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Social psychological factors related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship

Quick, Donna Smith, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1989

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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS RELATED TO THE QUALITY OF THE
STEPMOTHER-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in the
Graduate School of The
Ohio State University

By

Donna Smith Quick, B.S., M.S.

* * * * *
The Ohio State University
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Any study of stepfamilies is complicated by the fact that there are various definitions of "stepfamilies," also known as blended families, reconstituted families and bi-nuclear families. In its strictest sense, a stepfamily is defined as a household formed by marriage wherein one or both members of the marital dyad have been previously married and in which a child or children from a previous marriage are living with the couple. A broader definition includes family units in which a child or children from a partner's previous marriage regularly visit the remarried couple.

According to Glick (1984), approximately 50% of first marriages of young adults today are likely to end in divorce, and 59% of these divorces involve children under 18. It is estimated that 70-75% of divorced persons remarry, and the majority of these remarriages occur within five years of the parental divorce. Moreover, parents today are divorcing at younger ages and are decreasing the time between first and second marriages (Furstenburg, 1979;
Furstenburg & Spanier, 1984). An estimated 35% of all children born in the United States in the early 1980s spent part of their lives living in a stepfamily (Glick, 1984). Most recently, Glick (1989) reported that remarriage rates increased 22% between 1970 and 1980. Currently, stepfamilies represent 17.4% of households with children under 18.

Recent analysis and interpretation by Martin and Bumpass (1989) of the June 1985 Current Population Survey conclude that about two-thirds of all first marriages are likely to end in divorce or separation, a substantial increase from the data provided by Glick (1984). Assuming this projection is accurate, it is likely that many more children are affected by divorce than is now reported. Subsequently the number of children in stepfamilies is likely to increase as well.

At present, our demographic understanding of stepfamilies is at best only an approximation. Current data collection systems are not yet designed to reflect accurately the complicated familial patterns of stepfamilies. For example, as Glick (1984) points out, his figures are conservative estimates in that they fail to reflect the 5% to 10% of stepfamily children living in the relatively rare stepfamily constellation of a natural father and a stepmother. Cherlin and McCarthy (1985) present demographic characteristics of stepfamilies based upon the
June 1980 Current Population Survey (CPS). Their study, however, focused on divorce-precipitated remarried households only, neglecting persons who became stepparents by marrying a widowed individual. Moreover, understanding the demographics of the increasing formation of stepfamilies goes deeper than the challenging task of tracking numbers. As Furstenburg (1980) emphasized, behind the demographic shifts are complex social and kinship changes which necessitate a host of personal and interpersonal adjustments.

Andrew Cherlin (1978) has labeled the stepfamily as an "incomplete institution," suggesting that these families are confronted with ambiguous social roles because society offers no institutional guidelines. Data do suggest that these family relationships may be more problematic than relationships in intact family structures. Yet we know less about stepfamilies than any other lifestyle (Herndon, 1982). For example, the formation of stepfamilies expands the kinship network, by increasing the child's number of relatives. What does it mean to a child to have three or four parents, perhaps six or more grandparents, not to mention an array of new aunts, uncles and cousins? As the number of stepfamilies continues to increase, involving greater numbers of children, it becomes important that rigorous research be implemented that examines the quality of the parent-child relationship in stepfamilies and the
long term impact this lifestyle has on family members' well-being (Sauer & Fine, 1988).

Steppmothering: A Stressful Role?

One relationship in stepfamilies that has been virtually unexplored is that of the stepmother-adolescent child. Research assessing the adjustments and effectiveness of stepmothers indicates they don't fare as well as stepfathers, further suggesting that stepmothers tend to be more anxious, depressed and angry about family relationships (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987; Sauer & Fine, 1988). Moreover, role adjustments may be difficult for stepmothers because women are expected to be the more loving, nurturant parent.

Adolescent Stepchildren

In addition, the general writings on stepfamilies have suggested that of all stepchildren, adolescents have the most significant adjustment problems (Chilman, 1983; Lutz, 1983), yet little empirical data are available to support this claim. What does seem clear, however, is that parent-child relationships affect the relative ease with which the young person adjusts to the changed roles and new demands of adolescence. How the special nature and circumstances of the stepfamily influence these transitions is a critical research question to be addressed by family scholars in the coming years. Moreover, a better understanding of stepmother families with adolescents would
not only shed more light on processes pertaining to the stepfamily, but would also contribute to a more comprehensive view of problems faced by adolescents.

**Multiple Perception Data Collection**

It has been argued that a major methodological weakness in the study of the family has been the reliance upon one source of information regarding the entire family, usually the wife and/or mother (McKenry, Price-Bonham, & O'Bryant, 1981). Some researchers have labelled this "wives' family research" and proposed that we must move beyond this one family member point of view or perception of family functioning to designs that provide a "whole" family perspective. Multiple perception family research appears "to have the potential of gaining much valuable insight into the family as a 'unit of interacting personalities'" (Ball, McKenry, & Price-Bonham, 1983, p. 895).

The proposed study is unique in that the key dependent variable will be the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship taking into account both the stepmother's and the adolescent's perceptions. In order to quantitatively reflect this relationship, data from both parties in the relationship will be summed into a dyad score (Miller, 1986).
A Theoretical Perspective on Stepmother-Adolescent Relationships

So much of what occurs in families is carefully defined role behavior and these roles are continually being entered and exited. This process—a change in role expectations or norms and hence a change in a set of behaviors—is certainly one that is important in family theory (Burr, 1973, p. 124).

Remarried families are confronted with numerous major structural changes including undertaking new roles and responsibilities, reorganization of household routines, and developing new attachments (Santrok & Sitterle, 1987), with few societal norms to guide them (Cherlin, 1978).

The clarity with which roles are defined positively influences the ability to adjust to transitions from one role to another. Thus, role theory is useful in supplying the concepts that influence the ease of making these role transitions for the stepmother and her adolescent stepchild.

Role Strain

Burr (1973) has stressed, lack of clarity regarding prescribed behavior associated with certain roles is thought to contribute to role strain (Goode, 1960). Role strain is defined as the "stress generated within a person when he either cannot comply or has difficulty complying with the
expectations of a role or set of roles" (Burr, 1973, p. 129).

Adolescent role strain. Examples of these contradictory expectations for the adolescent in a stepfamily might include the task of separating and establishing their own identity and independence while at the same time being asked to join a new family with its own joint activities, goals and traditions. Young adolescents may well be in the early stages of developing their sense of separateness or autonomy and may be reluctant to forfeit any of this new found freedom in the event of a remarriage (Whiteside, 1982). Furthermore, a stepfamily is simply not afforded the time that is available to biological families to adjust and experience these developmental transitions and to gain mastery of the tasks associated with remarried living. In other words, in stepfamilies, people from different backgrounds and developmental histories suddenly find themselves living in the intimacy of a new family (Quick & Quick, 1986). Consequently, some adolescents may be experiencing divided loyalties between their "new parents" and their "old parents" (Lutz, 1983) and may even challenge the stepparents' right to establish rules and maintain discipline policies. This push-pull experience of desiring to attain one's own independence, which includes facing peer expectations and dating, experimenting with different lifestyles and spending more time away from home,
while at the same time sensing the need to develop some sort of relationship with this new parent, may all lead to additional conflict and strained role expectations for the adolescent child (Leigh & Peterson, 1986).

**Stepmother role strain.** Although there are few studies to draw upon, conclusions seem to indicate that "there is more confusion, uncertainty and problematic interaction among family members in stepmother families" (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987, p. 100). One popular explanation given for this is that the role of stepmother lacks institutional guidelines and clear norms, thus potentially contributing to role conflict or role strain. Consequently, many stepmothers report difficulty in carrying out this role and its responsibilities (Messinger, 1976; Visher & Visher, 1978).

Some of the suggested reasons for these difficulties include: (a) the stepmother enters a role that has been traditionally viewed as cruel (Fast & Cain, 1966; Smith, 1953); (b) stepmothers suffer from this stigma even when they are kind, understanding, and supportive because of the emotions that are culturally associated with the lack of a biological connection (Bohannon, 1970); (c) a stepmother normally spends more time with the children than a stepfather, inviting more opportunity for disagreements (Duberman, 1973); and (d) children in our society are closer to their mothers and thus it is unlikely that anyone can
take the place of the natural mother without some problems.

Another explanation for the strained roles and the subsequent problematic nature of stepmother families is that these families may be fundamentally different from stepfather stepfamilies. In this culture, children living with their fathers may do so as a result of a difficult custody negotiation or may have a history of difficult behaviors and family interactions. Similarly, Giles-Sims (1985) found that father custody typically occurred at the time of the divorce or sometime after the divorce, because the mother could no longer handle the adolescent child. In these situations, the father and stepmother gain a son or daughter who may need ongoing supervision and controls beyond what is ordinarily customary for this age group.

A final reason why stepmother families may be stressful is that stepmothers who have never anticipated becoming full-time stepparents may well find themselves in that role full-time. One study found that full-time stepmothers with older stepchildren had greater conflict with their spouse, additional disagreements over child rearing and discipline and consequently less marital satisfaction than biological mothers with older children (Nadler, 1976).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to investigate social and psychological factors that serve as resources that the stepmother and adolescent may draw upon in their efforts to
cope with the suggested role strain inherent in the relationship and further impact the quality of that relationship. According to role theory, the ability of the stepmother-stepchild to adjust to the stress involved in the formation of a new stepfamily will be, in part, contingent upon resources that each individual brings to the situation (Clingempeel, Brand, & Segal, 1987). Several factors have appeared in the stepmother-stepchild research as correlates of adjustment to the role. Seven of these have been selected as independent variables for this research. These include: a) age of stepmother at the time of the remarriage (Duberman, 1975); b) adolescent's time in the current stepfamily (Papernow, 1980); c) adolescent's perception of family coping patterns (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1981); d) self esteem of stepmother (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978); e) marital quality (Brand & Clingempeel, 1987); f) frequency of agreement between the stepmother and father on how to raise the stepchild (Messinger, 1976); and g) quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother and sex of the child (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985; Santrok & Sitterle, 1987).

Age of Stepmother at the Time of the Remarriage

Some demographic characteristics of stepparents seem to serve as resources in mediating the quality of stepfamily relationships (Clingempeel, Brand, & Segal, 1987). The age of the stepmother at the time of the remarriage is a
potentially important variable.

Duberman (1975) found that younger stepmothers had less difficulty in adjusting to stepchildren than did older stepmothers. It may well be that younger stepmothers adjust better because they are more flexible in role taking. Less experienced in parenting, they may also be more open-minded in their expectational set concerning the stepmother role. Being younger they may also relate to their adolescent stepchild as a "friend," a role probably more compatible with the teenager's preferences, particularly in the initial stages of relationship formation. In addition, young stepmothers may have their own children they are busily parenting. The demands of parenting a young child may, of necessity, give the adolescent more freedom from potentially excessive stepparenting in the critical early stages of the adolescent-stepparent relationship, thus lessening role strain.

Older stepmothers, on the other hand, may have more set rules of how children "should" behave since they may have already parented their own children. Thus, older stepmothers may become overinvolved and/or inappropriately involved in "parenting" their stepchildren, even when the message is clear this is not the role the adolescent wishes her to assume.

This discussion might suggest that it is not the age of the stepmother per se that influences the quality of the
stepmother-adolescent relationship, but rather her previous and current parental responsibilities. It could also be argued that age indicates a summary of one's life events and therefore, the content of many of these events such as education, marital history, etc., would all be related to the quality of the relationship being reviewed. For purposes of simplicity in this research, which in part, is examining developmental characteristics of the stepmothers, the chronological age factor remains important.

Adolescent's Time in the Current Stepfamily

Time in the current stepfamily for the adolescent appears to be an important resource to stepfamily satisfaction. The needs that adults have to form an immediate close-knit or intimate stepfamily is often the cause of much family distress and role strain for children. One of the popular beliefs held by many adults that makes for greater difficulty and contributes to role strain is the belief that stepchildren and stepparents will care for and/or love one another immediately. Expectations of "instant love" are usually unrealistic and self-defeating (Quick & Quick, 1986). Remarried parents may push too hard in this direction, thus contributing to additional role strain for the child. Over time these newly formed relationships can develop gradually and naturally with their own unique characteristics and features without forcing the expression of trust, love and affection. This process does
however take time, often a matter of years (Papernow, 1984).

Adolescent's Perception of Family Coping Patterns

In stepfamilies people from different backgrounds suddenly find themselves living together in the intimacy of a new family. Coping mechanisms are less effective because there is no time for "anticipatory socialization" as a means of preparing for stressful times. When faced with a variety of stressors and/or changes, families with a greater ability to modify habits and roles to adapt to new situations stand a better chance of avoiding or minimizing stress. It is reasonable to expect that adolescents in families utilizing more effective or adaptive coping patterns and problem-solving strategies may experience less role strain and adapt to the addition of a new stepparent more positively (Hetherington, 1989; McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1981).

Self-Esteem of Stepmother

A critical psychological resource for managing stressors and strains is self-esteem, the positiveness of one's attitude toward one's self (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Therefore it is suggested that a more positive sense of self for the stepmother may also provide her with the confidence to better meet the challenges of this new family lifestyle and perform more effectively her role as stepparent. Higher self esteem for adults has been shown to be related to job satisfaction (Simpson & Simpson, 1959), marital satisfaction (Stinnett & Walters, 1977), and effective coping strategies
(Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). In general evidence suggests that individuals with high self esteem are more capable and competent (Burns, 1979), more aware of and sensitive to others (Walster & Walster, 1978), which enables them to be more responsive to those with whom they interact. One recent study found a strong positive correlation between parental self-esteem and parent-child communication (Small, 1988).

**Marital Quality**

Rare in the stepfamily literature are studies of the effects of the qualitative dimension of the remarried couples relationship on the stepmother-stepchild relationship. Custodial parents and new stepparents must establish a healthy, caring spousal relationship between themselves before they can move on to the more complicated issue of the parent-adolescent relationship (Goetting, 1983). Studies of stepfathers indicate that those who characterized their marital relationship as satisfying, also behaved toward their stepchildren more positively. For the stepmother, a quality marriage may also serve as a support system for the parent role and thus lessen some of the accompanying role strain associated with that role.

**Frequency of Agreement Between the Stepmother and the Father on How to Raise the Stepchild**

Although our society may expect that stepparents love their stepchildren and take on at least some aspect of the
parental role, stepparents may also be blocked from exercising disciplinary and control privileges, generating role ambiguity, role conflict, and role strain (Messinger, 1976). Given these ambiguous expectations, it is not surprising that stepfamilies report child rearing issues as the most frequent problem area (Duberman, 1975; Messinger, 1976). Frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the stepchild might well serve as a resource to reduce the amount of role strain associated with assuming the role of stepparent.

The Quality of the Child's Relationship With the Non-Residential Mother and Sex of the Child

The quality of the nonresidential mother-child relationship may mediate the quality of the relationships within the stepfamily household. A quality relationship with the nonresidential mother could reduce children's fears that the stepmother is a parent replacement, resulting in less role strain and a more positive stepmother-stepchild relationship. A quality childcare role by the non-residential mother might also result in the stepmother developing more of a "friend" relationship with the child, thus further reducing role strain for the stepmother and stepchild. However, there do appear to be some sex differences here. For example, Brand and Clingempeel (1987) found for girls more frequent visits with the nonresidential mother was associated with lower quality
stepmother-stepdaughter relationships, however this same relationship was found non-significant for boys in stepmother families. Research is needed, however, that goes beyond the "frequency of visitation" and examines the qualitative dimensions of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother and how that relationship further influences the quality of the stepmother-stepchild relationship according to the sex of the child.

**Relationship Quality and Parent Adolescent Communication: The Dependent Variable**

Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson (1967) contend that relationships may be defined by communication. Moreover, from a symbolic interaction framework, Goffman (1959) viewed communication as central to the quality of all human interactions. Therefore, it is possible to examine the quality of a parent-child relationship in terms of parent-adolescent communication or more specifically, in terms of the adolescent's and stepmother's joint evaluation of the communication that exists between them. If there is a feeling of freedom to exchange ideas, information, and concerns, the communication or the relationship may be characterized as "open" (Barnes & Olson, 1982). However, if there is a sense of reluctance in sharing ideas and feelings then the relationship may be considered problematic (Barnes & Olson, 1982). The Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (Barnes & Olson, 1982), which measures aspects of family
communication as experienced by the stepmother and adolescent child, describing the amount of openness, problems or barriers to communication and the degree to which people are selective in their discussions with other family members will be used to measure the dependent variable, quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The scores of the stepmothers and the adolescents will be summed to create a joint evaluation of communication.

**Hypotheses**

This study was designed to investigate social and psychological factors related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship as perceived by both the stepmother and the adolescent stepchild. The general research question being examined was that the quality of this relationship is influenced by demographic and personality characteristics of family members, intrahousehold relationship variables and relationships with persons living outside the home.

Specifically it was hypothesized that:

1. The **age of the stepmother at the time of remarriage** is negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

2. **Length of time in the current stepfamily** for the adolescent is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.
Family coping patterns as perceived by the adolescent when measured by three subscales selected from the Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scale (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1981), are related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship in the following manner:

a. **Family passivity** is negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

b. **Reframing family problems** is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

c. **Acquiring social support** is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

Self-esteem of the stepmother, as measured by the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

Marital quality, for the stepmother, as measured by the Sabatelli (1984) Marital Comparison Level Index is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

The frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the child as perceived by the stepmother, is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.
7. The interaction effect between the sex of the adolescent and the quality of the adolescent's relationship with the non-residential mother:
a. is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship for males,
b. and negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship for females.

Assumptions
1. The role of stepmother is significant to the psycho-social development of the adolescent.
2. The quality of family functioning and well-being affects the adolescent's continued growth and development.
3. The transition from a two-parent to a single parent home to a stepfamily home is stressful for children.
4. Living in a stepfamily with an adolescent child or children is a stressful situation for a stepmother.
5. The quality of the stepmother role is important to the stepmother.
6. The quality of the relationship between the stepmother and the adolescent is also important to both.

Definition of Terms
Stepfamily: A family in which one or both of the adults have children from a previous marriage.
Stepmother: The spouse of one's biological or adoptive father by a subsequent marriage.
Adolescent: A child between and including the ages of 12 and 18.

Stepchild: A child brought into a remarriage who is biologically or adoptively linked to one of the parents (in this study the father) but does not have such a link to that adult's spouse (in this study the stepmother).

Quality of Parent-Child Relationship: As defined and measured by The Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (Barnes & Olson, 1982), which measures aspects of family communication as experienced by the stepmother and adolescent child, describing the amount of openness, problems or barriers to communication and the degree to which people are selective in their discussions with other family members. In this study the scores of the stepmothers and the adolescents will be summed to create a joint evaluation of communication.

Age of Stepmother at the Time of the Remarriage: Self-reported chronological age.

Adolescent's Time in the Current Stepfamily: Self-reported number of years.

Stepmother's Self-esteem: Defined and measured by the Rosenberg (1965) Self-esteem Scale used to measure the self-acceptance aspect of self-esteem. The scale consists of ten items revolving around liking and/or
approving of oneself.

Adolescent's Perceived Family Coping Patterns: Defined and measured by selected subscales of the Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) (McCubbin, Olson, & Larsen, 1981) created to identify effective problem solving and behavioral strategies utilized by families in difficult or problematic situations.

Family Passivity: Inactive or passive behaviors a family might employ such as avoidance responses based on a lack of confidence in one's ability to alter the outcome.

Reframing Family Problems: The family's capability to redefine stressful events in order to make them more manageable.

Acquiring Social Support: A family's ability to engage in acquiring support from relatives, friends, neighbors and extended family.

Marital Quality: As defined and measured by the Marital Comparison Level Index (MCLI) Sabatelli (1984), designed to assess the individual's current perceptions of the marriage in comparison with what he/she expected of that relationship.

Frequency of Agreement Between the Stepmother and the Father on How to Raise the Stepchild: Self-reported by the stepmother, using a five-item rating scale.
The Quality of the Relationship Between the Adolescent and the Non-Residential Mother: Self-reported by the adolescent, as measured by a five-item rating scale.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter two reviews the current literature pertaining to the present study of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. It is divided into five sections: (a) factors related to the quality of the mother-child relationship in adolescence; (b) stepfamily characteristics—stressors and myths; (c) research on stepmothers; (d) adolescents in stepfamilies; and (e) the state of the current research on stepfamilies.

Factors Related to the Quality of the Mother-Child Relationship in Adolescence

Traditionally family relationships during adolescence have involved certain parental functions and roles including: socializing agent, disciplinarian, and contributor to values and attitudes formation (Newman & Newman, 1986). Despite the recent trend toward more egalitarian roles in parenting, it appears that mothers still tend to be the primary caretaker of both children and adolescents. They are more involved in socialization of their adolescents and generally take greater responsibility
for the parenting role than do fathers (Small, 1988).

As children approach adolescence, "a host of individual and contextual changes occur" (Belsky, Lerner, & Spanier, 1984, p. 76). Changes associated with this developmental period, such as physical alterations accompanying puberty and the desire to spend more time with peers and less with family, alter the relationships of family members.

Identity Development and Parent-Child Relationships

The major developmental task for adolescents is the formation of a separate identity, involving a separation of self from family (Erikson, 1963). Considerable evidence suggests that the nature of an adolescent's interactions with his or her parents, as well as with other people in their social context, influences identity development. Several studies suggest that positive personal and interpersonal characteristics of parents can be transmitted to their children to facilitate a healthy identity development.

Waterman and Waterman (1971) conducted a longitudinal study of college freshman over a one year period assessing identity development and family independence. Their results showed that young people who possessed stable identity achievement status or a separate definition of self from family and friends during this period of time scored significantly higher on a measure of family independence than did students who fluctuated in and out of achievement
status. Moreover, adolescents high in identity status tended to live in families where they experienced less parental restrictiveness and more positive parent-child communication than adolescents low in identity status.

In addition, LaVoie (1976) examined identity formation among high school students and found that male students high in identity reported less control by their mothers than did males low in identity development. Moreover, LaVoie found that high identity females also reported less maternal restrictiveness and greater freedom to discuss problems with their mothers than did low identity females.

Adolescent achievement of independence is clearly associated with the parent's ability to involve the child in decision making, to discuss rules and limits, and to encourage independent judgement rather than conformity to requests (Newman & Newman, 1986). A developmentally appropriate parenting strategy, therefore, for a mother with an adolescent might include "trusting her adolescent with a high degree of autonomy apart from a great deal of external control" (Belsky et al., 1984, p. 90).

Parental Self-Esteem and Parent-Child Interaction

In an attempt to ascertain the consequences of parental self-esteem on adolescent development, Small (1988) examined selected aspects of parent-adolescent interaction and adolescent behavior. His findings suggested that mothers with high self-esteem were more likely to engage in positive
parenting and less likely to be concerned about their adolescent's behavior. These same children were less likely to push against parental limits and were more likely to perceive the mother as being less controlling. Furthermore, this group of adolescents were more likely to behave in ways that were considered independent and responsible. Small further points out that his study should be considered exploratory in nature and that additional empirical information is needed to further predict how parents' feelings of self-worth are related to the way they interact with their children.

Montemayor (1982) concurs that mothers who are depressed, irritable, or have low self-esteem tend to have more arguments with their adolescents and tend to have more negative interactions with their children than normal mothers.

Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Relationships with Mothers

Some theorists have argued that parent-adolescent relationships are inevitably and fundamentally stressful, often described as conflictual (Adelson & Doehrman, 1980). Montemayor (1986), in a comprehensive review of parent-child relationships during adolescence, argues that relations between parents and adolescents vary in conflict depending on the family social context, family structure, characteristics of parents and adolescents, and the style of parent-adolescent interaction. From a positive perspective
Montemayor suggests that researchers need to address, "What factors account for the variation in parent-adolescent harmony?" (p. 16).

Studies of mothers who frequently are in conflict with their adolescent show the mothers to be more depressed (Patterson, 1980), and these same mothers report less satisfying marriages (Margolin, 1981) than mothers who are in less conflict with their teenagers. Constant mother-child conflict in families with adolescents may well be related to other family problems and symptomatic of other adolescent problems (Montemayor, 1986).

Montemayor (1986) further explains that family structure may also be a factor related to the quality of parent-adolescent relationships; discord seems greatest in single-parent families, typically headed by a female parent (Dornbusch et al., 1985). There is comparatively less discord in stepfamilies than single-parent families (Amato, 1987; Garbarino, Sebes, & Schellenbach, 1984; Lutz, 1985; Pink & Wampler, 1985; and Santrok, Warshak, Lindbergh, & Meadows, 1982) and even less discord in families with two biological parents.

It is important, however, to note that this review of literature related to adolescent conflict in families is in no way implying that the "ideal" family function is to be conflict free. In fact just the opposite may be true. While parents may agree that the "ideal" relationship with
an adolescent may be one that is conflict free, other researchers agree that a certain amount of conflict is healthy, normal and growth producing. One study found that a reasonable pattern of conflict between girls and their parents on issues related to appearance, friends and ideas showed a progression toward independence. In general, these conflicts took place in an atmosphere these girls perceived as open and reasonable (Douven & Adelson, 1966).

Several adolescent characteristics also are related to the quality of parent-child relationships during adolescence. First, physical maturity appears to be associated with parent-adolescent relationships, with conflicts seeming to decrease after age 15; late maturers experience more conflict post-age 15 than early maturers (Montemayor, 1983). Second, mothers and daughters argue more than mothers and sons. Third, adolescents with a variety of behavior problems tend to experience a high level of conflict with their parents (Montemayor, 1982; 83).

As seems true with parents, adolescent self-esteem also plays a part in parent-child relationships during adolescence. Matheson (1974) found that adolescents with high self-esteem viewed communication with their parents as more positive than did adolescents with low self-esteem. Furthermore, the parents of these same children not only viewed their relationship with their adolescent in a more positive light, but also rated their spouses as more
facilitative and their marriages as more positive than did parents of adolescents with low self-esteem. Thus, communication quality among all family members appears to be related to adolescents' feelings of self-worth (Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams, 1987).

Montemayor (1986) suggests that variation in parent-adolescent conflict is further affected by the family's ability to communicate and problem solve, the management techniques employed by the parents, and the exchange of positive and negative behaviors. He summarizes the current findings by stating that supportive families of adolescents: (a) tend to spend more time together, and have some notion of where the children are when they are not in the home; (b) have more positive than negative interactions, tend not to respond to negative interactions with additional negative responses, and, furthermore, use more rewards than punishment in their discipline strategies; and (c) attempt to solve problems before they evolve into serious difficulties.

This extensive review by Montemayor (1986) suggests that parent-adolescent relationships in natural families are affected by individual and family variables. It is the intent of this research to examine whether some of these same multi-dimensional factors also affect relationship quality in stepmother-adolescent dyads.
**Stepfamily Characteristics—Stressors and Myths**

Much of what we know about stepfamilies is based on clinical data lacking a strong theoretical base. Moreover, while research studies regarding stepfamily living have flourished since 1980, the body of empirical literature is still quite slim, disjointed, and filled with contradictory results. The information available used to characterize the stepfamily milieu continues to be gathered from clinical reports and impressions. These reports do indicate that these families experience a significant amount of strain due to the complexity of family life -- ties to the past and present family members, as well as a lack of clear institutional guidelines on how to fulfill the role of stepparent (Cherlin, 1978). Based on these reports, however, certain characteristics of stepfamilies do emerge and clearly mark some fundamental ways those units differ from their intact nuclear counterparts. Some examples include: a) the nonbiological character of the parent-child relationship in remarried families (Cherlin, 1978; Kompara, 1980); the complexity of relationships that develop after a remarriage (Cherlin, 1978; Clingempeel & Brand, 1985; Johnson, 1980; Poppen & White, 1980); dealing with losses and gains (Chilman, 1982; Fishman, 1983); and the often unclear, unrealistic expectations for the role of stepparent and child (Cherlin, 1978; Johnson, 1980; Poppen & White, 1980; Visher & Visher, 1972). The effects of these
characteristics can result in further problems concerning discipline, divided loyalties, parents arguing over stepchildren, and arguments over the allocation of resources—time, money and economic constraints (Fishman, 1983; Johnson, 1980; Poppen & White, 1980).

In addition, Kompara (1980) highlighted the following specific socialization difficulties present in the adjustment process. These include: children thrown into an intimate relationship for which they are not ready, difficulty adjusting to the sexual relationship of their natural parent with another person, attempts to deal with children who have already been socialized by another set of parents, problems of prior marital experience on new family, grandparents who interfere, non-custodial parents who attempt to turn children against the stepparent, the difficult stepmother role, age of stepchildren, relationship stepchild maintains with the natural parent, adjusting to habits and personalities, and gaining acceptance of the children.

Visher and Visher (1978), cite the following myths surrounding the dynamics of stepfamily living: stepfamilies are nuclear families, death of a spouse makes stepparenting easier, stepchildren are easier when not living in the home, and love happens instantly.

They contend that when society as a whole, and members of the helping professions in
particular, are able to understand and support stepparents in their struggle to cope with complicated and emotionally-charged stepfamily situations, stepparents will be better able to use their strengths, and more new families may successfully reconstitute and blend (Visher & Visher, 1978, p. 261).

Lastly, Chilman (1983), in an attempt to summarize some of the central themes of problems and adjustments experienced by children, their parents and their stepparents in blended families, highlights the following factors: discipline disagreements, open communication between the marital pair and the children, shifts or deficits in physical space, a close, positive relationship within the marital dyad, and children who become the battlegrounds for earlier family wars of both their biological parents and stepparents.

It must be re-emphasized, however, that many of these observations are anecdotal in nature and may not truly represent the general stepfamily population. Preliminary data from a nationally representative survey of children between the ages of 11 and 16 indicates that most stepfamilies report high levels of parental satisfaction, low levels of intrafamily conflict, and relatively harmonious relations between stepparents and their children (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Furstenburg &
Nord, 1985).

The national data do suggest that clinically based studies may exaggerate—at least to some extent—the number of problems experienced by stepfamilies. Most stepfamilies appear to negotiate successfully the challenges of their complex and normatively ambiguous family roles and situations (Bernard, 1956; Duberman, 1973; Santrok, Warshak, Lindbergh, & Meadows, 1982; Zill & Peterson, 1986).

Nevertheless, there is a definite need to develop creative ways to integrate and institutionalize stepfamilies into the mainstream of society. Part of the solution is to encourage realistic role expectations and to build appropriate coping skills. For example, given stepfamilies' more far-reaching and complex relationships, less clearly defined boundaries, and fewer cultural norms for guiding family roles, their quality of family functioning may be more dependent on communication skills and other patterns of coping than the quality of family functioning in intact families ( Peek, Bell, Waldren, & Sorrell, 1988). It is the purpose of this study to examine possible resources and skills related to the quality of one particular stepfamily relationship, that of the stepmother-adolescent child.

Research on Stepmothers

The few studies (see Table 1) focusing on stepmother families, portray a consistent picture. There is more confusion and problematic interaction among family members
<table>
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<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample</th>
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<th>Major Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Duberman (1973)</td>
<td>88 random sample of parents who had remarried from 1965-1968, drawn from county marriage records (included both stepmother and stepfather families)</td>
<td>interviews, researcher ratings</td>
<td>1) relationships between SM and children were generally positive; 2) younger SM more likely to have excellent relations with their stepchildren than older SM.</td>
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<td>Nadler (1976)</td>
<td>24 part-time stepmothers, 24 full-time stepmothers, 24 biological mothers, 72 total families (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>questionnaire</td>
<td>1) both types SM indicated more depressed, angry than biological mothers; 2) part-time SM less involved in family interactions, more conflict with family, parent role, etc.; 3) full-time SM with older children--more conflict over child-rearing, less marital satisfaction than biological mothers with older children; 4) part-time SM with older children--more conflict with child than biological mothers with older children.</td>
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<td>Santrok, Warshak &amp; Elliot (1982)</td>
<td>64 total families (stepmother, nuclear, single-parent) 12 stepmother families (stepchildren ages 6-11) and informants. (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>observations</td>
<td>1) boys showed less competent social behavior in SM families than girls in SM families or boys in nuclear families; 2) no differences for stepdaughters.</td>
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<td>Brown (1984)</td>
<td>51 stepmothers (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>questionnaire interview</td>
<td>1) most difficult aspects of stepmothering were: relating to the biological mother of one's stepchildren, being a stepmother without being a biological mother, discipline of children, and handling &quot;unacceptable&quot; feelings toward stepchildren.</td>
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<td>Clingempeel, Brand &amp; Ievoli (1984)</td>
<td>16 stepmother families, 16 stepfather families, 32 children ages 9-12 (gathered from marriage license records, newspaper ads)</td>
<td>observation questionnaire</td>
<td>1) stepparent-stepdaughter relationships in both SM and stepfather families were more problematic than stepparent-stepson relationships.</td>
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Table 1 (Continued)

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<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample Description</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Furstenburg &amp; Nord (1985)</td>
<td>1208 nationally represented sample of adults and children stepfather and stepmother families</td>
<td>Telephone interview</td>
<td>1) children have little contact with nonresidential parent, children use a different scale to evaluate outside parent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand &amp; Clingempeel (1987)</td>
<td>40 stepfather families, 22 stepmother families, 62 children ages 9-12 (recruited from marriage license records in Philadelphia, PA)</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>1) in SM families, higher marital quality was associated with more positive stepmother-stepson relationships and better stepson adjustment, but less positive stepmother-stepdaughter relationships and poorer stepdaughter adjustment.</td>
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<td>Santrok &amp; Sitterle (1987)</td>
<td>69 children ages 7-11 and their families, 26 children in stepfather families, 25 children in intact families (recruited* from the Dallas-Fort Worth area from friends, colleagues, students, churches, newspaper articles, radio and television advertisements)</td>
<td>Questionnaire, Observation</td>
<td>1) group of SM felt less involved with their stepchildren compared to mothers from intact families; 2) children seem to adjust better in a SM family when only the remarried father had children from his previous marriage, when a new child was not produced by the remarried father and the stepmother, when there were fewer children and when the annual income was reasonably high.</td>
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<td>Sauer &amp; Fine (1988)</td>
<td>130 college students from intact families, 47 students from stepfamilies, 16 students from stepmother families (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>1) now adult children from stepfamilies perceived their relationships with their noncustodial biological mothers and stepmothers less positively than now adult children from intact families perceived their relationships with their biological mothers.</td>
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* Stepmother families most difficult to find.
in stepmother families compared to intact, biological mother families or stepfather families (Clingempeel, Brand & Ievoli, 1984; Clingempeel & Segal, 1987; Duberman, 1973; and Santrok, Warshak, & Elliot, 1982).

**Parent-Child Relationships and Role-Satisfaction for Stepmothers.**

Nadler, 1976, has provided some insight into the role of stepmother by comparing part-time and full-time stepmothers with a matched set of biological mothers. Both types of stepmothers reported more depression and anger regarding family relationships than did biological mothers. Part-time stepmothers reported less positive involvement in family interactions and more conflict regarding family life, their parent role, financial matters and relationships with relatives and others in the community than did biological mothers. Full-time stepmothers with older stepchildren reported having greater conflict with their spouse over child rearing and discipline and less marital satisfaction than biological mothers with older children. Part-time stepmothers with older children reported more conflict between themselves and the stepchild than did biological mothers with older children.

Similarly, Santrok and Sitterle (1987), when examining parent-child relationships in stepfather, stepmother and intact family structures, found that although this group of stepmothers was attempting to establish a good relationship
with their stepchildren, they felt they were less involved with their stepchildren compared to mothers from intact families or stepfathers. Even though this group reported sharing many of the parental and child-rearing responsibilities and persistently trying to involve themselves with the stepchildren, the children continued to view the stepmother as somewhat detached, unsupportive and uninvolved in their lives. Consequently, stepmothers began to agree with these conclusions regarding their present role in the family.

Reasons given for the child's negative view of their stepmother and their stepmother's own negative view of their relationship with their stepchildren included: (a) the stepmother's presence threatens the child's attachment to his/her noncustodial mother, (b) the remarriage may have ended the child's fantasy regarding the reconciliation of the biological parents and, furthermore it may be a constant reminder of the death of that dream, and (c) it may be that the child is projecting the anger, hurt and disappointment felt toward the non-residential mother and even the father, onto the stepmother, (d) the continued lack of social support and recognition for this type of family in our society, (e) and finally, the lack of definition or social affirmation for the role of stepmother within the family.

Utilizing a random sample of 88 parents, drawn from county marriage records, who had remarried from 1965-1968,
Duberman (1973) also found that stepmothers found less satisfaction in their role than did stepfathers. While, in general, relationships between stepparents and children were generally positive, the above differences did exist with regards to stepfathers' and stepmothers' scores on a family integration measure.

Further insight into the role of stepmother and how this might potentially impact the quality of the parent-child relationship in stepfamilies is provided by Brown (1984). Fifty-one volunteer stepmothers were interviewed in a nonclinical exploratory study addressing the questions: What satisfactions and strains do women experience as they assume this role; and what methods have they developed to become "effective" stepmothers?

This study revealed that indeed the cruel stepmother image had a negative influence on the participants self concepts and in their behavior toward their stepchildren. The most difficult aspects of stepmothering identified were: (a) relating to the biological mother of one's stepchildren; (b) being a stepmother without being a biological mother; (c) dealing with negative feelings toward stepchildren; and (d) handling discipline. While all the participants acknowledged the difficulties associated with the stepmother role, 72% described the role as primarily satisfying rather than dissatisfying. The most satisfying aspects of stepmothering as described by this group included: (a)
experiencing the rewards of mothering; (b) family relationships; (c) creation of a family unit; (d) having a larger family; and (e) limited parental responsibilities associated with the stepparent role.

Perceptions of parent-child relationships in stepfamilies compared to relationships in intact families, as reported by now adult college students (Sauer & Fine, 1988) further support the notion that children also view their relationships with their stepmothers more negatively. This finding suggests that the remarriage of a custodial father and the entrance of a stepmother creates a new role in the family and that this new addition to the family may be viewed by the children as a threat and an intrusion to the family roles that have already been established. This is especially true for children who continue to remain very close to the noncustodial parent (Lutz, 1983).


Until recently, few studies have systematically compared boys and girls living in stepmother and stepfather families using the multi-method, mutli-source approach advocated by Esses and Campbell (1984). Studies examining children's perceptions of that relationship produced interesting and yet conflicting results when examining gender of the child as a factor in determining stepparent-stepchild relationship quality in stepfamilies. Santrok,
Warshak, & Elliott (1982) found that among children living with custodial fathers, the father's remarriage appeared to produce a positive effect for his daughter but a negative effect for his son. For a boy who seems to be getting along well in a single-parent, father-custody family, the entrance of a stepmother may produce conflict. On the other hand, the arrival of a stepmother may lead to more positive relationships for the father-daughter custodial relationship. She now has a same sex parent who may better understand her needs and with whom she can identify.

Similarly, Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli (1984) conducted an investigation of the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship in stepmother and stepfather families. The major finding here was that the stepmother's relationship with her stepdaughter was more negative and detached than the stepmother's relationship with her stepson, an opposite finding from the Santrok et al. (1982) study. One explanation for this conflicting finding may stem from the fact that fathers seldom obtain custody of their children, especially girls, and when they do, it may indicate the father-daughter relationship is unusually close. "Consequently the remarriage of a father and the entry of a stepmother into a household may be perceived by girls as a major threat to the father-daughter relationship" (Clingempeel et al., 1984, p. 472).
The Clingempeel et al. research also found frequent visits with the biological mother were associated with a lower quality stepmother-stepdaughter relationships; however, such frequent visits did not significantly affect the quality of the relationship with the stepson. Furstenberg and Nord (1985) found similar results in their study of child-rearing after a divorce, suggesting that "regular contact with the biological mother creates tensions in the stepfamily and complicates the children's relations with their stepmother" (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987, p. 103).

Quality of the Stepmother's Remarriage and the Parent-Child Relationship.

Only one study examining the relationship between the stepmother's perceived marital quality and the stepparent-stepchild relationship exists. In contrast to intact family marriages, in stepmother families Brand and Clingempeel (1987) found that marital quality differentially affected male and female stepchildren. For stepdaughters, more positive marital relationships were associated with less positive stepmother-stepdaughter relationships and lower psychological adjustment. For stepmother families with boys, more positive marital relationships were associated with more positive stepmother-stepson relationships and better psychological adjustment. It may be that stepmother families with girls in this sample are a unique group having
to deal with such issues as: (a) perceived losses associated with the hope of a parental reconciliation and the re-establishment of a close mother-daughter relationship; (b) loyalty conflicts for the stepdaughter; and (c) and the fear of also "losing" the custodial father to his new spouse. Boys, on the other hand, may view higher marital quality as an additional support rather than detracting from their parent-child relationship. These findings do suggest that relations between marital quality and stepmother dyads depend in part upon the sex of the child.

Demographic characteristics are also related to more positive parent-child relationships in stepmother families. For example, Santrok and Sitterle (1987) found that children seemed to adjust better in stepmother families where the stepmother had no children of her own, when the stepmother and remarried father had no children of their own, when there were fewer children in the family, and when the annual income was high.

The research on stepmothers is just beginning to examine the factors that directly and indirectly moderate adjustment and parent-child relationship quality in stepfamilies. While it seems logical to assume that variables such as age of the stepmother, psychological resources such as self-esteem of the stepmother, marital satisfaction and frequency of agreement with the father on how to discipline the child would all impact functioning of
the role of stepmother, almost no research has considered
the influences of such factors.

Adolescents in Stepfamilies

Adolescence has typically been described as a time of
inherent transition and developmental change. Moreover, the
formation of a stepfamily also produces change and
adjustments that may pose added stress to the well-being of
its members. Thus the adolescent in a stepfamily, may well
pose special risks not typically found in traditional
nuclear families.

Research Related to Adolescent Adjustment in Stepfamilies:
An Overview.

Despite a good deal of discussion about stepfamilies,
there are few substantive studies with regard to how
adolescents adjust within them (see Table 2). A small body
of research suggests that adolescents in stepfamilies have
no more significant adjustments to make than adolescents in
nuclear families. Bernard (1956), in a classic study of
remarried families, examined the relationship between a
parents' remarriage and college students' attitudes toward
stability, self-sufficiency, dominance, and attitudes toward
remarriage. This nonprobability sample of stepchildren
reported positive attitudes toward parents who had
remarried. Nye (1957) questioned 789 students, grades 9-12,
and found no differences in adjustment to school, delinquent
companions and further reported stepchildren displayed
<table>
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<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample Size &amp; Characteristics</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bernard (1956)</td>
<td>2,009 total college students 112 college students from SM and SF families (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>questionnaires interviews with stepchildren and informants</td>
<td>1) stepchildren had positive attitudes toward parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nye (1957)</td>
<td>780 students grades 9-12 (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>questionnaire developed by researcher</td>
<td>1) no differences in adjustment to school, church attendance, delinquent companions; 2) stepchildren better adjusted to parents, had fewer psychosomatic complaints, less delinquent behavior than children from unbroken, unhappy families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowerman &amp; Irish (1962)</td>
<td>29,000 total students grades 7-12 2,145 stepchildren from both SF and SM families (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>questionnaire</td>
<td>1) stepchildren were not as close to parents as nuclear family children; 2) stepchildren experienced more rejection and discrimination; 3) stepmothers fared worse than stepfathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burchinal (1964)</td>
<td>1,566 total students grades 7 &amp; 11 210 from both SF and SM families (nonprobability sample: junior and senior high school students from one community)</td>
<td>questionnaire (including Minnesota Test of Personality)</td>
<td>1) no difference in personality characteristics, grades, school and community activities, number of friends, school attitudes, days absent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenberg (1965)</td>
<td>5,024 total students grades 11 &amp; 12 262 stepchildren from SM &amp; SF families (random selection of 10 public high schools in New York state)</td>
<td>questionnaire (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale)</td>
<td>1) stepchildren had lower self-esteem and more psychosomatic complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Zurcher, MacAdams &amp; Curtis (1975)</td>
<td>2,869 total adults and 10th Graders 122 from SF families (secondary analysis of a data set)</td>
<td>questionnaire</td>
<td>1) no differences between those who had lived in a stepfather family and nuclear family persons on selected psychological characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Sample Description</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oshman &amp; Manosevitz</td>
<td>125 total volunteer college students, 39 from SF families (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>Questionnaire (Ego-Identity Scale)</td>
<td>1) no difference on psychosocial functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1976)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lutz (1983)</td>
<td>103 total stepchildren, 12-18 years of age from SF and SM families (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>1) issues of divided loyalty and discipline were most stressful</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) stepfamily life may not be as stressful as literature suggests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink &amp; Wampler (1985)</td>
<td>56 total families with adolescents aged 12-18, 28 SF families (nonprobability sample)</td>
<td>Questionnaire (FACES, PAC, others)</td>
<td>1) stepfamilies had lower cohesion, adaptability regard, unconditionality;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2) stepfathers reported less positive and more negative communication than did biological fathers;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) no difference in adolescents or ratings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clingempeel &amp; Segal</td>
<td>60 total stepfamilies, 40 SF families, 20 SM families (half of each structural type had a male and half had a female 9-12 year old target child); Sample gathered from marriage license and ads.</td>
<td>Questionnaire (Ego-Identity Scale)</td>
<td>1) few significant findings for those with stepfathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1986)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) for girls with stepmothers, less frequent visits with mother and longer time in stepfamily were related to positive relations with stepmother.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
better adjustment to parents, had fewer psychosomatic complaints, and less delinquent behavior than children from unbroken, unhappy families. Wilson, Zurcher, McAdams, and Curtis (1975) attempted to examine the impact of living in a stepfather family upon the stepchildren. Secondary analysis of questionnaire data from the General Social Survey and the University of Michigan Youth in Transition Survey revealed that there were no substantial differences between tenth grade students who had experienced stepfather families and those who had lived in their natural-parent family on selected social-psychological characteristics such as delinquency, general interpersonal relationships, interpersonal relationships regarding marriage and the family and personal evaluations. The authors concluded that just as in a natural parent family, children in stepfather families can experience a combination of positive, negative or mixed family relationships.

In 1976, Oshman and Manosevitz studied family structure and the children's psychosocial functioning using a nonprobability sample of 125 college students. These students reported no significant difference in psychosocial functioning. Bohannon and Yahraes (1979) further studied the relationship between family structure and quality of family relations and school behavior and grades. No differences were found in school behavior, friends, and many behavioral characteristics.
Likewise, Burchinal (1964) investigated the possible effects of divorce and remarriage upon the behavior of adolescent children in grades seven and eleven. The overall conclusion of this study was that the data did not show detrimental effects of divorce and remarriage upon children and "there is no question...family dissolution and, for some families, reconstitution, was not the overwhelming influential factor in the children's lives that many have thought it to be" (P. 50).

Some of the older literature examining the adjustment of adolescents in stepfamilies tends to be more problematic due to the fact that stepfamilies often were compared with intact families, finding that members of stepfamilies experience greater stress (Bowerman & Irish, 1962). They found that steprelationships proved more likely to have stress, ambivalence and low cohesiveness than did relationship in nuclear family settings.

In an investigation of what adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 perceived to be the most stressful aspects of stepfamily living, Lutz (1983) found that "issues pertaining to divided loyalties and discipline" (p. 367) were reported as the most stressful to this group of young people.

One study reported that adolescents in stepfamilies have lower self-esteem and mental health and more psychosomatic complaints than adolescents in intact families
(Rosenberg, 1965). More recently, Pink and Wampler (1985) explored family functioning and the quality of stepfather-adolescent relationship; hypothesizing lower family cohesion and adaptability and lower quality in the male parent-adolescent relationship in stepfamilies than in intact families. Stepfamilies reported their families as less cohesive and less adaptable than intact families. Members of the stepfamilies also reported lower regard of the stepfather towards the adolescent and lower regard and unconditionality of the adolescent towards the stepfather.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research that finds poorer stepfamily adjustments in some but not all areas of family functioning. One unique aspect of this research was the multi-measures of three family systems—the marital relationship, the father/stepfather-adolescent relationship, and whole family functioning.

**Factors Related to Adolescent Adjustment in Stepfamilies.**

**Time in the remarriage.** Several studies have found a positive relationship between the length of time in the remarriage and adolescent adjustment (Clingempeel & Segal, 1986; Lutz, 1983).

Clingempeel and Segal (1986) hypothesized that the length of time the child had lived in the current stepfamily would mediate both the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship and the social adjustment of the stepchildren.
The stepmother finding revealed that stepmother-stepdaughter relationship and child outcomes were positively related to the total time the biological father and stepmother had lived together. Furthermore, the longer the stepdaughters lived with the stepmother, the more positively they perceived the relationship. The reverse was true for stepfathers.

Similarly Lutz (1983) found a positive relationship between the adolescent's perceived level of stress and the length of time in the stepfamily. Children who lived in stepfamilies less than two years reported greater stress than those who had lived in a stepfamily more than two years. Lutz added that it may be that the family dynamics of the first two years of stepfamily living are complex due to so many adjustments taking place at the same time.

Gender of the adolescent. Until recently, the gender of the adolescent stepchild has been given scant attention by stepfamily researchers. Lutz (1983) reported that female adolescents in stepfamilies experienced higher levels of stress than males. Several studies have looked at gender of the child, aged 9-12 (Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984; Clingempeel, Ievoli, & Brand, 1984) and found that stepdaughters rated lower than stepsons in positive verbal behaviors toward stepparents. They further report that stepparent-stepdaughter relationships in both stepmother and stepfather families were more problematic than stepparent-
stepson relationships. While these findings suggest that the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship may depend in part upon the gender of the child, no studies have looked systematically at adolescents 12-18 years of age and gender of the child to determine if the same relationship differences exist.

**Relationship quality with the non-residential mother.**

No studies have assessed an adolescents' relationship with their non-residential mother and the quality of the relationship with their stepmother. Two studies which have addressed this issue using a different age group of children found that children age 9-12 experiencing a high degree of contact with the non-residential mother, are generally less satisfied with the quality of their family life and in particular experience difficulties with their stepmother (Clingempeel et al., 1984; Furstenburg & Nord, 1985). Gender differences as discussed in a previous section were also found indicating that frequent visits with the biological mother were associated with a lower quality stepmother-stepdaughter relationship; however such frequent visits did not significantly affect the quality of the relationship with the stepson. Studies, however, need to go beyond this "frequency" of visitation and examine the qualitative dimensions of the child's relationship with the non-residential parent and how that further impacts the stepmother-stepchild relationship according to the sex of
the child.

In summary, the research studies on adolescent adjustment in stepfamilies are so few it is difficult to make any educated guess regarding what factors do play a significant role in stepfamily well-being. It is the aim of this study to examine a specific set of resource factors, suggested by the research literature regarding younger children, to determine if these same factors also serve as correlates of adjustment to the stepmother-adolescent relationship in remarried families.

The State of the Current Research on Stepfamilies

Methodologically adequate studies of stepparent-stepchild relationships are virtually nonexistent. Early studies of stepfamilies are characterized by: (a) the use of deficit-comparison models; (b) data gathered from one family member; (c) failure to deal with the complexity of stepfamily variations (i.e., most studies have examined only the divorced woman with children and a previously married stepfather); (d) reluctance to control for or measure salient demographic variables including custody arrangement, age of children and length of time in stepfamily formation as a developmental process (Clingempeel et al., 1984; Esses & Campbell, 1984; Ganong & Coleman, 1984; and Skeen, Robinson, & Flake-Hobson, 1984). Moreover, many of the reports concerning stepfamily relationships consist of clinical data of unknown reliability; other sources of
information are based on surveys or questionnaires that do not include a comparison group.

It is not surprising then that the literature on stepfamilies yields conflicting results. Some researchers have found no differences between stepparent and intact families on measures of attitudes towards remarriage (Bernard, 1956); adjustment of stepparents (Nye, 1957); general interpersonal relationships and quality of family relationships (Wilson, Zurcher, McAdams, & Curtis, 1975; Bohannon & Yahraes, 1979); psychosocial functioning (Oshman & Manosevitz, 1976); psychological well-being (Kellam, Ensminger, & Turner, 1977); self-concept (Parish & Copeland, 1979; Parish & Nunn, 1981; Parish & Parish, 1983) and sources of stress (Lutz, 1983). Other studies reveal a more negative view of step-family relationships (e.g., Bowerman & Irish, 1962; Langner & Michael, 1963).

Robinson (1984) examined data from previous stepfather research attempting to draw attention to inconsistencies in the literature as a result of methodological shortcomings. He suggested using multi-method approaches to stepfather research rather than traditional one-dimensional approaches. Generalizations are frequently made from clinical groups to all non-clinical stepfather families. Other common problems with clinical studies are lack of precise instrumentation, overemphasis on pathology and using small sample sizes. Robinson (1984) suggests that using a more representative
sample may yield more positive outcomes for stepfathers.

In a meta-analysis by Ganong and Coleman (1984) of the effects of remarriage on children, 38 empirical studies were critically examined and discussed. The subjects were the studies examined, the methods were the reviewing procedure, the data were the elements of the studies, and the results were the conclusions drawn. As Ganong and Coleman (1984) point out, the body of research on stepchildren has been characterized by: "use of a deficit-comparison model, limited conceptualizations of family structural variables, a failure to account for the complexity of stepfamilies, small or nonrandom samples, reliance on self-report questionnaires, and the use of data gathered from one family member" (p. 390). It is not surprising that conclusions drawn from this research are limited.

The nuclear family, according to Ganong and Coleman (1984), is usually the standard model; however, since stepfamilies are structurally and dynamically different, some researchers agree that these families should be studied in and of themselves (Visher & Visher, 1979; Fox & Inazu, 1982; Perkins & Kahan, 1979).

Based on their review, Ganong and Coleman (1984) suggest that variables such as death of a parent, age at disruption of parents' marriage, years resided in a single-parent household, age at parental remarriage, years resided in stepfamily, and custody and residence of the
stepchildren need to be included in future studies. Structural variables included in future studies should include: stepchild's birth order, number of siblings, stepparent's age, having a half sibling and living with stepsiblings. Clearly, state Ganong and Coleman (1984), "important family structure factors have been excluded in research on stepchildren" (p. 403). Family process variables, including evaluation of parents, family happiness, perceived conflict, authority structure of the family, and relationships with parents and siblings have also been largely ignored.

Possibly the major weakness is that we have accepted results from small non-random samples and generalized these to the rest of the stepfamily population (Ganong & Coleman, 1984). Finally, as previously mentioned, research on stepchildren has been gathered using survey methods which collect information form one source, usually the child or mother. The reliance on a single data gathering technique may be the major weakness of this body of literature. Few studies have adequately employed a multi-method, multi-source approach. Ganong and Coleman conclude by suggesting a number of possible research areas presently in need of empirical evidence. Clearly, multi-family structure data are needed to produce a more holistic, logically integrated picture of the lives of children growing up in stepfamilies.
Unfortunately, most research to date is heavily focused on problems. This is primarily due to the use of the deficit comparison model perspective frequently used in the study of stepfamilies. This approach suggests that stepfamilies are perceived as deviant from the normal family milieu consisting of biological parents and child. Thus, children in these families are studied from a perspective of "lacking" in some social or psychological area of development due to their living in a non-traditional family form. Furthermore, this concept is perpetuated in clinical settings when therapists continue to compare stepfamily functioning with functioning in intact family forms. Knaub, Hanna and Stinnett (1984) and Coleman, Ganong and Gingrich (1985) point out that research attention is desperately needed in the area of identifying what individual and family resources contribute to the quality of stepfamily relationships. This factor, combined with common negative stepfamily stereotypes, tends to perpetuate negative expectations which may well be self-fulfilling. It is imperative that the resource strengths of the stepfamily structure be better understood and the factors contributing to the adjustment of stepfamilies be more clearly delineated.

Based on a review of the limitations of existing stepfamily research and suggested improvements: (a) studies of adolescents in stepfamilies need to focus more attention
on families where the husband is the custodial or residential parent and the wife is a residential stepmother; (b) survey techniques should ideally involve as many stepfamily members as possible; (c) non-clinical, well-functioning stepfamilies need to be studied; (d) and, there is a need for more systematic studies which examine in the context of carefully defined variables (e.g. in this research: time in the stepfamily, coping patterns within the family as perceived by the adolescent, quality of the adolescent's relationship with the non-residential mother) and the consequences of stepfamily living for adolescents.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study was part of a larger project entitled "Divorce and the Transition to Remarriage: A Study of Stepfamilies with Adolescent Children" under the direction of Dr. Barbara M. Newman and Dr. Patrick C. McKenry, funded by the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (H-839). This particular research was funded by a Dissertation Award, granted by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and the Ohio State Research Foundation (Project #87-1003).\(^1\) This study analyzed the social and psychological factors related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

Sample Selection

The purposive sample in this study consisted of stepmothers and their adolescent stepchildren, custodial and

\(^1\) The present investigator played a key role in the conceptualization and implementation of this research project, including the writing of the funding grants, the development of the questionnaire, the selection and solicitation of the families, and the training of the personnel involved in the collection and coding of this data.
non-custodial, between and including the ages of 12 and 18 living in 50 families residing in large metropolitan areas of Ohio and Kentucky. For inclusion in this study the children must either live with the stepmother and biological or adoptive father or visit regularly (at least once a month). All the adolescent's parents had previously divorced. Both the stepmother and adolescent stepchild were surveyed. Where there was more than one adolescent stepchild in the home, only the eldest eligible stepchild participated in the survey. This non-random sample was selected using a reputational sampling technique drawing on stepfamily support groups and suggestions from friends, colleagues, and participants in the study. It should be noted that while 50 stepmother-adolescent dyads statistically may seem like a small number, this sample took well over a year to identify and to solicit 50 stepmother families who were willing, in the end, to participate. When one considers that only 5-10% of fathers in the general population obtain custody of their children following divorce or that 1-2 years after a divorce a child's regular visitation with their father substantially decreases it becomes apparent that this population of stepmothers limited by the fact that they were gathered from a rather small geographical area, was not a simple one to identify.

To obtain our proposed sample size of 50 stepmothers and their adolescent stepchild, 75 stepmother families were
contacted. Many of these added 25 initially agreed to participate then later declined for such reasons as: a) the child moved back with mother and the stepmother family no longer sees on a regular basis; b) stepmother not willing to participate if whole family had to complete the survey form; c) child declined to participate; d) stepmothers and some fathers feared that discussing the divorce and remarriage in a survey would be too painful; e) too difficult to schedule a time when the stepmother, adolescent and biological or adoptive father\(^2\) could all be at home to complete the questionnaire; f) stepmothers felt the family had too many problems to assess relationship quality at this time; and g) both husband and child would not fill out the questionnaire.

Subjects

The sample consisted of 50 stepmother families with a biological or adoptive father, his oldest adolescent child living with the family or visiting regularly, and a stepmother. The father and stepmother had no natural children between them. Demographic characteristics of the stepmother family members are presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

\(^2\)The original survey procedure required the stepparent, the residential biological parent and the oldest adolescent child living in the home or visiting regularly to complete the questionnaire. For this study, however, only the stepmother and adolescent responses were used.
Data Collection Procedures

A research proposal was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Committee of the Ohio State University (Appendix A). Following approval, the survey materials were pretested on several stepmothers and stepchildren who are not members of the sample in order to identify and correct inappropriate or ambiguous items.

Stepmothers and their oldest adolescent stepchild were mailed a letter of introduction, inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix B). This letter was followed by a telephone call to give families the opportunity to ask further questions and to set up an appointment for a survey packet to be administered. Data were collected by the principal investigator as well as other trained personnel. During the visit in the home, questionnaires were administered by the investigator to both the adolescent and his or her stepmother.

The survey took an average of one hour to complete. Questionnaires were administered, completed, and collected by the investigator during a weekday evening or weekend. Prior to the interview, "Consent to Participate" forms were completed (Appendix C). Family members were requested to keep their written answers confidential. The investigator's presence assured that inappropriate sharing of responses between stepmother and stepchild did not confound the survey results; questionnaires were individually collected upon
completion. Results of the study will be shared with participating families.

**Instrumentation**

The survey used in this study consisted of forced choice and open-ended questionnaire items developed by the principal investigators, Dr. Barbara Newman and Dr. Patrick McKenry, and Donna Quick, research associate. Adolescent and stepparent versions of the questionnaire used in the study were composed of standard demographic and family background questions, as well as standardized instruments designed to determine perceived stepmother-stepchild satisfaction and functioning, specifically measuring the following variables: age of stepmother at the time of the remarriage, adolescent's time in the current stepfamily, adolescent's perception of family coping patterns, self-esteem of stepmother, marital quality, frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the stepchild, and quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother and sex of child.

**Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale**

The purpose of the Parent-Adolescent Communication (PAC) instrument (Barnes & Olson, 1982) is to describe parent-adolescent communications in a variety of family types and to capture some of the diversity of communication experiences in different families. In addition, a comparison of views and perspectives of different family
members can be obtained. One other study of stepfamilies, Pink and Wampler (1985) also used the (PAC) as an indicator of the quality of the stepfather-adolescent relationship.

This scale is intended to assess the views of both adolescents and their parents regarding their perceptions and experiences of communication with each other. Of particular interest are issues such as: extent of openness or freedom to exchange ideas; information and concerns between generations; trust or honesty experienced; and positive or negative perceptions of the interactions.

Analysis of the pilot study revealed three main components which were incorporated into a final instrument which consists of two subscales. The first subscale, Open Family Communication, measures the more positive aspects of parent adolescent communication. It focuses on the free exchange of factual and emotional information, lack of constraint, and degree of understanding within the relationship. The second subscale, Problems in Family Communication, measures the negative aspects of communication such as hesitancy and caution in what to share, as well as negative styles of interaction. In this research the two subscales will be combined to create a total scale score as suggested by Barnes & Olson.

The scale consists of a total of twenty items, ten in each subscale. The Likert type scale allows for one of five responses: strongly agree, moderately agree, neither agree
or disagree, moderately disagree, strongly disagree. These items are summed with a possible range of 20-200.

Cronbach's Alpha was used to compute the internal consistency reliability for the Barnes and Olson study. The alpha reliability is .87 for Open Family Communication, .78 for Problems in Family Communication and .88 for the Total Score. The results indicate that the two subscales and the total scales are very reliable. In studies of parent-child relationships, a key variable might be some aspect of the relationship that can best be understood by taking into account both the parent and the child scores. Or, the constructed variable might reflect a property of the parent-child relationship created from the combined scores of these family members (Miller, 1986). Composite scores commonly used in marriage and family research are constructed in several ways -- one is to simply add up the scores. In this study, the responses of the stepmothers and the adolescent were added together, creating a combined index of communication. Using this combined method, the total Cronbach's alpha was found to be .92.

**Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scale**

The Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scale (F-COPES) (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1981) was created to identify effective problem-solving and behavioral strategies utilized by families in difficult or problematic situations. F-COPES draws upon the coping dimension of the Double ABCX
Model in which the following factors are integrated: pile-up, family resources, and meaning/perception.

The original instrument features thirty coping behavior items which focus on the two levels of interaction outlined in the Double ABCX Model: a) individual to family system, or the ways a family internally handles difficulties and problems between its members, and b) family to social environment or the ways in which the family externally handles the problems or demands that emerge outside its boundaries but affect the family unit and its members. It is hypothesized that families operating with more coping behaviors focused on both levels of interaction will adapt to stressful situations more successfully. Three subscales of the original instrument were used in this study to measure both internal and external family coping patterns as perceived by the adolescent. Subscales were selected which consisted of multiple measures. Two subscales categorized under the heading of Internal Family Coping Patterns were used. The first subscale, Family Passivity, which originally consisted of three questions focusing on family behaviors related to responses used to avoid actively dealing with a problem were selected for use in this study. In the final analysis only two of the original three questions were used, based on the reliability of analysis which indicated the question regarding television watching was not a reliable measure of passivity in this research.
Alpha reliability for family passivity was .62 in this study.

**Reframing Family Problems**, composed of three questions in this study, related to the family's perceptual orientation toward stressful experiences. The initial analysis showed the three questions combined were low in reliability. When the questions were reduced by one the reliability did not change, therefore a reframe question was chosen based on empirical criteria which indicated which question taken alone had the strongest relationship to the dependent variable. The question, "facing the problems 'head on' and trying to get solutions right away" had the highest correlation with the dependent variable, the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

A third subscale, **Acquiring Social Support**, measuring the degree to which the adolescent's family sought support from family and friends was used to measure External Family Coping Patterns. Alpha reliability was .54.

**Self-Esteem Scale**

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg (1965) Self-esteem Scale. This scale measures the self-acceptance aspect of self-esteem and was originally developed for use with high school students. The form is self-administering and includes such items as: "I feel that I have a number of good qualities," "I feel I have much to be proud of," etc. The scale consists of ten items answered on a four-point
scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, although they are scored only as agreement or disagreement. The scale was designed specifically with brevity and ease of administration in mind. The scale has been used in a wide variety of samples. Silber and Tippet (1965) found a test-retest correlation over two weeks of .85. Rosenberg (1965) presents considerable data on the construct validity of this measure. The alpha reliability in this study was found to be .85.

**Marital Comparison Level Index**

The Marital Comparison Level Index (MCLI) (Sabatelli, 1984) was used to measure perceived marital quality. Theoretically grounded in exchange theory, the MCLI was designed to assess the individual's current perceived outcomes in comparison to what he or she expects. Drawing upon past research regarding marital quality and stability, the MCLI contains items that reflect areas of concern for marital partners, allowing respondents to make assessments of their relationship in these areas. From a social exchange perspective, one might assume that the "less the outcomes derived from the relationship meet a person's expectations, the less the rewards derived from the relationship and the more complaints a person has about the relationship" (Sabatelli, 1984, p. 655). The MCLI consists of 36 items that measure equity and commitment within a relationship. Individuals are instructed to indicate on a
seven-point scale how they think their current relationship experiences compare with their expectations. A score of one or two indicates that the current experience falls BELOW the respondents expectation and is thus perceived as much worse than expected. A score of three, four or five indicates that one's current experience EQUALS one's expectation level; a score of six or seven indicates that current experiences fall ABOVE one's expectations and is thus perceived as much better than expected. A single sum score is obtained from these items ranging from 32-224. Sabatelli (1984) reported an internal consistency of .93. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha was also found to be .93. Sabatelli (1984) determined the construct validity of the MCLI using the above mentioned measures of equity and commitment. The correlations of .62 and .65 for husbands and wives respectively were found for equity and .58 and .59 respectively for commitment.

Other information including: a) age of stepmother at the time of the remarriage, b) adolescent's time in the current stepfamily, c) frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the stepchild, and d) quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother and sex of the child were gathered using a questionnaire developed by the investigator.
Data Analysis

The dependent variable for this study was the stepmother's and adolescent's combined scores (summed) on the Parent-Adolescent Communication (PAC) Scale. This creates an index or joint evaluation of stepmother-adolescent communication or relationship quality. The technique of adding the stepmother's and stepchild's scores on the (PAC) was used for several reasons: (a) the purpose of this study was to examine the views of both the stepmother and their adolescent stepchild regarding their joint assessment of the overall quality of this relationship and further examine what factors were related to the quality of that relationship, (b) this additive method includes a range of values and subsequently more indicators of quality in the dependent variable and a greater reliability score of .92, than one alternative method, that of averaging scores which indicated a reliability of .41, (c) and, to establish norms for the total scale score, Barnes and Olson (1982) added the responses of each family member. The independent variables were: age of the stepmother at the time of the remarriage, adolescent's time in the current stepfamily, adolescent's perception of family coping patterns, self-esteem of the stepmother, marital quality, the frequency of agreement on how to raise the stepchild and the quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother and sex of the child.
The relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable was investigated by the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. Further analysis, utilizing a multiple regression procedure, examined the joint effect of the variables found to be significant in the bivariate analysis. The technique of mean substitution was included in the regression process, since the variables were not interdependent and also to maximize the use of the data.

**Limitations**

(1) Generalizations of findings from this study are limited because of the small sample size and the nonprobability and purposive sample selection. Participants in the study met all the established criteria; however, they were a volunteer and not a randomly selected sample. Furthermore, these stepmother families were very difficult to obtain. An elaborate and prolonged search was pursued over a 15-month period. The research team encountered families who declined to participate, indicating that they had experienced a number of difficulties, and feared participation in the study might rekindle these troubles. Therefore, the families who volunteered may be different from those who declined to participate or dropped out. It was also difficult to find families where all three members, natural parent, stepparent, and adolescent child were willing to participate and could all be at home at the same
time to fill out the survey packet.

(2) This study is limited by the fact that it was based exclusively on a self-report, paper and pencil questionnaire. Respondents were asked to recall their feelings and perceptions of past experiences involving a divorce and the formation of a new stepfamily. Many of the responses were recollections rather than immediate responses to the event.

(3) The sample consisted primarily of college-educated, white, upper-middle class stepfamilies. The results thus may not be generalized to non-Caucasian, minority, rural, or non-middle class families.

(4) This study is based entirely on the stepmother's and adolescent's perceptions of their relationship. Different conclusions or perspectives regarding that relationship might be reached by surveying the child's biological father or noncustodial mother or by observing family interactions.

(5) The variables selected for this study were based largely on a review of the current research literature. Other potentially influential variables not examined in this research include: stepmother's prior parenting and/or child care experiences as well as prior parenting experiences as perceived by the adolescent (Clingempeel, Brand & Segal, 1987); the child's and parent's satisfaction with the present custody arrangements and how these decisions were
made (Santrok & Sitterle, 1987); family's attitudes and beliefs about stepfamilies and how true those "beliefs" are in their own family (Ganong & Coleman, 1983); and relationships with stepsiblings (Ihinger-Tallman, 1987).

(6) Limitations of the cross-sectional nature of this study must be considered in interpreting and discussing the results of this research, including the difficulty in determining causal ordering. The purpose of this study was to examine factors associated with the quality of the relationship, not the causes of the quality. For example, one could argue that not only could high self-esteem for the stepmother enhance the quality of her relationship with her stepchild, but a quality relationship with the stepchild could also enhance the stepmother's self-esteem. Moreover, this design does not test any processes or establish any trends regarding how people change over time, but rather gives a "snapshot in time" relying primarily on recall, providing the researcher with limited predictive information.

(7) Lastly, the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship was based on the combined and summed scores' of both stepmother and the adolescent on the Parent-Adolescent Communication scale. While half of these dyads generally agreed on the quality of the relationship, another half disagreed on the quality. This combined score does not differentiate the difference in dyads where the mother rated
the relationship higher than the child and vice versa. For example, the question could be asked: Might the family dynamics be different in a family where the mother scored 60 on communication and the child scored 20, and in a family where the mother scored 20 and the child scored 60? And are those differences "masked" in a combined score? As explained in Chapter IV, because there were only 25 families in this group, a multiple regression analysis was not feasible. A larger sample would provide the additional cases needed to examine more closely the dyads who expressed discrepancy.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine social and psychological factors related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The combined scores (summed) on the stepmother's and the adolescent's communication scales were used to measure the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The independent variables were: age of stepmother at the time of the remarriage, adolescent's time in the current stepfamily, family coping patterns as perceived by the adolescent, self-esteem of stepmother, marital quality, frequency of agreement between the stepmother and father on how to raise the stepchild, and the quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother and sex of the child.

Subjects

The demographic information discussed in this section is presented in Table 3. The all-white sample consisted of 50 stepmother families—stepmother, natural father, and his oldest adolescent child. There were 21 female adolescents and 29 male adolescents in the sample. The average age of
Table 3

Demographic Statistics of Sample

Demographic Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Families</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Stepmother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 Years College</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years College</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12th Grade</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Stepmother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Family Income</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Stepmother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20,000 - 29,999</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 - 39,999</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000 - 49,999</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000 - 74,999</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75,000 - 99,999</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000 or more</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Stepmother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Executives, Proprietors of Large Concerns and Major Professionals</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Managers, Proprietors of Medium-Sized Businesses and Lesser Professionals</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Personnel, Small Independent Businesses and Minor Professionals</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and Sales Workers, Technicians and Owners of Small Businesses</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Manual Employees</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the children was 15.26 years.

The number of years the stepmothers had been married to their spouses ranged from one year to twelve years with a mean of 4.4 years (S.D. 2.78). Twenty-four percent (n = 17) had been married for two years. Forty-two percent had been married between three and six years.

In stepmother families, the level of education for both husbands and wives ranged from not completing high school through graduate degrees. Seventy-four percent of fathers had completed at least four years of college, and forty-eight percent had graduate degrees. Seventy-six percent of the stepmothers had completed four years of college, and thirty-four percent had graduate degrees.

Using the "Two Factor Index of Social Position" (Hollingshead, 1957), thirty-four percent (n = 17) of the fathers were classified in category two as business managers, proprietors of medium sized businesses, and lesser professionals. The next largest (32%, n = 16) was category one, which included higher executives, proprietors of large concerns and major professionals. Ninety-eight percent of the stepmothers were also employed. Forty percent (n = 20) were classified as level two, and sixteen percent (n = 8) as level one.

The majority of the families were Protestant (54%) with other religions making up the remainder of the sample. Total family income ranged from $20,000 to more than
$100,000 with forty-four percent within the intervals of $40,000 - $75,000. Twenty-two percent earned more than $100,000 per year. Thus, the majority of the sample included highly educated, middle-to upper-middle class families.

Findings Related to the Hypotheses

The hypotheses in this study were tested to determine the degree of relationship between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable, parent-child communication or relationship quality for stepmothers and their adolescent stepchildren. The dependent variable, quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship was based on the combined and summed scores of both the stepmother and the adolescent responses on the Parent-Adolescent Communication scale.

The mean, standard deviation, and range of scores for the dependent variable, are presented in Table 4. The individual scores as well as the combined scores are shown. A contingency table (see Appendix D for further description) revealed that while half the cases (n = 25) reported agreement on the quality of their relationship, half (n = 25) indicated a discrepancy in their combined perceptions of the quality of the relationship. For example, in sixteen cases the child indicated that the relationship quality was lower than did the stepmother. In nine cases the stepmother indicated the relationship quality was lower than the child
Table 4

Descriptive Statistics on Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Observed Range</th>
<th>Possible Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Communication (Combined Scores)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>125.42</td>
<td>24.84</td>
<td>62-184</td>
<td>40-200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents' Score</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60.22</td>
<td>15.55</td>
<td>32-89</td>
<td>20-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepmothers' Score</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65.17</td>
<td>15.23</td>
<td>27-95</td>
<td>20-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Stepmother</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34.86</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>24-51</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent's Time In Current Stepfamily</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1-12</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent's Perceived Family Coping Patterns:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Passivity</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>2-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing Family Problems</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.571</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring Social Support</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>4-12</td>
<td>4-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem of Stepmother</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>10-40</td>
<td>10-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Quality for the Stepmother</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>144.56</td>
<td>27.74</td>
<td>91-203</td>
<td>32-224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Agreement on How To Raise Stepchild</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Between Quality of Child's Relationship with the Non-residential Mother and Being:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.323</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>2.167</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
child indicated. Ideally, one would have examined the study variables in relation to those cases where discrepancy is apparent, but given so few cases (n = 25) a multiple regression analysis was not appropriate. Thus, to maximize the number of dyads for a multiple regression procedure, and continuing to treat this stepmother/stepchild as a "unit of analysis," the final constructed dependent variable was simply to add all 50 sets of scores for both the stepmother and stepchild as a joint evaluation of relationship quality and examine the independent variables in relation to this variable.

The means, standard deviations and ranges for each independent variable are also listed in Table 4. The zero order correlations for all the independent variables used in the regression analyses are presented in Table 5. One of the strongest correlations existed between frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the stepchild and the stepmother's self-esteem (.5302), but not high enough to be concerned with multicollinearity.2 The findings related to the hypotheses

---

2 When some or all of the independent variables are substantially correlated with each other, the coefficients obtained by the simultaneous model for the entire set may be highly misleading. This situation is sometimes called the problem of multicollinearity and can lead to an imprecise estimation of the regression coefficients (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was run excluding the "agree" variable to determine if "self-esteem" would then be significantly related to the dependent variable. A non-significant relationship was found.
Table 5
Zero Order Correlations Among Independent Variables
(Lower Triangle: Correlations, Upper Triangle: Pairwise Sample Size)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age of Stepmother</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 45</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Years in Stepfamily</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 48</td>
<td>N = 48</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Acquiring Social Support</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 48</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family Passivity</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
<td>N = 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reframing Family Problems</td>
<td>-0.24*</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 45</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-Esteem of Stepmother</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 45</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Marital Quality</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>N = 45</td>
<td>N = 45</td>
<td>N = 45</td>
<td>N = 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Frequency of Agreement on How to Raise Child</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
<td>N = 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interaction Between Quality of Child's Relationship with Non-Residential Mother and Being:
9. Male | -0.18 | 0.14 | 0.05 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.02 | 0.02 | -0.20 | N = 50 | N = 50 |
10. Female | 0.11 | -0.11 | -0.06 | -0.11 | -0.14 | -0.08 | -0.06 | 0.13 | -0.87** | N = 50 |

*p < .05
**p < .01
are presented in Table 6 of this section.

The correlations among the independent and dependent variables are presented in Table 6. For the purpose of this study, the probability level used for reporting significance was .05.

Hypothesis 1. The age of the stepmother at the time of remarriage is negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between age of the stepmother and the quality of the relationship with her adolescent stepchild. Although the correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis was not significant ($r = -.07; p > .05$), the direction of this correlation was as predicted. However, the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 2. Length of time in the current stepfamily for the adolescent is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of
Table 6

Correlations Among Dependent and Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combined Scores on Stepmother-Adolescent Communication Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of Stepmother at the Time of the Remarriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent's Time in Current Stepfamily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent's Perception of Family Coping Patterns:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Passivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing Family Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring Social Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem of Stepmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Quality for the Stepmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Agreement on How to Raise Stepchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Between Quality of Child's Relationship with Non-Residential Mother and Being:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10
** p < .05
the relationship between length of time in the current stepfamily and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis was not significant ($r = .01; p > .05$). Therefore, the hypothesis was not accepted.

Hypothesis 3. **Family coping patterns as perceived by the adolescent when measured by three subscales selected from the Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scale (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1981) are related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.**

3a. **Family Passivity** is negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between family passivity and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis was not found to be significant ($r = -.00; p > .05$). Thus, the hypothesis was not accepted.
3b. **Reframing family problems** is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between reframing family problems, and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlations coefficient obtained from the analysis did show a positive and significant relationship between these two variables ($r = .24; p < .05$). Thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

3c. **Acquiring social support** is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between acquiring social support and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from the analysis indicated a positive and significant relationship between the
variables ($r = .36; p < .05$). Thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 4. **Self-esteem for the stepmother, as measured by the Rosenberg (1985) Self-Esteem Scale, is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.** To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the self-esteem for the stepmother and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis indicated a positive relationship between these two measures ($r = .19; p < .10$). Thus the research hypothesis was supported.³

Hypothesis 5. **Marital quality, for the stepmother, as measured by the Sabatelli (1984) Marital Comparison Level Index is positively related the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.** To test this hypothesis,

³ For inclusion in the regression analysis .10 probability level was used for the variable stepmother's self-esteem. The correlation coefficient was "borderline" in reaching significance at the .05 level, and it is highly probable had the sample size been larger, indeed, this variable would have reached .05 probability level.
Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between marital quality for the stepmother and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between these variables ($r = .29; p < .05$). On the basis of this analysis the research hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 6. The frequency of agreement on how to raise the child between the stepmother and father, as perceived by the stepmother, is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the frequency of agreement on how to raise the child between the stepmother and father and the quality of the stepmother adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis indicated that there was a positive and
significant relationship between these variables ($r = .42; p < .05$). On the basis of this analysis, the research hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 7. The interaction between sex of the adolescent and the quality of the adolescent's relationship with the nonresidential mother: (a) is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship for males, (b) and, negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship for females.

7a. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the quality of the male adolescents' relationship with their nonresidential mother, and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis was not significant ($r = -.12; p > .05$). On the basis of this analysis the research hypothesis (7a) was not accepted.
7b. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the interaction of quality of the female adolescent's relationship with the non-residential mother, and the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The correlation coefficient obtained from this analysis was not significant ($r = .12; p > .05$). On the basis of this analysis the research hypothesis (7b) was not accepted.

Summary of the Findings Related to the Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested, using Pearson product-moment correlations to determine the degree of relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship as measured by the communication between the two. The results of these analyses indicated support for the hypotheses relating the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship, and reframing family problems as perceived by the adolescent, acquiring social support as perceived by the adolescent, self-esteem of the stepmother, stepmothers' satisfaction with the remarriage, and frequency of agreement between the stepmother and father on how to
raise the stepchild.

A simultaneous regression analysis was run with all the independent variables to check for suppression effects; data analysis revealed that those variables not significant at the bivariate level were also not significant in the multiple regression equation. Subsequently, because the major independent variables were not highly intercorrelated, only the variables significant at the bivariate level were entered into the final multivariate regression equation to determine the amount of variance in the dependent variable, quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship, accounted for by the independent variables, reframing family problems as perceived by the adolescent, acquiring social support as perceived by the adolescent, self-esteem of the stepmother, marital quality, and the frequency of agreement of the stepmother and father on how to raise the child in the equation. In addition, the analysis will determine the net effect of any of the independent variables on the stepmother-adolescent relationship. In the following section, the results of the multiple regression analysis are presented.

Findings Related to the Multiple Regression

The multiple regression procedure for the five variables selected from the bivariate analysis produced a significant $R^2$ of .35, ($F = 4.89, p = .001$), indicating the amount of variation in the dependent variable explained by
the independent variables equaled 35%. The findings of this analysis are summarized in Table 7.

In the multiple regression analysis, only two predictors were significant. These were acquiring social support (beta = .38; p < .05) and the frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the child (beta = .33; p < .05). As expected from the bivariate relationships, the family's ability to acquire social support as perceived by the adolescent was consistently the most important predictor of the quality of the relationship with his or her stepmother, with frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the child second in affecting the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

Summary of the Findings Related to the Multiple Regression

A multiple regression equation was utilized to determine the total amount of variance in the dependent variable which could be predicted by a set of independent variables.

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4 In multiple regression analysis, covariation between the independent variables is removed from any estimate of the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. A multiple regression procedure provides the net effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Thus, some independent variables may be significant at the bivariate level but not significant at the multivariate level. This means that while controlling for all other variables in the equation, the effect of acquiring social support and the frequency of agreement could have occurred by chance only 5 times out of 100.
Table 7

Multiple Regression Analysis of Quality of the Stepmother-Adolescent Relationship and Preselected Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Standardized Regression Coefficient (Beta)</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reframing Family Problems as Perceived by the Adolescent</td>
<td>8.55</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring Social Support as Perceived by the Adolescent</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>8.70*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem of the Stepmother</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Quality</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Agreement on How to Raise the Child</td>
<td>11.81</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>4.91*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(constant)</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R = .60
R² = .35
Adjusted R² = .28
F = 4.89, p = .001

* p < .05
variables. This equation produced a significant $R^2$ of .35, $(F = 4.89, p = .001)$. In this analysis, two variables were identified as having a significant net effect in the dependent variable; i.e. the family's ability to acquire social support as perceived by the adolescent and frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the child. The standardized regression coefficients indicated that both were equally important predictors of the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship in this research.

An Examination of "Open-Ended" Responses by Stepmother-Adolescent Dyads

An examination of three selected open-ended questions was conducted with the five stepmother-adolescent dyads that scored highest on the Parent-Adolescent Communication (PAC) scale and the five that scored the lowest to determine if certain themes were associated with low and high quality relationships that might not be evident in the quantitative information or that might provide further support to the findings in the analysis. The five highest dyad scores ranged from 154 to 184 and the lowest scores ranged from 62 to 92. The questions were: 1) Is there any additional information you would like to share that you feel might be helpful in trying to understand your particular experience with divorce, remarriage and living in a stepfamily? 2) What are the most positive aspects of living in a
3) How do you feel you could improve relationships with your adolescent stepchild or stepmother? A summary of these responses follows.

The responses of the five stepmothers who scored the lowest on the (PAC) indicated a great deal of stress and frustration regarding living in a stepfamily. One mother shared that "the relationship with my husband will probably end soon--partly because we spent so much time over kids issues that we didn't grow in our own." Two others responded that there was no preparation for the role of stepparent, especially stepmother. Subsequently, the unclear nature of the role lead them to much pain and "chaos." One other stepmother mentioned the role of the nonresidential mother as especially difficult when that parent disliked the new stepparent so much and made these views known to the adolescent child as well.

Interestingly, the five children who scored lowest on the (PAC) wrote very little in response to question 1. One child did, however, indicate some continued anger over the parents' divorce and remarriage, responding that she thought divorce was stupid and why marry if it is going to end in divorce. Furthermore, she added, getting remarried only makes matters worse. In response to question 2, the stepmothers in this group indicated that focusing on the positive aspects of the child's personality, their continued devotion and love for the child's father, an opportunity to
experience various views on issues, to work on problem solving and the advantages of a larger family were all positive aspects of living in a stepfamily.

Again, only one child responded to question 2, indicating that the most positive aspect about living in a stepfamily was that now she no longer had to put up with her parents fighting.

When asked how do you feel you can improve the relationship with your stepchild, one stepmother indicated that backing away from the relationship with the stepchild and hopefully allowing him to see her good qualities was slowly improving the relationship. Another indicated better communication and more patience might improve the relationship. Another stepmother shared that the child had difficulty deciding where she wanted to live so the stepmother was hesitant to invest in a role she might only have for a short period of time. Finally, one stepmother shared that after years of counseling and support groups, her relationship with her stepchild remained unchanged. She'd lost hope and looked forward to the child leaving the home. She concluded by adding, "I think this is the most painful relationship I've ever had."

Three children responded to question three. One indicated it was impossible to improve the relationship with the stepparent. Another mentioned being more open and a third indicated the situation was hopeless.
In summary, this group of stepmothers and adolescents seemed to feel that at this point the relationship was almost beyond hope. One stepmother was choosing divorce as a means to decrease the pain, another stepmother was "trying to survive" until the child leaves home for good, and a third one tried to back off and allow the relationship to grow on its own. While the children wrote very little in response to these questions, one indicated anger over the parents' divorce and remarriage and another responded that remarriage was insane. None of the children felt there was much hope in developing a mutually satisfying relationship and the stepmothers tended to agree.

The second group of stepmother-adolescent dyads--those who scored highest on the (PAC)--provided some interesting contrasts to the previous group. In response to question number 1, this group of stepmothers acknowledged that stepfamily living was at times problematic, however, the shifting of roles, relationships and responsibilities could also be growth producing for all family members. For these families the added children were an asset rather than a liability. These stepmothers saw more positive aspects of living in a stepfamily such as: more companionship with stepchildren, more tolerance and acceptance of individual differences, a chance to "value" what you have as strong, good and lasting, sharing times together as a family and learning from past life relationships and experiences.
Furthermore, these stepmothers made many good suggestions for ways they could improve the relationship with the adolescent, such as: spending more individual time with the child, continuing to support the child's growth toward independence, eliminating negative comments regarding the child's natural mother, openly discussing the child's past family life, continuing to let the stepchild know he is cared for and building a strong marital relationship with the child's natural father.

Similarly, the children responded with more information than the first group of adolescents. In response to question 1, one child wrote, "first it was hard then it really got easier. We have a lot of fun together!" Aspects of stepfamily living they liked included: more people around, more toys, candy and gifts at holidays and birthdays, more "great" people. "Listening more" was the only suggestion this group of adolescents gave for improving the relationship. Four of the five responded that the relationship was very good and they could not think of any ways to improve it.

In summary, this group of stepmothers and children tended to see the relationship as more of an opportunity than a "burden," unlike the first group. In general, the stepmothers saw the relationship as positive and growth producing. They did suggest a number of positive ways they felt they could further improve the relationship. All in
all, they felt the relationships "were unique and very close." Similarly, the children viewed their relationship with their stepmother as positive and very close. The majority of them wrote, "I could not improve my relationship because we are doing very well...it is as good as it can get!"

A third selected group of stepmother-adolescent dyads examined were those that revealed discrepancies in their scores on the (PAC). In other words, in this group the stepmother viewed the relationship more positively than did the child. Three dyads were chosen in which the stepmother indicated that their relationship was considerably better than the child indicated. The stepmother scores ranged from 79-93 and the child's scores ranged from 32-43. The stepmothers responses in this group tended to indicate that these parents are putting a good deal of effort into "parenting" these children, probably more so than the children needed or wanted. Furthermore, they see this role as their duty rather than a choice. For example, one stepmother wrote, after having grown up in a stepfamily, "I know now I have an opportunity to give to someone what was given to me." Another shared, "I don't know why I have taken on teenagers again...but they keep us active" and finally one stepmother reported that she felt that if anything went wrong with the stepchildren, it would be her fault.
On the other hand, the children's responses indicated they felt over-parented and over-controlled. One child wrote that the situation might improve if the stepmother didn't think she knew everything—even what the child was thinking. Another shared, "our relationship would improve greatly if she would stop yelling and share her feelings in a calmer way." This child further added, "It is especially difficult to adjust to the difficult expectations of my stepmother as opposed to my natural parents upbringing."

A final group of dyads was examined in which the child scored higher on the (PAC) than did the stepmother. The stepmothers scores ranged from 44-57, the child's scores ranged from 68-82. This was the most difficult group to determine any trends. While both the stepmothers and the stepchildren appeared somewhat satisfied with their relationship, the stepmothers tended to be more critical or realistic in their view of the child. My overall impression was that this group of stepmothers were experiencing some stress and finding it difficult to share their needs with the child. Two stepmothers indicated that blending families together took much flexibility and effort on their parts. One shared that because of her recent difficulties associated with depression, her responses may indicate more negativity in the family than is truly the case. All three stepmothers indicated that one way they could improve relationships with their stepchild would be to open up more
by communicating and openly discussing problems and asking the child for help.

The children in this group, responded very little to any of the three questions. They indicated, overall, they were happy in their stepfamilies. One wrote that friends helped ease the adjustment through a divorce and remarriage and that continued communication with parent and stepparent was important to improving relationships. One child added, "I live in a good family, I couldn't improve it." This group of children seemed unaware of their stepmothers' dissatisfaction and needs regarding their relationship.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine conceptually related social and psychological predictors of the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship in remarried families. The seven predictors or independent variables included: (a) age of the stepmother at the time of the remarriage; (b) adolescent's time in the current stepfamily; (c) adolescent's perception of family coping patterns: family passivity, reframing family problems, and acquiring social support; (d) self-esteem of the stepmother; (e) marital quality for the stepmother; (f) frequency of agreement between the stepmother and father on how to raise the child; and (g) quality of the adolescent's relationship with the non-residential mother according to sex of the child.

Role strain as defined by Goode (1960) was used as the theoretical framework used to guide this research. According to this perspective, lack of specific norms regarding behavior in certain roles contributes to role strain. Persons in roles that lack expectations and

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guidelines for performance are at risk for stress, conflict, and strain. However, the degree of stress experienced and the ability to adapt to the stress inherent in role strain is contingent, upon the resources the individual and family bring to the situation.

The reputational sample for this study consisted of 50 primarily middle- to upper-middle class stepfamilies, the majority of whom lived in a large, midwestern, metropolitan area. The families consisted of a stepmother, natural or adoptive father, and his oldest adolescent child. All the adolescents' parents had previously divorced. Fathers, stepmothers, and adolescents completed questionnaires in their homes in the presence of a research assistant. The questionnaires included demographic information, family background questions, and standardized scales.

Discussion

Sample Characteristics

Average family income of this all-white sample fell within the interval of $40,000 to $74,999. Forty-two percent of the stepmothers, and twenty-six percent of the fathers had completed four years of college. Thirty-four percent of the stepmothers and forty-eight percent of the fathers held graduate degrees. These families had been married an average of four years.

The 21 female and 29 male adolescents ranged in age from 12 to 18. The average age of the children were 15.3.
The average age of the stepmothers were 34.5, ranging in age from 24 to 51.

It appears this is a sample of middle- to upper-middle class stepmother families who may have more than average access to both social and psychological resources and thus may be better adjusted than stepmother families in the general population.\(^1\) Better adjusted families may be more willing to expose their family life to outsiders because they are more willing to learn about themselves and improve their situations. On the other hand, some of the families that volunteered to participate might be seeking solutions to family difficulties and see such participation as one way to accomplish this goal.

**Findings Related to the Hypotheses**

Hypotheses were tested to determine the degree of relationship between ten independent variables and the dependent variable, quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The results of correlational analyses indicated a significant correlation between five of these variables and the dependent variable: (a) adolescent's perception of family's ability to reframe family problems;

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\(^1\) It should be noted, however, that in general, father's who seek custody of their children after a divorce tend to be highly educated and financially secure (Price & McKenry, 1988). Therefore, this population of stepmothers may be quite similar to the real population in terms of social class and financial resources.
(b) the adolescent's perception of his or her family's ability to acquire social support; (c) self-esteem of the stepmother; (d) stepmother's satisfaction with the remarriage; and (e) frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the child.

A multiple regression equation was used to determine the total amount of variance in the dependent variable which could be predicted by the set of independent variables significant at the bivariate level. In this equation, two variables were identified as significantly accounting for 35 percent of the variance in the dependent variable: the adolescent's perception of the family's ability to acquire social support and frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the child. A summary of these findings are presented in Table 7.

**Implications of Hypothesis Testing**

The quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship was defined and measured in this research as the degree to which the stepparent and the stepchild view their perceptions and experiences of communication with each other as open, honest, and positive or negative. The average combined score for the stepmother and adolescent on Barnes and Olson's (1982) Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale was 125.4. The norms given for this combined scale are 142.1. Thus it appears that the combined parent-child communication
score for this sample was slightly lower than reported norms. This is not surprising based on the fact that the families used in the Barnes and Olson study were intact families with adolescents, whereas the sample in this study utilized stepfamilies with adolescents that had been together for an average of four years and are probably still in transition in terms of establishing a quality relationship with the stepmother.

As just mentioned, the correlational analyses identified five variables as being significantly related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. These variables are components of a multilevel-multivariable developmental model as suggested by Clingempeel, Brand, and Segal (1987) as an "overarching conceptual framework...that may serve to broaden the foci of future research on stepfamilies" (p. 65). A discussion of these variables follows.

Adolescent's perception of family's ability to reframe family problems. The regression analysis revealed that the family's ability to reframe family problems as perceived by the adolescent was not significantly related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship at a multivariate level. However, Pearson correlations did support the research hypothesis.

While no studies to date have examined coping strategies within the stepfamily as perceived by the
adolescent, it appears that the ability to reframe or redefine a stressful event is an important coping dimension. Because the role of stepmother and stepchild is not clearly defined and society offers no clear guidelines as to what can be expected in that role (Cherlin, 1978), each family member must work out their own definition of how they are supposed to behave. This process can pose particular challenges for some stepfamilies, especially those with stepmothers. The purported ambiguity of steprelationships would suggest that the tolerance of that ambiguity, and the ability to redefine stressful family situations in a more positive framework is a family characteristic that may be an important predictor of relationship quality in stepfamilies.

Adolescent's perception of family's ability to acquire social support. Multivariate analysis did reveal that the family's ability to acquire social support as perceived by the adolescent was a significant predictor of relationship quality. Again, while no studies have looked at family coping patterns as a resource in the formation of stepfamilies, the clinical literature does suggest that while adolescents may have difficulty adjusting to a new stepparent, many teenagers and their families turn to friends for support during this transition period (Visher & Visher, 1982). It may be that many of these adolescents are still adjusting to painful losses in their family -- the loss of a parent by divorce, moving to a new neighborhood,
leaving friends and familiar routines, needing to share one's room and other physical spaces and a loss in the amount of individual attention received. Moreover, the child's parents often are not emotionally available during these transitions due to their own adjustments. Adjusting to these losses often takes time and understanding. The expression and acceptance of hurt, anger, fear, and guilt are a normal part of this healing process. It appears that the family's ability to acquire support from relatives, friends, and neighbors, is an important resource for stepfamilies. Considerable anecdotal data collected in the present study also suggests that social support is an important component of the quality of parent-adolescent relationships in remarried families.

**Self-esteem of the stepmother.** The multivariate analysis revealed that self-esteem of the stepmother was not related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. However, Pearson correlations did support this research hypothesis at the .10 level. While several studies have looked at the child's self-esteem as the outcome variable in stepfamilies with children (Rosenburg, 1965; Kaplan & Pokorny, 1971), no studies have looked at the self-esteem of the stepmother in relation to the quality of the parent-child relationship in remarried families. However, Small (1988) did find in natural parent families the mother's self-esteem was positively related to better
communication with her adolescent. The present study also finds this to be true in stepmother families with adolescents.

The role of the stepmother has typically been depicted as evil, uncaring, and self-centered. Expectations regarding how we should perform a social role frequently act as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stepmothers may be expected to share in the child-rearing duties. In a situation such as described above, it may be that self-esteem or a strong sense of self-worth gives the stepmother a clearer, more honest view of her own strengths and limitations. As a result, she may view and perform the role of stepmother more realistically, enabling her to effectively deal with the often ambiguous nature of her role.

Ste pmother's satisfaction with the remarriage.

Multiple regression analysis indicated the stepmother's satisfaction with the remarriage was not related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship at a multivariate level. Pearson correlations, however, did support the research hypothesis which stated the stepmother's satisfaction with the remarriage is positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. This is partially consistent with the findings of Brand and Clingempeel (1987) which stated that marital quality was associated with more positive stepmother relationships for boys, but not for girls.
In the present study the average score on Sabatelli's (1984) Marital Comparison Level Index was 144.56. The normative score which indicates that expectations are being met is 128. Thus the stepmothers in the current study indicated that the marital relationship more than met their expectations. It appears that a quality marital relationship is related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship and could serve as resource to the family.

It is important to note that in a correlational design these relationships could work the other way. For example, not only might a quality marital relationship contribute to a quality parent-child relationship, but a quality parent-child relationship could also enhance the parents' marriage.

While the remarried couple is usually enthusiastic about their new family, some of the children and relatives may be less than enthusiastic. Studies of intact families have pointed out the potential importance of the marital relationship as a source of help to individuals in times of stress (Blood & Wolf, 1960). In stepfamilies the strength and health of the marital bond may be particularly important. In stepfamilies people from different backgrounds find themselves suddenly living together in the intimacy of a family. Furthermore there are typically
former spouses, assorted relatives and friends of various affiliations who continue to have input into and influence on the family unit. In this often complicated set of relationships, the stepmother again finds herself in a situation that lacks clear role guidelines. A happy marriage could serve as a support system for the stepmother role and also provide the stepchildren with exposure to a positive model of marital interaction. A positive marital atmosphere may also send a clearer message to the children that a reconciliation between the child's former parents is no longer possible. This in turn, may promote the children's ability to accept reality and help them focus on the positive aspects of their current family situation. Making a commitment to a strong marriage, creating new rules, roles and family routines may further serve the adjustment to new roles that facilitate the quality of the stepmother-stepchild relationship.

*Frequency of agreement on how to raise stepchild.* The multivariate analysis revealed that the frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the stepchild was significantly related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. Disagreements over stepchildren appear to be a frequent problem unique to stepfamilies (Albrecht, Bohr, & Goodman, 1983; Duberman, 1975; Messinger, 1976; and Visher & Visher, 1982). Although studies regarding the stepmother's role in disciplining the
children are practically non-existent, studies of stepfathers do indicate that disagreements related to enforcement of rules and discipline strategies are a source of stress for parents and children. Because of the more salient role of mother as parent, stepmothers are often expected to be more involved in parenting than stepfathers. It does appear from the results of the present research that successful parental efforts to work out issues related to parenting expectations and strategies is related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship and could serve as a resource to the stepmother. It seems reasonable to expect that as the stepmother and father experience more cooperation and agreement on issues related to child rearing, the role strain associated with the unclear nature of how the stepmother is supposed to function in this disciplinary role would be reduced. It appears that a "united front" of both parents regarding discipline and child guidance contributes to a quality relationship between the stepmother and stepchild.

As just discussed, a multivariate analysis identified only two of these five correlational relationships as significantly related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. These variables were: the family's ability to acquire social support as perceived by the adolescent, and frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the stepchild.
Why were the variables of social support and agreement on raising children significant at the multivariate level whereas self-esteem, marital satisfaction and reframing family problems were only significant at a bivariate level?

Each of the variables that were found to be significant at the bivariate level are somewhat circumscribed in scope. Self-esteem, while a vital psychological resource to the stepmother, is an internal perception that may not directly determine relationship quality. Likewise, marital satisfaction may not strongly affect the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The variable of reframing family problems is also limited in scope in that it is a specific skill.

On the other hand, both social support for the family and agreement on how to raise the child are more global variables. They encompass not only perceptions of individual well-being and specific skill development, but are direct social indicators that may reflect the quality of interpersonal relationships among stepmother, father and adolescent.

Perceived support from friends and relatives has been found to be an important indicator of stepfamily well-being (Knaub, Hanna, & Stinnett, 1984) as well as important to stress theory in general. The findings of the present study confirm the importance of social support. It would seem that when adolescents feel social support and acceptance for
their new family, this validates the family's worth and helps the adolescent feel more comfortable with the new roles in which he or she has been cast.

As with social support for the family, frequency of agreement on how to raise the stepchild is a global variable in that it reflects patterns of family communication, conflict management and child guidance. Agreement between parents on how to raise the child reduces role strain and gives additional role definition to the stepmother as well as the child. Therefore, it clarifies both role expectations and provides an atmosphere that is predictable.

It was also hypothesized that additional variables, age of stepmother at the time of the remarriage, adolescent's time in the remarriage, family passivity as perceived by the adolescent and quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother according to sex of the child would be significantly related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. Despite conceptual indications that they would contribute to the stepmother-adolescent role satisfaction in remarried families, these factors were not significant. A brief discussion of these variables follows.

Age of stepmother at time of the remarriage. It was hypothesized that the age of the stepmother would be negatively related to quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship with older stepmothers experiencing less
quality relationships. Duberman (1975) reported that younger stepmothers were more likely to have good relationships with their stepchildren than older stepmothers. The research literature alludes to the fact that younger stepmothers may be more flexible and open-minded in their parental interactions with the stepchild whereas older stepmothers may see their role as more authoritarian and become "over-involved" in parenting their adolescent stepchild.

When tested by correlational analysis, this developmental variable was not found to be significant in the direction predicted ($r = -.07$, $n = 48$). One possible reason for the lack of relationship might be the relatively low number of cases used in this study. This variable may well have been significant if a larger number of stepmothers had been included in the sample. It may also be true that other related factors, such as the time in the relationship, or the stepmother's previous parenting or child care experiences affect quality, not just age per se.

**Adolescent's time in the current stepfamily.** It was hypothesized that the adolescent's time in the current stepfamily would be positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. Some research suggests that the first few years of living in stepfamilies may be the most stressful (Lutz, 1983; Visher & Visher, 1979). Considering this fact, the current study proposed that over
time a newly formed relationship with a stepparent could develop gradually and naturally, without forcing premature expressions of trust and affection. While this structural variable seemed relevant for this group of adolescents when tested by correlational analysis, it was not related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. Interestingly, the results of this study do support the findings of Pink and Wampler (1985) that length of time in the current stepfamily for the adolescent is not related to the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship or to the quality of the adolescent's adjustment to the stepfamily. One possible explanation for the finding may be that the first few years of stepfamily living are not seen as that stressful. Individuals also may be on their best behavior during the first few years of the marriage (Strother & Jacobs, 1984).

Adolescent's family coping pattern: Family passivity.
It was hypothesized that family passivity as perceived by the adolescent would be negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. Although this psychological variable seemed relevant for this group of adolescents, it was not related to stepmother-adolescent relationship quality when tested by correlational analysis. As previously stated, no studies to date have examined family coping patterns as perceived by adolescents in stepfamilies. While over the long term passive techniques
may prove to be inadequate coping strategies, they are still coping patterns. "Waiting for the problems to go away" may afford stepfamilies time to adjust to new roles and responsibilities and further may engender some "hope" that things will get better over time. Passive strategies such as "luck plays a big part in how we handle problems" and "believing that if we wait long enough, the problems will go away" were coping patterns used by this non-clinical group of stepfamilies. However, they were not used systematically enough to provide for a significant correlation.

Quality of the relationship with the non-residential parent by sex of the child. It was hypothesized that this variable would be positively related to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship for males, and negatively related for females. In this study, significance was not found for this variable for either sex. Interestingly, 92 percent of the adolescents evaluated their relationship with their non-residential mother as either very close, close, or somewhat close. It may well be that the adolescent truly does view the stepmother as a "friend" and not a replacement parent. As a result, the child may not experience the degree of emotional attachment to the stepparent that is usually true of a relationship with a natural mother. In addition, Ganong and Coleman (1986) point out in their comparison of clinical and non-clinical literature on stepfamilies that issues relating to loyalty conflicts may
be more frequent in troubled stepfamilies and not so much an issue in well-functioning, less clinical populations such as the ones in this study.

Additional Findings Related to an Examination of the "Open-Ended" Responses by Dyads

Several themes did emerge from the "open-ended" responses by dyads that provide further support for the findings in the present study. Four groups of stepmother-adolescent dyads were examined on three open-ended questions regarding their experiences with living in a stepfamily and how these family members felt they could improve their relationships. These included those dyads that scored highest on the Parent-Adolescent Communication scale, those dyads that scored lowest, and those who showed discrepancies in their relative assessment of the relationship (i.e. three dyads where the child scored higher than the stepmother and three where the stepmother scored higher than the child).

Two stepmothers pointed out that because there was no preparation for the role of stepparent and because of the ambiguous nature of the role, they experienced considerable stress and unhappiness. This finding lends support to the idea that the role of stepmother is indeed ambiguous and can lead to considerable role strain for stepparents.

Several stepmothers mentioned the importance of a strong marital bond at the core of the stepfamily as a means of strengthening and improving the family unit. In
addition, one stepmother pointed out because she and the child's father had not been able to agree on how to discipline the child considerable stress resulted. She felt this factor alone strongly influenced the quality of the relationship with her adolescent stepchild.

The group of stepmothers and stepchildren who scored the highest on the (PAC) offered some positive suggestions on how to strengthen the quality of their relationship. These included: (a) spending more time with the child; (b) openly communicating and sharing with the adolescent; and (c) continuing to show concern and caring for the adolescent's growth and development. The children also mentioned that they could "listen more" as a way to strengthen their relationship with the stepparent.

For the group of stepmothers and adolescents where there was discrepancy in their relationship scores, it appeared in one group the stepparent was trying too hard to "parent" these children in a way that was not helpful or familiar. The final group of stepmothers seemed to have needs they were unable to express. They felt this reduced the quality of the relationship with their stepchild. In this group one stepchild did find solace in support from friends and relatives outside the family, thus resulting in a higher relationship score for the child than the mother indicated.

In summary, selected pieces of qualitative data
provided additional support for the importance of the family's ability to acquire social support, quality of the marriage, frequency of agreement on how to raise the stepchild, and the quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential mother. Other factors mentioned, but not measured quantitatively in this research included: the child's adjustment to the parents divorce, amount of time the stepparent and stepchild spend together, the amount of care and affection shown to the stepchild, previous "parenting" the child received, willingness of the stepmother to express her needs and to ask for help, and the degree of depression experienced by the stepmother and child.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations of this research will be divided into three sections. Included will be recommendations for research, theory, practice and policy. Several factors, as previously mentioned, must be considered when discussing the implications of this study. First, the results are based on a restricted sample of stepmothers and their adolescent stepchildren, thus generalization beyond this sample must be made with caution. Second, the study was correlational in design and care must be taken not to imply a cause-effect relationship. Lastly, the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship was based on the combined and summed scores' of both stepmother and the adolescent on
the Parent-Adolescent Communication scale.

In view of these considerations, the findings of this research indicated that certain social and psychological resources of both the stepmother and her adolescent child were significantly related to the quality of that relationship. Recommendations resulting from these findings follow.

Research

The present research has shown the importance of developing sampling strategies to increase the number of stepmother/stepchild dyads. A larger sample may have resulted in more significant predictors in the multiple regression analysis. In addition, a larger group of stepmother-adolescent dyads would have allowed a closer look statistically at those groups where there was discrepancy in the quality of the relationship scores. Other study variables that are a part of an adolescent's life experience may serve as additional resources. Variables associated with teachers, friends in general, siblings, and stepsiblings should be included in future studies. The sex of the child and the relationship with the stepmother, residential parent and non-residential mother also merits further exploration. Clearly more research is needed to examine the dynamics and differences between male and female adolescents in stepmother families.

The qualitative data provided insights into study
questions not considered in the quantitative design. In a research area such as parent-child relationships in stepmother families where empirical information is lacking, qualitative information can serve to generate additional ideas and insights into a relatively little understood area of family studies. The anecdotal data suggest that the adolescent's involvement in their custody decision after the divorce, their thoughts about changes in custody, their satisfaction with the present custody arrangements and how often they see their mother, are important factors related to the relationship with their stepmother.

It is suggested that future studies of this type utilize: (a) longitudinal designs whereby adolescents and their stepfamilies are studied at various points of the remarriage process, (b) appropriate comparison groups, and (c) multiple methods and measure of the child's relationship with the stepmother, the biological custodial parent, and the non-residential parent (Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984). These methods would address the limitations of cross-sectional and correlational data analysis and provide designs which examine time related changes in family relationships. It also seems appropriate to compare different structural subtypes of stepfamilies to assess differences between those that are functioning more successfully and those in distress. The gathering of data from multiple sources increases the reliability and validity
of the findings and provides greater opportunity for insights into the family's functioning (Miller, Rollins, & Thomas, 1982). Stepfamilies may at some point be the most common family form in which children are reared.

Sauer and Fine (1988) suggest that future research should explore the quality of the parent-child relationships in stepfamilies and the long-term effect this relationship has on the adjustment of parents and children. Santrok and Sitterle (1987) state that future research studies on the quality of the parent-child relationships in stepmother families be extended to other age group children speculating that family processes and resources differ in stepmother families with young children. Working class families, including different racial and ethnic groups, should also be included. It may be that role assignments and the resources to deal with role ambiguity are very different in these families. The utilization of larger samples of stepmothers is also of much importance when generalizing findings. Future studies must be conducted in a multi-method, multi-source, multi-context format to reveal more insights into stepmother family processes. Social-psychological theorists argue that one cannot fully understand the role a person plays in a family without also understanding the roles and perceptions of other family members. A further weakness surrounding the use of one method of data collection (i.e., self-report) when persons are under
stress, is that the responses may not truly represent the current nature of the family. As one stepmother shared, "I have been quite depressed lately and my answers reflect my illness--I don't think the situation is as bad as I have written."

In summary, the limitations of existing stepfamily research and suggested improvements are woven throughout this document. Interview techniques should involve as many stepfamily members as possible and might be helpful in assessing the adolescent's and the stepmother's thoughts and feelings. As noted in Chapter I, past family research has often been based on one family member's perceptions of the entire family's functioning, and that family member has usually been the wife and mother. More multi-method approaches are needed as are longitudinal studies and innovative designs. Appropriate control groups and non-clinical, well-functioning stepfamilies need to be more frequently employed. The reliability of questionnaires, interviews, behavioral observations and clinical assessments need to be established when these techniques are used to collect research data. There is also a need for replication studies and large-scale, long-term research projects that are grounded in theory. An adequate theoretical model of stepfamily functioning is needed to guide researchers. This model should address fundamental structural differences between remarried and first-married families.
Relative to the specific stepmother-related content of future research, the needs are indeed vast. A number of questions in this study remain unanswered. (1) How do children of different ages perceive, respond to and adjust to stepfamily living and what difference does the age and sex of family members make in the quality of a stepmother-stepchild relationship? (2) It seems unclear whether it is the age of the stepmother or the persons experiences with parenting and or child care that influence the quality of the relationship with the stepchild. (3) The question remains whether the effects of marital quality vary depending upon the sex of the residential parent and sex of the stepchild. (4) Are there other family coping patterns such as confidence in problem-solving or seeking spiritual support that also serve as resources for stepfamilies? (5) Finally, it remains unclear how the child's relationship with the outside mother affects the child's relationship with the stepmother.

Clearly, with regard to future research on stepfamilies, the need is pressing, opportunities for creative activity abound, and the potential results hold great promise for a clearer understanding of the dynamics associated with stepfamily living.

**Theory**

Burr (1973) described role strain as the "stress
generated within a person when he either cannot comply or has difficulty complying with the expectations of a role or set of roles" (p. 129). According to role theory, the ability of the stepmother and stepchild to adjust to the stress involved in the formation of a new stepfamily will be, in part, contingent upon demographic and personality resources, intrahousehold resources and extrahousehold resources that each individual brings to the situation (Clingempeel, Brand, & Segal, 1987). In the present research there was support for concepts from role theory--role ambiguity and the subsequent strain involved as a viable framework for examining the stepmother-stepchild relationship in remarried families. The stepparent's and stepchild's ability to adjust to their roles is considered in light of the salient social and psychological characteristics within the individual and his or her environment (e.g., self-esteem of the stepmother, family coping patterns reported by the adolescent, quality of the marital relationship and the child's relationship with the non-residential parent) that serve to reduce the strain involved.

The ability of family members to adapt to stress and manage resources during stressful events has been given little attention in both research and theory building, especially among studies of stepfamilies. In this study acquiring social support as perceived by the adolescent,
which included seeking encouragement and support from friends, relatives, neighbors, and others who have faced similar family situations, was the strongest predictor of the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. Thus it appears that spending time with friends, seeking advice from persons who have also faced similar adjustments, sharing difficulties and seeking assistance from relatives are valuable resources to adolescents and their families as they make the adjustments of living in a stepfamily. Furthermore, this support can provide added legitimacy to the stepfamily as a whole and aid in clarifying family roles, thus reducing role strain for the individuals involved. If adolescents perceive that their own friends as well as their family's friends and relatives support their new family lifestyle, stress may be reduced, resulting in a more positive stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Numerous investigators have suggested that issues relating to discipline of the stepchild are a source of stress in remarried families. In this study, frequency of agreement between the stepmother and father on how to raise the child was found to be highly predictive of the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. The relationship between frequency of agreement on how to raise the child and quality of the stepmother-adolescent was the second strongest relationship at a multivariate level of analysis. The uncertainty and ambiguous role expectations for
Stepmothers can cause many problems for individuals during this time. Discussion about how the stepparent is to function in her role related to discipline strategies is especially important at this time in reducing role strain. Cooperation and agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to parent the child appears to be a valuable resource for enabling the stepparent and child to cope with the stress and transitions involved in stepfamily living. Moreover, when the parents experience less conflict and more agreement over issues related to raising the child, the ambiguity and strain associated with the role of stepmother is reduced and a more positive, open relationship with the child can result.

Another correlation that was related at the bivariate level to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship was the positive relationship between a second family coping pattern as perceived by the adolescent — reframing family problems. This relationship suggests that a family's ability to face problems head-on, redefine the situation, and attempt to make a stressful situation more manageable is a valuable resource to an adolescent in the adjustment to the addition of a new stepmother. Perhaps if stepfamilies are able to work out their own definition of how each person in the new family is to behave, role ambiguity and strain are reduced and family members are able to interact in a manner best suited to their particular
It was believed that the quality of the marriage between the stepmother and the child's father would serve as a resource to the stepmother in the formation of her relationship with her adolescent stepchild. This study did indeed find a positive relationship at the bivariate level between these two variables. This supports the notion that a quality marriage can serve as a resource for the stepmother in buffering the ambiguous effects of living in a stepfamily with adolescent children. It should be noted, however, that although a quality marriage may serve as a support system to the stepmother, the positive effects of higher marital quality on parent-child relationships may not apply to relationships in stepfamilies.

For example, in stepfamilies, children may see a more positive marital relationship as a threat to the relationship they formerly had with their single parent. Furthermore, a quality marriage may be seen by children as an additional threat to their hope that their parents would be reunited and an even greater threat to the relationship with the non-residential parent (Brand & Clingempeel, 1987). This would indicate that perhaps the stepfamily members need to carve out their own role for the stepmother-stepchild that continues to support the child's relationship with the residential as well as the non-residential parent.

Other investigators have suggested that self-esteem is
an important psychological coping resource. In this study, high self-esteem for the stepmother was found to be predictive of the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship at .10 level. Thus, it appears that high self-esteem is a valuable resource for enabling these women to cope with the often unclear social roles associated with being a stepmother. High self-esteem may afford the stepmother the psychological wherewithal to realistically assess her role as distinct from that of the natural parent, face head-on the stereotypes associated with stepmothering in this culture, and realize that indeed this role differs in having a high degree of ambiguity. From this perspective, perhaps she can establish a role within the stepfamily that for her is workable and productive.

It was further predicted that the age of the stepmother at the time of the remarriage would be negatively related to the quality of the stepmother-stepchild relationship. While the results of this analysis did not reach significance, the direction of the relationship was as hypothesized. It may be that the stepmother's other experiences associated with the parenting role better serve to reduce role strain than the age factor and further influence the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship.

While several of the variables selected for this research did not prove relevant to the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship (i.e. adolescent's time
in the current stepfamily, passive family coping as reported by the adolescent, or quality of the child's relationship with the non-residential parent by sex of child), concepts from role theory were nonetheless helpful in studying this topic and suggesting specific factors that may well serve as resources to both the stepmother and adolescent.

Finally, Boss (1980) contends that in any family, stress will continue until membership can be clarified and the system reorganized regarding who performs what roles and tasks. To facilitate family functioning in stepfamilies, stepmothers and stepchildren must be allowed to carve out their own roles within the family, taking into consideration that roles in stepfamilies are often distinct from roles in first marriage families. Family members need to discard unrealistic fantasies and expectations and create new rules, roles and routines in their new family unit (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1987). The present study provided evidence to support this theoretical notion that when family members can agree on how to perform the role of stepparent and stepchild and the family receives added support from individuals outside the family, the stress associated with role ambiguity and strain is reduced and the stepfamily is able to better adjust.

Practice and Policy

The results of this study indicate that the family's ability to acquire social support as perceived by the
adolescent was the most significant factor related to the quality of the adolescent-stepmother relationship. For the stepmother, frequency of agreement between the stepmother and the father on how to raise the stepchild was the most significant factor related to the quality of the relationship with her adolescent stepchild. Other significant factors included self-esteem of the stepmother, marital quality and adolescent's perception of the family's ability to reframe problems. A number of recommendations for clinical, educational and policy intervention are suggested by the findings of this research.

(1) As mentioned previously, it can well be argued that the most pressing content area for future research is that of focusing more on healthy stepfamily development (Giles-Sims & Crosbie-Burnett, 1989). This study is a preliminary step in that skills have been identified as associated with reducing stress associated with stepfamily living (i.e., family coping patterns; acquiring social support and the frequency of agreement between the stepmother and father on how to raise the child). These findings suggest means of building strong stepfamilies because the identified skills and strengths can be learned.

In particular, future applied research needs to address such questions as: What additional factors are related to successful stepfamily living? How can the development of these success factors be encouraged? How is stepfamily
well-being affected by positive expectations? What is the role of the individual and collective perceptions of stepfamily members? To what degree can perceptual set be taught? Would doing so have a positive impact on family functioning? Which stepfamilies are functioning at a superior level of well-being, why, and can this level of functioning be taught to other stepfamilies? What interpersonal skills allow for optimal functioning as a stepfather, stepmother or stepchild, and how can the development of these skills best be encouraged?

(2) The family's ability to acquire support from relatives, friends, neighbors and extended family can be a valuable resource for helping adolescent children cope with the changes and stressors involved in the formation of a relationship with a stepparent. The significant increase in the number of individuals and families affected by divorce in recent years has not been accompanied by widespread societal support that might ease the transition to a remarried lifestyle (Price & McKenry, 1988). Most societal efforts have focused on divorce prevention, not facilitation of post-divorce lifestyle. The importance of the families' use of other social support networks including church and religious resources, community resources, neighborhood agencies and programs such as counseling services could be emphasized by family life educators and family therapists as a resource to families and children in the transition from a
single parent family to a stepfamily and also during the period of relationship formation. Support groups provided by the high school for adolescents experiencing divorce and/or remarriage might be helpful in providing yet another situation where the adolescent can share his or her experiences in a supportive atmosphere of peers and teachers.

(3) This study indicated that maintaining open communication and cooperation between the stepmother and father on discipline strategies used with the adolescent was another major factor in the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship. Expectations regarding parenting roles should be discussed in preparation for remarriage with children. Furthermore, there needs to be an emphasis on preparation for remarriage classes where parenting as well as other stepfamily issues are discussed. Additional information for preparation for remarriage could be provided through newspaper articles, magazines, and prepared lists of recommended readings for parents and children. Special workshops on issues related to stepfamily living such as the product developed by the American Guidance Association called Strengthening Stepfamilies (1986) are also suggested. Participation in a workshop on communication and/or problem solving is highly recommended, as is setting aside time each week or month to discuss family problems and solutions.

(4) This study does lend support to the fact that the
family's ability to reframe problems as perceived by the adolescent is also related positively to the quality of the relationship with his or her stepmother. Helping the family and child to develop the ability to redefine stressful events in order to make them more manageable also serves as a resource dealing with the remarriage of the child's father and subsequent addition of a stepmother. It is further recommended that the thoughts and beliefs of the adolescent be entertained regarding having a stepmother, and that negative perceptions of that event be replaced with more positive, realistic expectations.

Family life educators and therapists should be trained to help stepfamilies understand that stepfamily living often brings a larger number of people into the closeness and intimacy of sharing a common family life. This increase in close interpersonal relationships creates an abundance of opportunities to put others first, to express patience and kindness, and to learn communication and problem-solving skills. It is important to reframe these difficulties as challenges and opportunities instead of seeing them only as hassles or problems that are without purpose or benefit.

(5) This study indicates that high self-esteem for the stepmother can be a valuable resource for coping with the many changes and ambiguous social roles associated with being a stepmother. The importance of developing and maintaining a positive self-image should also be built into
programs for stepparents, as well as discussed in therapeutic settings. Balanced development, including meeting one's physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs—also can facilitate coping and adaptation skills.

(6) Recommendations for family life educators and practitioners regarding stepfamilies include providing information, training, and support for a strong couple relationship (Quick & Quick, 1986). This study lends support to the notion that a healthy, growing, flexible marriage actuated by a two-way commitment to common goals and values is the cornerstone of successful stepfamily living. In stepfamilies, the strength and health of the marital bond is particularly important. Building in regular periods for marriage-enriching activities is recommended.

(7) Family counselors need training to help them to better understand the uniqueness of stepfamily living. Negative, unrealistic attitudes and values regarding remarriage and stepfamilies need to be assessed. Family professionals should familiarize themselves with not only stepfamily characteristics and concerns, but stepfamily strengths as well.

(8) This research also suggests recommendations for family policy. Stepparents under the current family law are not provided with clear and comprehensive rules associated with their responsibilities to the stepchild (Fine, 1989). This legal ambiguity can further contribute to role strain.
There is need for legislation that is more sensitive to the legal status (or lack of, as the case may be) of stepfamily members and further consider the interplay between legal issues and parent-child relationship and adjustments in stepfamilies.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL
Research Involving Human Subjects

ACTION OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

With regard to the employment of human subjects in the proposed research protocol:

86B0152 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS RELATED TO THE QUALITY OF THE STEPMOTHER-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP, Patrick C. McKenry, Barbara M. Newman, Donna S. Quick, Family Relations and Human Development

THE BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES REVIEW COMMITTEE HAS TAKEN THE FOLLOWING ACTION:

- APPROVED
- DISAPPROVED
- X APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS*
- WAIVER OF WRITTEN CONSENT GRANTED

* Conditions stated by the Committee have been met by the Investigator and, therefore, the protocol is APPROVED.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to retain a copy of each signed consent form for at least four (4) years beyond the termination of the subject's participation in the proposed activity. Should the principal investigator leave the University, signed consent forms are to be transferred to the Human Subjects Review Committee for the required retention period. This application has been approved for the period of one year. You are reminded that you must promptly report any problems to the Review Committee, and that no procedural changes may be made without prior review and approval. You are also reminded that the identity of the research participants must be kept confidential.

Date: November 7, 1986
Signed: [Signature]
(Chairperson)

HS-025B (Rev. 3/85)
APPENDIX B

LETTER SENT TO SUBJECTS
Dear [Name],

We would like to invite you, your current spouse and your oldest adolescent (step)child (living in the home or visiting regularly) to participate in a study of stepparent, natural parent and adolescent relationships. We are trying to get a better understanding of the way stepparents, natural parents and adolescent children relate to one another as the children grow up. We are interested in your ideas, feelings, and reactions to questions about the quality of the relationship with your adolescent (step)children. The study will require your participation in a paper and pencil questionnaire that will take about one hour. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. We simply want to know your views. The questionnaire will take place in your home at your convenience.

Your answers will be completely confidential. Some of the questions may be sensitive and you are free to not answer any you so choose. We believe that the information that is gathered from this study will be of great value in helping stepparents, natural parents and adolescent (step)children to understand those factors that are important in successful family life during the adolescent years. One of the members of our research team will be calling you soon to find out if you might be interested in participating in our research. Please feel free to contact Donna Quick (292-9430) if you have further questions about the project.

A similar letter is also being sent to your oldest adolescent (step)child. If one of the family members does not agree to participate, the other family members will not be questioned.

Sincerely,

Patrick C. McKenry
Professor and Acting Chairperson
Department of Family Relations
and Human Development

Donna S. Quick
Graduate Research Associate
Department of Family Relations
and Human Development
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in (or my child’s participation in) research entitled:
Divorce and the Transition to Remarriage

explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my (my child’s) participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am (my child is) free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me (my child). The information obtained from me (my child) will remain confidential unless I specifically agree otherwise by placing my initials here _______.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ________________  Signed: ________________  (Participant)

Signed: ________________  (Principal Investigator or his/her Authorized Representative)

Signed: ________________  (Person Authorized to Consent for Participant - If Required)

Witness: ________________

HS-027 (Rev. 10-81) — To be used only in connection with social and behavioral research.
APPENDIX D

EXPLANATION OF CONTINGENCY TABLE
The contingency table was based on a recoded communication variable for stepmothers and children. The first step was to create an additive index of communication by summing the 20 single item communication variables for the stepmother and the child individually. Possible scores on each index (one for the stepmother and one for the child) ranged from 20-100. The second step entailed recoding this index so that scoring from 20-40 were coded category 1, indicating poor communication. Scores from 41-60 were coded category 2, indicating poor communication overall with some positive aspects. Scores from 61-79 were coded category 3, indicating more positive statements regarding communication than negative. Scores from 80-100 were coded category 4, indicating overall positive comments regarding communication and relationship quality. Given these ranges, if a specific case scored between 20-40, for example, for both the stepmother's additive index of communication and the child's additive index of communication, than that dyad was placed in category 1 and considered in agreement on the quality of communication. Using these recoded variables, the Chi square was 17.6, df = 9, p = .04, indicating a significant relationship between the recoded stepmother communication index and the child's recoded communication index. Pearson correlation for these two indices was .25 (Gamma = .28) p = .04.
LIST OF REFERENCES


