisfaction and comfort with the degree of responsibility given to the stepparent for the disciplining of the stepchildren.

10. Marital satisfaction was also positively related to the two adults holding similar views on childrearing.

11. A positive relationship resulted between marital satisfaction and the degree of support given to the stepparent from the spouse's extended family. The relationship between marital satisfaction and support from the respondent's own extended family was not significant.

12. A positive relationship was found between satisfaction with stepchildren and comfort with responsibility given to the stepparent for the disciplining of the stepchildren.

13. Satisfaction with stepchildren was positively related to similar views held by both adults on childrearing practices.

14. The degree of support from the respondent's extended family was associated with the stepparent's satisfaction with their stepchildren. This degree of support from extended family did not relate to the stepparents marital satisfaction.

15. The degree of support from the spouse's extended family was related not only to marital satisfaction but it was also related to satisfaction with stepchildren.

16. The degree of support that the stepparent felt from their own children was positively related to their satisfaction with stepchildren.

This same relationship did not exist with marital satisfaction and support of children.

17. This study did not reveal significant differences in whether the stepparent was a stepmother or stepfather. In satisfaction with stepchildren the differences between stepfathers and stepmothers approached significance but in marital satisfaction the means were equal. Several researchers have found the stepmother role more difficult (Draughon, 1975; Duberman, 1975; Goodman-Lezin, 1985; Nadler, 1976). Clingenpeel, Brand and Levoli (1984) did not find differences in their sample between stepfathers and stepmothers.

18. A positive significant ($p < .0001$) relationship was found between lower scores on the Conflict over Childrearing Scale and satisfaction with stepchildren. Stepparents that were more satisfied with their stepchildren had less conflict with their spouse over childrearing.

Possibilities for Future Research

There is a paucity of research on the upper class. The researcher found this group to be very cooperative, articulate, and willing to participate in research on stepfamilies. It is recommended that they be included in future research.

An interesting possibility to investigate in future research would be to take another look at conflict over childrearing and how the degree of conflict varied with the number of stepchildren in the family. In this study there was less conflict when there were more stepchildren which seems rather unusual. Perhaps parents are less protective and less personally involved with each child when there are more stepchildren.

In addition, are parents more protective of younger children causing more conflict between spouses over younger rather than older stepchildren? The particular ages of this sample may be the explanation but from the interviews came the explanation that parents are more protective of younger children. One possibility is that the older stepchildren had been in the family longer so the study should be done controlling for length of time in the stepfamily. If further research confirmed that older stepchildren were associated with less conflict between spouses people might not be as reluctant to marry a person with older children.

The finding that there was higher marital satisfaction and satisfaction with stepchildren when stepparents had fewer child development and parenting classes needs further investigation. The categories of child development and parenting courses should be differentiated and compared in future studies. In addition parenting courses planned for stepparents could be compared with the traditional parenting and child development courses.

Another possibility for research would be to use a large random sample or a different social class to test the association of marital satisfaction, satisfaction with children and parenting education or parenting skills. The same research could be replicated using stepfamilies.

Every stepparent that was interviewed agreed that the nuclear traditional model of the family does not work in stepfamilies. Theorists and researchers (Cherlin, 1981; Dolan & Lawn, 1985; Jacobson, 1979; Schulman, 1972, Visher & Visher, 1977; Walker, Rogers, & Messinger, 1977) agree that the nuclear model does not work well in

stepfamilies. Research into strong stepfamilies might provide new needed guidelines for those persons living in stepfamilies. The role of the stepparent in discipline of the stepchild seems to be an emotional issue with suggestions varying from exercising complete authority over stepchildren to not taking responsibility for discipline of stepchildren. The finding that marital satisfaction is significantly associated with degree of comfort with responsibility for discipline of stepchild given to stepparent bears replication.

Family systems theorists would be interested in several of the findings. One example is marital satisfaction as it relates to the degree of support from the spouse's extended family. Satisfaction of stepparents with stepchildren is associated with the degree of support of the stepparent's extended family and the degree of support from their own children. A highly significant ($p < .001$) relationship was found between satisfaction with stepchildren and similar views held by spouses on childrearing practices.

The positive significant ($p < .001$) relationship between satisfaction with stepchildren and marital satisfaction as well as conflict over childrearing needs further investigation to see if the results would be similar to the present study.

From the interviews came the suggestion that parent and stepparent must have a united front with the stepchild. According to several of the stepparents the united front of the marital couple is very important in the stepfamily. One of the stepmothers said, "My stepson almost caused the collapse of our marriage by playing us off against each other. I realized what was happening. He was lying to both of us. My husband and I talked and agreed to always consult each other

before giving him permission for anything. In private we argued out our differences but to him we said WE have made a decision." The theory of the importance of the united front for stepparents could be researched giving valuable insights for stepfamilies.

In some cases the researcher interviewed both individuals in a dyad because they were both stepparents, and discovered conflicting views of the marriage and children. Therefore, if possible, both spouses should be interviewed for each person's perception of the situation instead of one. This should provide a clearer understanding of the relationships in stepfamilies. It would also be interesting to interview the children from the stepfamily to get their perceptions of the family's interactions.

The researcher performed four unofficial interviews before creating the questionnaire and recommends this procedure because the interviews supplied ideas not found in the review of literature on stepfamilies.

Suggestions for Professionals

Educators tend to think of the family as the biological family (children and parents related by blood ties) and ignore the large number of stepfamilies present in our society. The predictions are that the number of stepfamilies will gradually increase. In elementary school, for example, teachers often only present the biological family model leaving out the families of a substantial minority of stepchildren. The biological family is only one kind of family in today's society. Educators need to recognize stepfamilies.

Crosbie-Burnett and Skyles (1989) relate suggestions for district school administrators. Local policy, practices, forms and curricula should be revised for nuclear intact family bias. A committee could be formed of parental figures who have various family structures for help in recognizing needed changes. Modify school projects to include a variety of family structures, for example, when making Mother's day cards include cards for two mothers.

Annually update family structure data for students including names, addresses and phone numbers for all parental figures. Report cards and important announcements should be mailed to nonresidential parents with information stating that they may have access to their biological children's records. Offer the parents separate teacher-parent conferences.

Family life education in junior high, highschool, college and beyond should include information on how to adjust to living in a stepfamily. In addition, family life education should be available to prepare individuals for remarriage and stepfamily formation tasks. If the couples can anticipate problems they can be better prepared for coping when they occur. If couples know what normative stepfamily issues are they are not as likely to assume they have failed personally when the inevitable issues arise.

Social workers and therapists could play a preventative role in stepfamily dysfunction by educating themselves and clients about dynamics and processes of stepfamily life. Usually individuals have had socialization for only the nuclear family. Couples in stepfamilies are at risk for stress and dysfunction because of the multiple roles they hold and the difficult tasks they must accomplish for successful

family integration and reorganization. Too often social workers and therapists use the nuclear model for stepfamilies. Such treatment is not only inappropriate but can exacerbate the family's problems if the treatment is not sensitive to the differences between the two family structures.

Results of the research have implications for better education and social work practice with stepfamilies. Duberman's research (1975) and this present study suggest that the quality of the husband-wife relationship varies directly with the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. The stepparents' comfort with degree of responsibility for discipline of stepchildren given to stepparent is important not only to the stepparent's satisfaction with stepchildren, but also to the marital satisfaction of the stepparent. The support of the extended families for the couple also influence the satisfaction with stepchildren and the marital satisfaction of the couple.

The social work practitioner needs to be sensitive to the stepparent role and understand that similar views on childrearing have extra meaning for the stepparent and spouse. Similar views on childrearing relate significantly with satisfaction with stepchildren and marital satisfaction. Workshops for spouses in stepfamilies could help not only their parenting abilities, but also their couple relationship.

Researchers and practitioners need to pay more attention to stepfamilies and they need to educate themselves about dynamics and processes in stepfamily life because of the large number of stepfamilies present in our society today. In addition, the predictions are that the number of stepfamilies will steadily increase. The number of

stepfamilies is increasing in caseloads of social service agencies. In-service training needs to be made available in order to prepare family service workers for this client population (Skyles, 1983).

Giles-Sims and Crosbie-Burnett (1989) also report the need for interdisciplinary communication and collaboration between researchers and clinicians involved with stepfamilies. Up to this point the empirical and the clinical literature on stepfamilies have developed quite independently. Ganong and Coleman (1989) note that clinical researchers tend to rely on their experiences with small numbers of clients who are experiencing difficulties, and to emphasize patterns of variation in process, family history and structure. It is misleading to generalize to the remarried population from the clinical data. The first models of stepfamilies from this group tended to be "deficit" comparisons with first marriages or were on pathology.

Conversely, empirical researchers often focus on questions that can be studied with surveys that often do not fully analyze the complexities of stepfamily relationships. The "researchable questions" may not provide useful data for clinicians and policymakers. Clinical and empirical researchers would both benefit from working together and developing an integrated model of stepfamilies that reflects cross-disciplinary concerns and to plan for collaborative research based on this model. Communication with policymakers could help focus research questions to create a knowledge base necessary for further policy development. Ganong and Coleman (1987) report that clinicians, researchers and policymakers could collaborate and contribute to future healthy stepfamily functioning.

The researcher suggests that researchers and practitioners not only pay more attention to stepfamilies but also cooperate in an effort to serve stepfamilies.

Universities must begin to teach courses on divorce and stepfamilies and provide field experience for students to learn how to sensitively provide services to these families. In addition, university personnel could conduct community education for other professionals -- lawyers, teachers and clergy in particular -- to enable them to become more aware of stepfamily issues and thus better understand and assist stepfamilies with whom they work. Teachers of community parenting courses should recognize and teach different guidelines for stepfamilies. Specialized courses just for stepfamilies should also be offered. It is critical for the success of stepfamilies that they receive recognition and institutional support.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

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There are increasing numbers of Americans who are stepparents. In an attempt to learn more about step-parenting we are asking you and other stepparents to complete this questionnaire. Your comments will help us gain greater knowledge and insight into stepfamily relationships. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and your answers are confidential and anonymous.

The following questions are concerned with general information about you and your family. Please check the statement that most accurately reflects your situation.

1. Parent 1. Stepfather 2. Stepmother 3.
2. Age 30-40 years 41-50 years 51-60 years
3. Education: Please check the highest education completed.

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. High School Graduate	<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Graduate Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Some College	<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Business or Trade School
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. College Graduate	<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Professional Training (medicine, law, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Post College Work	
4. Where have you resided most of your life? (Check one):

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Farm
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Non-farm rural residence
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Small town (population under 2,500)
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Large town (population 2,500-24,999)
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Small city (population 25,000-100,000)
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Large city (population over 100,000)
5. What is the primary source of the income of your family?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Inherited savings and investments
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Earned wealth, transferable investments
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Profits, royalties, fees
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Salary, commissions, (regular, monthly or yearly)
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Hourly wages, weekly checks
6. Total household income for most recent year:

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Under \$25,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. \$25,001-\$50,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. \$50,001-\$100,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. \$100,001-\$150,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Over \$150,000
7. Employment: Yes No
8. My occupation _____
9. My spouse's occupation _____
10. Present marital status:

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Divorced
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Remarried
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Widowed
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Separated
11. Indicate below how religious your family is: (rate on a 5-point scale with 5 representing the highest degree of religious orientation and 1 representing the least.)

	5	4	3	2	1.
--	---	---	---	---	----
12. How many years have you been a stepparent? _____
13. What are the ages of your stepchildren? _____
14. How many stepchildren do you have altogether? _____
15. Male Female - stepchildren. (How many)
16. Male Female - own children. (How many)

17. How many child development or parenting classes have you attended? _____ Please describe them (example: class at church, college course, etc.).

18. Indicate below what is closest to your situation:

- Stepchildren live with us
- Stepchildren visit every other week
- Stepchildren visit monthly
- Stepchildren visit holidays and summer
- Stepchildren visit rarely

19. Indicate below how much responsibility for discipline of your stepchildren is given to you by your spouse: (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing the highest degree of responsibility and 1 representing the least.)

5 4 3 2 1

20. Are you comfortable with the degree of responsibility you have for discipline of your stepchildren? (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing the most comfort and 1 representing the least.)

5 4 3 2 1

21. Indicate below how similar are the views of you and your spouse on childrearing practices. (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing very similar and 1 representing dissimilar views.)

5 4 3 2 1

22. Do you feel support by the biological parent of your stepchild? (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing much support and 1 representing little.)

5 4 3 2 1

23. Do you feel support by your extended family? (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing much support and 1 representing little.)

5 4 3 2 1

24. Do you feel support from your spouse's extended family? (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing much support and 1 representing little.)

5 4 3 2 1

25. Do you feel support from your own children? (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing much support and 1 representing little.)

5 4 3 2 1

26. Do you feel support from your spouse when you are dealing with your stepchild? (Rate on a 5 point scale with 5 representing much support and 1 representing little.)

5 4 3 2 1

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please circle below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list:

	Always Agree 5	Almost Always Agree 4	Occasionally Disagree 3	Frequently Disagree 2	Almost Always Disagree 1	Always Disagree 0
27. Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
28. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
29. Religious matters	5	4	3	2	1	0
30. Demonstrations of affection	5	4	3	2	1	0
31. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
32. Sex relations	5	4	3	2	1	0
33. Conventional (correct or proper behavior)	5	4	3	2	1	0

Always Agree 5	Almost Always 4	Occasionally Disagree 3	Frequently Disagree 2	Almost Always Disagree 1	Always Disagree 0
34. Philosophy of life				5 4 3 2 1 0	
35. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws				5 4 3 2 1 0	
36. Aims, goals, and things believed important				5 4 3 2 1 0	
37. Amount of time spent together				5 4 3 2 1 0	
38. Making major decisions				5 4 3 2 1 0	
39. Household tasks				5 4 3 2 1 0	
40. Leisure time interests and activities				5 4 3 2 1 0	
41. Career decisions				5 4 3 2 1 0	

All of the time 0	Most of the time 1	More often than not 2	Occasionally 3	Rarely 4	Never 5
42. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?		0 1 2 3 4 5			
43. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?		0 1 2 3 4 5			
44. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?		0 1 2 3 4 5			
45. Do you confide in your mate?		0 1 2 3 4 5			
46. Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together?)		0 1 2 3 4 5			
47. How often do you and your partner quarrel?		0 1 2 3 4 5			
48. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves?"		0 1 2 3 4 5			
49. Do you kiss your mate?	Every Day 4	Almost Every Day 3	Occasionally 2	Rarely 1	Never 0
50. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	All of Them 4	Most of Them 3	Some of Them 2	Very few of Them 1	None of Them 0

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

Never 0	Less than once a Month 1	Once or Twice a Month 2	Once or Twice a Week 3	Once a Day 4	More Often 5
51. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas?		0 1 2 3 4 5			
52. Laugh together		0 1 2 3 4 5			
53. Calmly discuss something		0 1 2 3 4 5			
54. Work together on a project?		0 1 2 3 4 5			

There are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks? (Circle yes or no)

55. Yes No Being too tired for sex

56. Yes No Not showing love

57. The numbers on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy" represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the number which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

58. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

- 5 I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.
- 4 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.
- 3 I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.
- 2 It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.
- 1 It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.
- 0 My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

Please read each of the following statements carefully and circle the number of the answer that best corresponds with your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Disagree 3	Strongly Disagree 4
59. Having a stepchild around has not brought all of the satisfactions I had hoped it would.	1	2	3	4
60. Having a stepchild has increased the happiness of our marriage.	1	2	3	4
61. This marriage would have been easier if my spouse had not brought his child into our marriage.	1	2	3	4
62. I sometimes wish my spouse and I had more time alone without our stepchild around.	1	2	3	4
63. Before having a stepchild, I didn't realize how much of a burden raising one could be.	1	2	3	4
64. Raising a stepchild is a nerve-racking job.	1	2	3	4
65. Having a stepchild has not kept my spouse and me from doing as much together as we used to do when we were dating.	1	2	3	4
66. Having a stepchild has interfered with the pursuit of my own career.	1	2	3	4
67. My stepchild does not show adequate respect for me and/or my spouse.	1	2	3	4
68. Words don't seem to have any effect on kids these days.	1	2	3	4
69. For the most part, my stepchild is well-behaved.	1	2	3	4
70. I wish my stepchild would show a little more concern for me.	1	2	3	4
71. My stepchild rarely seems to care how I feel about things.	1	2	3	4
72. My stepchild rarely fails to meet assigned responsibilities at home.	1	2	3	4
73. My stepchild seems to fight more with me than children in other families.	1	2	3	4

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4
74. My stepchild doesn't seem as happy and carefree as other children of the same age.	1	2	3	4
75. My stepchild considers me an important part of his/her life.	1	2	3	4
76. My stepchild's value system is very much the same as my own.	1	2	3	4
77. Quite frequently, my stepchild comes and talks to me about routine events in his/her daily life.	1	2	3	4
78. My stepchild and I don't have very much in common to talk about.	1	2	3	4
79. I frequently get together with my stepchild for fun or recreation at home.	1	2	3	4
80. My stepchild and I often work together in the yard or on projects around the house.	1	2	3	4
81. My spouse and I rarely disagree on when or how to punish my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
82. My spouse and I always try to support each other when one of us praises or punishes my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
83. My spouse and I decide together what rules to set for my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
84. My spouse and I nearly always agree on what my stepchild's responsibilities at home should be.	1	2	3	4
85. My spouse and I nearly always agree on how to respond to my stepchild's requests for money or privileges.	1	2	3	4
86. My stepchild has learned that if he/she can't get something from me he/she can often get it from my spouse.	1	2	3	4
87. Sometimes my spouse really spoils my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
88. My spouse and I rarely argue about my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
89. A large portion of arguments I have with my spouse are caused by my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
90. My stepchild often manages to drive a wedge between my spouse and me.	1	2	3	4
91. My spouse and I seem to argue more frequently than we did when we were dating.	1	2	3	4
92. Our marriage has never been in difficulty because of my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
93. My spouse and I assume equal responsibility for rearing my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
94. Most of the work involved in caring for my stepchild falls on my shoulders.	1	2	3	4
95. My spouse doesn't display enough affection toward my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
96. My spouse doesn't assume his/her fair share of taking care of my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
97. My spouse shows a great deal of enthusiasm in my stepchild's interests and accomplishments.	1	2	3	4
98. My spouse doesn't spend enough time with my stepchild.	1	2	3	4
99. My spouse and I rarely disagree on how much time to spend with my stepchild.	1	2	3	4

100. Did you and your spouse talk about how you would handle problems with stepchildren before you married? Yes No
101. Did you spend time together in pleasant activities with your stepchildren before you married their parent? Yes No
102. What has been the most enjoyable part of being a stepparent?
103. What has been the least enjoyable part of being a stepparent?
104. What advice would you give a person who is considering becoming a stepparent?
105. Have any of your stepchildren ever had counseling or psychotherapy? Yes No
106. Have you ever had counseling or psychotherapy? Yes No
107. Have any of your stepchildren had problems with drugs? Yes No

APPENDIX B

RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

102. What has been the most enjoyable part of being a stepparent?

like being a grandparent - a joy
 their being affectionate with me
 early interactions - preteens
 mothering children who had not had mothering
 nothing

learning that biological parenting is not necessary to have a very close and respectful, loving
 relationship
 being appreciated after they had left home and were on their own
 being allowed to be part of the child's life--personal growth
 it's nice to have another boy in the family so my son could have a brother
 watching the child grow

getting to know the 2 older ones and watching the 2 younger ones develop
 seeing the youngster respond to a caring adult...and grow more responsible in his behavior
 seeing him change from a sick, failing 9th grader to a straight A student
 making my husband happy by having them around
 we have one big happy family and each person adds their own gifts to our household. I have been
 enriched by them

establishing new relationship
 none. They have moved away. Most of the time I never liked them
 seeing my oldest grow up happy and successful
 seeing them mature into fine adults
 oldest child-she is now an adult raising her 2 own children - pleasure watching the change of
 motherhood

When I can help them make decisions or when they ask for my support or advise
 Seeing them finally feel good about themselves
 having more family
 I don't know if you would consider it enjoyable for me, but the only positive aspect has been the fact
 that it was very important to my husband to have custody of his son and to raise him which we have
 done
 Nothing!!

Enjoying having children, taking vacation trips together
 Helping him grow and develop emotionally
 The relationships my stepchildren and I have established - it's not bliss, but certainly it is happier
 and more giving than I had expected
 Having kids
 I consider the younger one as my own child--its gratifying when he refers to me to his friends as his
 "Mom" tho he does not call me that to my face.

Nothing!
 At times they are very sweet and make me feel like I'm loved
 Being a neutral friend
 Nothing
 Being married to his father

Getting to know grown children
 The experience of raising a girl after having an only son
 It has been enjoyable being a step grandmother
 Having a close relationship with them--taking them hunting, fishing, etc.
 My stepson is an hyperactive nice child. I have enjoyed the companionship when he has been in the
 mood or wanted to visit.

Having additional children as family members. They add so much with their unique personalities and
 goals

Nothing
 Before they lived with us permanently, we could have fun and be a little indulgent with our visits and
 their stays with us - this included shopping trips, trips for vacation occasionally, lots of fun
 entertainment, which at that point of my life was rewarding and time and money well spent for them.
 There were also times for more serious moments and discussions - and discipline occasionally - but
 those times were always for a short period, which in a sense was good for all of us. When they came
 to live with us, upon learning that their mother and her new husband intended to move out of the
 state, we had already begun our own family, a 9-month old boy and I was 5 months pregnant with our
 daughter! We were very busy and with the added responsibility of the girls, our lives have not
 slowed down, 3 years later. That first year, they were ages 15 and 17, they were a tremendous help
 to us with our new children. It took a lot of compromise on all parts of each of us to adjust and
 those "adjustments" are still being made. As hard as it is to have an influence on children whom
 you have not raised and have not had some of our values and beliefs growing up, it is rewarding to
 see that in these respects, that as they do grow up, they do reflect some of our attitudes and
 ideas at times. This is enjoyable, as well as rewarding as I mentioned. It is also enjoyable to

know that they are at home with our children (their youngest stepbrother and sister) and have fun and a good lovable relationship with them.
I enjoy talking to my stepkids. I had a wonderful childhood and I enjoy planning and taking them to the zoo, amusement parks, etc. They are very appreciative of anything I do for them and not at all spoiled.

103. What has been the least enjoyable part of being a stepparent?

She withdraws to get her way - plays games - very manipulative. Only wants her Dad.
Worrying about drug use.
Discipline in teen years
Picking up after a messy teenager whom you did not train as a child.
Being left with 98% of the decision for raising my kids--education, activities, support, nurturing.

Resentment of the love their father gave me--their thinking it decreased his love for them (it did not)
Often being caught in the middle between father & son.
I expect everyone to pick up after themselves--sometimes he does not.
Suffering the nastiness youngest child inflicted upon both of us when she went off the beam.
The energy drain, the way it cuts into time for my own activities, reading, projects, etc.

Not really feeling a part of his life, simply marking time until he gets into college.
Their mothers jealousy of me was difficult for them and for me especially in beginning.
Learning to share my spouses time and resources without feeling threatened.
Having another teenager in the house.
Watching their father wait on them.

Watching the younger one flounder.
Knowing what was the right or wrong thing to say or do.
Youngest--trying to give guidance with a rebellious child.
Wanting them to have more and to watch their difficulty being torn between natural parents.
The expense of them especially when you have a selfish husband who wants expensive things--such as an airplane.

Feeling responsible without having authority. Wanting more control. Dealing with the other parent indirectly
Feeling their hurt over their parents divorce.
Everything!
The early teen years - 13-16.
Disciplining

The games of the most recent ex-wife.
Discipline
With the older boy, I've had to bail him out of jams several times. Went thru drug treatment with him. He has lied to me, stolen from me, etc. - it wasn't fun...
Dealing with his high level of energy, taking a "backseat" when he visits - we're newlyweds and I resent sharing my new husband.
I'm not their mother and they don't feel allegiance to me and don't feel they have to do what I say.

Dealing with the ex-wife!
Everything
His mother & father still playing games with each other and use him.
Having my spouse be at war with my children.
The feeling of competition between us for her father's attention.

It is difficult.
The financial hardship.
Trying to balance workload and take on additional family-related tasks. Time for everyone is further stretched and causes tension and resentment--less energy.
Lack of respect--putting his children before me.

104. What advice would you give a person who is considering becoming a stepparent?

Work out problems of self-pity, resentment, control, anger. Do not project on child. Work on own faults.
1. never let early activities together lapse and 2. choose children's friends carefully.
You must like kids and your spouse must support you.
Make sure you would want them for your own kids.
Never compare a biological parent to yourself.

Open communication--true commitment to your spouse and letting the children know the marriage comes first.
Communicate--agreement between both spouses as to expectations and responsibility.
Precounseling.
Spend time with the stepchild.
You must have a secure relationship with spouse; sometimes a child will try to break it up.

It's the toughest part of a new marriage. Blended families remind me of trying to put two jigsaw puzzles together to make one "picture" . . . very tricky! Takes lots of work!
 Have a good relationship with the child beforehand--get to know and love him/her.
 Talk about everything in detail before you get married--to know what each spouse expects of the other spouse's children.
 Make friends as early as possible.
 Be very careful -

Be honest/face facts/don't expect perfection/be sure you have the self-confidence to handle unusual situations and relationships/be adult!

Parents must stick together.

Much patience, much love, firm discipline, understanding and not trying to take the place of the natural parent but always supportive.

To talk to several stepparents and stepchildren and to have premarital counseling and to take a stepparenting course.

Don't expect to replace the natural parent. Don't expect too much from these kids. Listen to these kids. Be interested in them. Be their friend. You do have some influence over them. I like my stepkids and I think they like me.

Go to a counselor. Talk about goals. Agree on rules, and agree to discuss before changing. If can't agree, explore how to deal with problems.

To be their friend.

Don't do it.

Do not!

Don't unless you intend to be honest, to be the kind of person you want your child to be, and to give your child the most precious gift you possess, your time!

Make sure you develop a good relationship before the wedding!!

That you will most likely care about a child for his/her parents sake (for your love for the parent) but the relationship between you and that child must grow from the foundation that you and the child build.

Don't think of them as a stepchild.

Please think twice--these kids are going to be with you forever--it takes a lot of patience and love.

Be prepared to feel like an outsider--share these feelings openly with spouse.

Sit down and make rules beforehand with kids and parents.

Have a solid relationship with your husband to be and always try to agree on discipline of the children.

Don't; But if you must, be sure you knew spouse's background; philosophy of rearing children.

Where does mother live?--how manipulative is she?

Try to be a friend to the child then later be the parent.

Get to know the child or children on an informal, day to day basis. Talk about expectations and feelings regarding the relationship.

Go into the marriage as their friend. Let the natural parent continue to discipline until gradually you gain their respect and love.

Make ground rules--responsibilities and consequences for failing to carry them out very clear and make sure your spouse will help follow through.

Realize that step-children have divided loyalties, even when the other parent is deceased. You are important but can never "replace" the other parent.

Do not marry anyone with children.

In my opinion, to be successful at parenting, or stepparenting, the most important advise I would give is that both parents should support each other and be united when dealing with children.

They are the first to sense dissention and will use it to their advantage. My husband and I support each other's views and always seek the opportunity to discuss things ahead of time privately to work out our own differences. If that is not possible, we support each other totally, trying to realize that one may have strong feelings or further insight into the matter.

It is also important to treat them as individuals as well as a unit to themselves. There is a very fine line and one has to be very careful in order to achieve firmness.

Don't be selfish. The children didn't choose this situation - the adults did. Children have many needs for time and attention but they grow up so fast. Enjoy them and give them time and love but don't try to take the place of their biological parent. My spouse and I agreed before we married that the children come first. Though it's hard when one child has a long series of needs for time and attention, it seems that once they realize that they come first and that they are very important, they don't feel threatened and their needs decrease.

APPENDIX C

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
FOR STEPPARENTS

Structured Interview Questions for Stepparents

1. What kinds of issues do you and your stepchildren seem to have conflict over?
2. Do you feel your spouse treats your children the same as his/her children?
3. Do you live in a different home than one which was occupied by either family before the remarriage?
4. Do the children seem to accept their step brothers/sisters?
5. Are you satisfied with the way your home accommodates the family members? Elaborate . . .
6. Have any of the children shown unusual behavior after the remarriage occurred? Eating problems, drinking, drugs, drop in grades, open hostility, becoming withdrawn, etc.?
7. Are you satisfied with the amount of financial resources you have for supporting the new family arrangement? Do either of you pay child support or alimony? Is it a burden? Do you resent this?
8. What kinds of things do your children and stepchildren do that get on your nerves? Does there seem to be conflict or bickering between the stepchildren?
9. Which role is the easier one--stepfathering or stepmothering? Why?
10. Which parent takes the stronger lead in disciplining the children?
11. Which parent assumes the responsibility for helping with homework?
12. Does your family attend any kind of religious services? How involved are the children?
13. Did some of the children have to change communities or schools after the remarriage? How well did they adjust?
14. Please describe any kind of problems you have had in the step-parenting experience.
15. Please describe any solutions you have found to share with other stepparents.
16. What are some positive things about remarriage, stepfamilies?
17. Please add any other comments you have regarding stepparenting that you feel we should know.

18. If you had it to do over would you become a stepparent?
19. From my questionnaire I found that as far as conflict between spouses, younger children were more of a problem. If this was true for you, what is the reason?
20. Are you conscious of dealing with any sexual issues in the remarried or stepfamily?
21. Which marriage was more satisfying sexually?

Questions 20 and 21 will only be asked if the researcher is comfortable with asking them to the particular respondent.

22. Have you taken any parenting courses? Were they helpful?
23. What is your role with stepchildren?

APPENDIX D

CORRESPONDENCE

1320 North Broadway
 Shawnee, OK 74801
 January 25, 1988

Dear Hockadaisy,

You may remember me, I was Oteka Little of the Hockaday class of 1957. I am working on my doctorate at Oklahoma State University in the field of Family Relations/Child Development. My dissertation subject is stepfamilies. I have narrowed my study to stepparenting and its relationship to marital satisfaction. It is my hope that this research will make a contribution to the family field.

Instead of trying to get a representative sample (equal number of people from each socio-economic class), I want to research the upper middle and upper classes. This is sometimes a difficult group to research because they are often very private people. In addition, the general public seems so curious about them. No names will be associated with this research when it is published.

I am enclosing a self-addressed postcard for your convenience. If you will fill out a questionnaire or be interviewed by me, please, return the postcard with your name, address, telephone number and the ages of your stepchildren. If you are not a stepparent but have friends who are, would you talk to them about filling out a questionnaire or being interviewed by me? If they agree send me their names, addresses, phone numbers and ages of their stepchildren on the enclosed postcard.

At this point I am under time constraints because of my committee meeting. Please do this today or this week at the latest. I will be forever grateful to those who help me. You will be helping not only another Hockaday girl, but also stepfamilies. Thank you for your consideration.

As ever,

Oteka Little Ball
 Hockaday Class of '57

1320 North Broadway
 Shawnee, OK 74801
 March 8, 1988

Dear Hockadaisy,

You don't know me, I was Oteka Little, Hockaday class of 1957; but you probably know my sister who was Janna Little, Hockaday class of 1963. She and her husband John Robbins are both stepparents. I am working on my doctorate at Oklahoma State University in the field of Family Relations/Child Development. My dissertation subject is stepfamilies. I have narrowed my study to stepparenting and its relationship to marital satisfaction. It is my hope that this research will make a contribution to the family field.

Instead of trying to get a representative sample (equal number of people from each socio-economic class), I want to research the upper middle and upper classes. This is sometimes a difficult group to research because they are often very private people. In addition, the general public seems so curious about them. No names will be associated with this research when it is published. I am very sensitive to the need for anonymity because of having been in a political family.

I am enclosing a self-addressed postcard for your convenience. If you will fill out a questionnaire or be interviewed by me, please, return the postcard with your name, address, telephone number and the ages of your stepchildren. If you are not a stepparent but have friends who are, would you talk to them about filling out a questionnaire or being interviewed by me? If they agree send me their names, addresses, phone numbers and ages of their stepchildren on the enclosed postcard.

Please do this for me and I will be forever grateful. I will share my findings with you. You will be helping not only another Hockaday girl, but also stepfamilies. Thank you for your consideration.

Cordially,

Oteka Little Ball

SANDRA GOODMAN-LEZIN, Ph.D

5435 Balboa Boulevard, Suite 210
Encino, California 91316
(818) 905-3609

June 25, 1989

Ms. Oteka Ball
1320 North Broadway
Shawnee, Oklahoma 74801

Dear Ms. Ball:

I hereby give you permission to use the Dissatification With
Stepchildren Scale and the Conflict Over Childrearing Scale in
your dissertation. I wish you luck in your research. Please
send me a summary of your results.

Sincerely,

Sandra Goodman-Lezin, Ph.D.

Sandra Goodman-Lezin, Ph.D.

SGL:kl

VITA

Oteka Little Ball

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: RELATIONSHIPS IN STEPFAMILIES

Major Field: Higher Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Madill, Oklahoma, February 2, 1939, the daughter of Reuel and Oteka Little; married Jerry Ball, September 5, 1959; two children, Jeremy, born in 1963, and Oteka Lyn, born in 1967.

Education: Graduated from Hockaday preparatory high school, Dallas, Texas, in 1957; attended Oklahoma University 1957-1959; received Bachelor of Arts degree in Home Economics from Southern Methodist University in 1962; received a Master of Arts degree in Family Relations/Child Development from Oklahoma State University in 1976; completed requirements for Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in July, 1989.

Professional Experience: Substitute teaching elementary schools, Canadian County, 1967-1967; substitute teaching elementary and secondary schools, Shawnee, Oklahoma, 1974-1975; lecturer Seminole Junior College, 1976-1977; assistant professor of Home Economics and Education, Oklahoma Baptist University, Head of Home Economics, 1978-1983; lecturer in Sociology, 1983-1989; sex education instructor at Greenleaf Psychiatric Hospital, 1987; assistant professor of Sociology and Head of Preschool Administration at Oklahoma Baptist University, 1989.

Professional Organizations: Iota Epsilon; Phi Kappa Phi; National Council on Family Relations; Certified Family Life Educator; Oklahoma Council on Family Relations; Association of Couples for Marriage Enrichment; Southern Association for Children Under Six; Oklahoma Association for Children Under Six; American Association of University of Professors.