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DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH STEPPARENTING AS PREDICTORS OF
REMARITAL SATISFACTION AND ADJUSTMENT

by

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An Honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Honors distinction

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

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ABSTRACT

As a result of high divorce and remarriage rates, stepfamilies have become commonplace in society. Researchers and clinicians have suggested that stepchildren can positively and negatively affect remarriage quality. Despite the increasing literature on stepfamilies, few studies have comparatively researched specific stepparenting difficulties as they affect marital satisfaction. Utilizing a sample of newlyweds, this study examines fourteen stepparenting related issues, as measured by the stepparenting subscale of the Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies, and their relationship to marital satisfaction and adjustment.

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Difficulties Associated with Stepparenting as Predictors
of Remarital Satisfaction and Adjustment

INTRODUCTION

Stepfamilies are becoming increasingly common in society. The national divorce rate has rested between 40 and 50% for nearly a quarter of a century (Schoen & Canudas-Romo, 2006) and nearly half of all U.S. marriages are remarriages for one or both partners (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Further, it is estimated that one out of three children under 18 will live in a stepfamily arrangement before their 18th birthday (Malia, 2005). These data are compelling evidence of a change in family structures, and, consequently, family life, on a national level.

Despite the prevalence of stepfamilies, societal norms and legislation are relatively absent regarding stepfamilies' roles and obligations (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Mahoney, 2005). For decades scholars have posited that stepparents can be affected by this ambiguity and may show increased conflict and stress as a result (Schwebel, Fine, & Renner, 1991; Cherlin, 1978). In light of recent research, it has been suggested that the stepparent-stepchild bond is key to remarriage satisfaction and success (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). However, few, if any comparative studies exist on specific stepparenting issues as they predict marital satisfaction and adjustment. Utilizing a newlywed sample, this study seeks to fill a gap in the extant literature and identify which stepparenting issues are most predictive of marital satisfaction and adjustment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The presence or absence of stepchildren has been noted to affect marital satisfaction (Ceballo, Lansford, Abbey, & Stewart, 2004; Kurdek, 1989; White & Booth, 1985). Although there is some reason to believe that, just as in biological families, the addition of stepchildren into a remarriage may impact marriage quality (Ceballo et al., 2004), many researchers believe it is the difficulties that come from the ambiguity and stress associated with the stepparent role that determines whether stepchildren positively or negatively affect the satisfaction of the remarriage. For example, Kurdek (1989) notes:

The evidence regarding the negative impact that stepchildren have on relationship quality primarily concerns problems related to the ambiguity of the stepparent role. This ambiguity may result in problems in the remarriage – for example, negative and coercive family interactions, ineffective communication, problems in exercising discipline, the biological parent's attempting to please the new spouse and the children, the children's resenting yet another change in family structure and family functioning and discord in the family system. (p. 1054)

Even the earliest research on remarriage satisfaction pointed to ambiguities in the stepfamily role as a key factor in marital satisfaction (see Cherlin, 1978). As Cherlin notes, there are well defined roles and boundaries within biological families that traditional families usually adhere to. However, such cannot be said of stepfamilies. For example, when a stepchild misbehaves it is not well established through society who should discipline the child or what rights/obligations the stepparent has toward disciplining the misbehaving child. Does the stepparent have the prerogative to discipline

the child even though there is no biological relation? Or should this be reserved for the biological parents only, whether residential or nonresidential? Even legislation is relatively absent regarding stepfamilies' roles and obligations (Mahoney, 2005).

Because there are ambiguous boundaries and roles within stepfamilies over even something as common as discipline, Cherlin (1978) dubbed stepfamilies an incomplete institution. Cherlin believed that there is a considerable amount of stress within stepfamilies and especially among stepparents as a result of these uncertain boundaries and roles. Recent research has supported Cherlin's position. Schwebel, Fine, & Renner (1991) randomly assigned a questionnaire with vignettes to participants. The vignettes were of problematic situations families face. The same vignettes were given to participants except for the main character of the story. Stepparents', biological parents', and adoptive parents' roles were manipulated in the vignettes in order to discover which role had greatest variance and ambiguity. The participants responded according to what the character in the story should do, would do, and what the character can do. The researchers found that the questions regarding stepparent roles had the greatest variance. That is, there was less agreement in what the role of the stepparent was in the given situation in comparison to the biological parent and the adoptive parent. The researchers also found variations in the way respondents answered how the stepparents 'should' and 'would' respond. Schwebel, Fine, & Renner conclude that stepparents are forced to be guided through (step)parenthood with the lack of conventional wisdom usually afforded biological families. Increased conflict and stress was posited as a likely result of the uncertain norms and ambiguous roles of stepparents.

Additional research has found that the specific attributes of the stepparent-stepchild relationship may hinder or help a marital relationship (Bray & Kelly, 1998; Crosbie-Burnett, 1984). Indeed, the stepchild relationship plays a pivotal role in remarriage satisfaction (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Hetherington and Kelly (2002) explain:

In first marriages, a satisfying marital relationship is the cornerstone of happy family life leading to more positive parent-child relationships and more congenial sibling relationships. In many stepfamilies, the sequence is reversed. Establishing some kind of workable relationship between stepparents and stepchildren...may be the key to a happy second marriage. (p. 181)

Using a national sample, Rogers and White (1998) find that parents with only their own biological children report significantly higher marital satisfaction than parents with stepchildren. Of interesting note is that also in their research the change in family structure does not significantly change the satisfaction in parenting. It follows, then, that there may be extra variables not being accounted for in research other than the dichotomous variable of being in a stepfamily or not that may help or hinder marital satisfaction. This may include the stress, ambiguity, and difficulties regarding stepparenting roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Rogers and White conclude:

Although multiple interpretations may be placed on the strong empirical correlation between these two family outcomes, for the most part scholars have happiness as the driving force and given little weight to the possibility that parenting experiences can have independent effects on marital quality. Given the

high salience of the parental role and the power of parenthood to shape life experiences, this assumption of one way causality seems premature. (pp. 293-294)

Although there have been some studies which examine specific difficulties that stepfamilies may face (e.g. Cherlin, 1978; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Bray & Kelly, 1998) more research needs to be done to investigate how specific stepparenting issues may hinder the marital satisfaction of remarried parents. As of yet, there has been no comparative study of common stepparenting issues to determine which are the most potent predictors of marital satisfaction.

The current study seeks to compare the fourteen items on the Stepparenting Subscale (subscale 4) of the Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies (QCS) (Beaudry, Parent, Saint-Jacques, Guay, & Boisvert, 2001) to established instruments of marital satisfaction and adjustment. The QCS is the only known validated instrument that measures specific difficulties associated with stepfamily life. Although a plethora of research has compared marital satisfaction of remarried couples to first married couples, these studies have focused mainly on instruments of marital satisfaction without seeking to comparatively investigate the unique difficulties within stepfamilies that may be contributive to marital satisfaction and adjustment. Ganong and Coleman (2004) report common difficult issues found through clinical works on stepchildren and group them into five broad categories: Incomplete Institution, Emotional Responses, Family Dynamics, Transitional Adjustments, and Stepfamily Expectations. All of the QCS questions can be grouped into one of these five categories. Consequently, the hypotheses for which difficulties will be most predictive of marital quality are presented in light of Ganong and Coleman's five categories.

HYPOTHESES

Incomplete Institution

Cherlin (1978) hypothesized 30 years ago that the lack of norms within stepfamilies and among society may be a strong cause of stepfamily instability. Schwebel, Fine, & Renner (1991) find that increased stress in a marital dyad is a likely result of these ambiguous roles as well. In light of this research, it is hypothesized that 'clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent' (question 36 on QCS) will also be among one of the top predictors of marital satisfaction and adjustment.

Emotional responses

'Establishing a relationship of trust with my spouse's children' (question 38 on the QCS) will be a highly significant factor in determining marital satisfaction. According to (MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996), parental "feeling" is more likely to be felt towards biological children than towards stepchildren. This level of attachment reached by biological families is often obtained through the trials faced together as a family (especially through a divorce) and the duration of time knowing each other. It is likely that a relationship of trust will be harder to establish with relatively new stepchildren and therefore will cause marital adjustment and satisfaction problems.

Family Dynamics

'Disciplining my spouse's children' (question 39 of the QCS) will be among the highest predictors of marital satisfaction and adjustment. Of the specific things Cherlin (1978) investigated, one of the most common problems that stepfamilies reported alike was disciplining stepchildren.

Research finds that mothers experience difficulties in parenting shortly after remarriage but after a while, their parenting styles resemble those of mothers in first marriages (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Henderson & Taylor, 1999; Bray & Berger, 1993). Because this sample is utilizing a longitudinal study beginning with the newlywed stage, it is hypothesized that this difficulty will likely be reported as well.

Transitional Adjustments

Because the current study has newlywed participants, it stands to reason that especially in the first months of marriage that transitional adjustments will be difficult issues especially as roles and boundaries are being established between spouses and between (step)children. Additionally, in light of MacDonald's and Demaris' (1996) research which supposes that parental "feeling" is more likely to be felt towards biological children than stepchildren, it is hypothesized that 'showing affection to my spouse's children (question 51 on the QCS) will be among the top items on the QCS' stepparenting subscale that is highly associated with marital satisfaction and adjustment.

Stepfamily expectations

As mentioned earlier, ambiguous roles have been shown to create conflict in stepfamilies (Cherlin, 1978). As a result of these unclear roles, expectations of family members may be undefined causing difficulty in the stepfamily. In light of this research, it is predicted that question 36 ('clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent') is hypothesized to be a significant factor in predicting marital satisfaction and adjustment.

No question on the QCS can be categorized solely into the stepfamily expectations category. As will be seen later, many of the items can be grouped into

different categories. Question 45 ('clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent') is one of those items that can also be grouped in another category. This question is also hypothesized as a predictor of marital satisfaction and adjustment in the incomplete institution category.

Men's v. Women's responses

In addition to stepparent difficulties that may cause marital dissatisfaction, there is also reason to believe that there are gender differences in stepparent satisfaction and this may have spillover affects on marital satisfaction. Research shows that mothers are more susceptible to child-related stress than are fathers (Ross & Willigen, 1996). Other research reports this same finding (Lu, 2006; Rogers & White, 1998). Consequently, it is hypothesized that men and women will report differences in marital satisfaction. It is also hypothesized that women will report being affected more by difficult issues regarding stepparenting and will report more difficult issues than men as well.

METHODS

All 2006 marriage licenses, from 26 of Utah's 29 counties, where at least one spouse reported entering a remarriage were gathered from the Utah Department of Vital Statistics. Utah marriage licenses contain information about whether the bride and/or groom were entering a first marriage or a remarriage. Contact information of the bride and groom was collected. Using best practices in mailing survey (see Dillman, 2000), these potential participants were contacted three times and invited to fill out and return a questionnaire.

Participants

Of the 374 females and 323 males who responded to the questionnaire, 203 females and 224 males were stepparents (54% and 69% respectively). Only individuals who reported having stepchildren were included in the analyses.

Most participants were in their second marriage (approximately 54% of males and 56% of females). The next highest marriage number was first marriages. Interestingly, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of those in this sample reported entering their first marriage with someone who was entering a remarriage; specifically, 23% of the males and 21% of females reported being in their first marriage. The next most frequent number of marriages was third marriages, with 18% of males and 16% of females reporting being in a third marriage. For females, the range of the number of marriages was 1 – 9 compared to 1 - 7 for males.

The mean annual income for this group of participants was negatively skewed with the average income being \$50,000 – \$60,000. Twenty percent of this sample made over \$100,000, and 16% percent made \$60,000 - \$80,000. Range of income was from less than \$10,000 annually to over \$100,000 annually.

The mean age of the participants was 39 for men and 36 for women. Median age was 37 and 34 for men and women, respectively. Ninety-four percent of men in the study were white as were 95% of women. The remaining 6 and 5 percent were nearly evenly divided between black, Native American, Filipino and Asian.

Measures

The questionnaire contained a variety of instruments including the Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies (QCS) (Beaudry et al., 2001), the Consensus subscale of the

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) (Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larsen, 1995), and a measure of marital satisfaction (Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Conger, Whitbeck, Huck, & Melby, 1990).

The Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies (QCS; Beaudry et al., 2001). This questionnaire is used to identify problematic areas of stepfamily relations. Specifically, the scale has four subscales: (1) difficulties functioning in society as a stepfamily, (2) difficulties associated with the role of a spouse, (3) difficulties associated with the role of a parent, and (4) difficulties associated with the role of stepparent" (Beaudry et al., 2001, p. 159). The QCS has been shown to be internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha of .80 (p. 161). This project utilizes the difficulties associated with the role of a stepparent subscale (subscale 4).

The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby et al., 1995). The RDAS is "an improved version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale that can be used to evaluate dyadic adjustment in distressed and non-distressed relationships" (p. 305). It includes 16 items that are placed into three subscales that measure consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion. All responses are measured on a 5 point Likert scale. Internal consistency among the subscales has a Chronbach alpha of .90 and split half reliability of .94. This study utilizes the consensus subscale which consists of 6 items (e.g., How often do you and your spouse agree on making major decisions).

Marital Satisfaction (Conger et al., 1990). This study used a two item instrument to investigate marital satisfaction. The instrument distinguishes the individuals' satisfaction with the relationship and the individuals' satisfaction with the current marriage. Specifically, the questions are: (a) How happy are you with your marriage and

(b) How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse. The responses range on a seven point Likert scale from 'Extremely unhappy/dissatisfied' to 'Extremely happy/satisfied.'

RESULTS

Simple descriptive statistics were run in order to see the frequency of the difficult issues that were most reported by men and women (see tables 1 and 2). Mean scores were calculated to gain a rudimentary understanding of the level of difficulty the participants of the study had with any particular issue. Additionally, standard deviation scores were calculated in order to gain an approximate idea of how similar respondents were on the level of difficulty with the issues. These scores were run for the women and men separately and then compared. Stepwise regression was utilized to determine the most significant stepparent difficulties, as measured by the QCS, as they predict marital satisfaction and adjustment.

Descriptive Statistics

The highest reported difficulty for the men was question 39 ('disciplining my spouse's children'; $M = 1.72$). However, this question also had the greatest variance of the men's scores with an SD of 1.17. The questions that were found to be significantly predictive of marital satisfaction and adjustment (i.e. questions 41, 42 & 44) were the fourth, fifth, and sixth lowest frequency scores reported (see tables 1 & 2).

The highest reported difficulty for the women was question 40 ('feeling I have my place in the family'; $M = 1.88$). However, this question was not a statistically significant predictor of marital satisfaction or adjustment. Just like the men's scores, none of the significant predictors were reported as having the most difficulty on average.

Marital satisfaction as predicted by stepparent difficulties

Marital satisfaction was regressed onto the fourteen questions of the stepparent subscale of the Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies (QCS) using stepwise regression analyses. Analyses were run for men and women respondents separately in order to determine which of the significant issues (if any) are specific to gender and which are shared by both genders.

Of the QCS questions, only two were statistically significant in predicting marital satisfaction for men. The questions were numbers 42 and 44 ('feeling my spouse's support when I deal with his or her children', and 'making direct requests to my spouse's children without using him or her as an intermediary' respectively). Combined R^2 for the model was .123.

In comparison, of the fourteen questions of the QCS five were predictive of marital satisfaction for women: questions 45, 52, 46, 43 and 48 ('accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined', 'accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children', 'living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than mine', 'dealing with the negative feelings my spouse's children have for their mother or father', and 'accepting the negative feelings I have for my spouse's children's father or mother' respectively). Combined R^2 for the model was .243.

Interestingly, none of the significant items were shared by both sexes (see tables 3 & 4). Additionally, women reported experiencing more difficult issues that were statistically significant predictors of marital dissatisfaction than did men. Women's

reported difficulties with stepparent issues also explained more variance in predicting marital dissatisfaction than men.

Marital adjustment as predicted by stepparent difficulties

Next, marital adjustment was measured by the consensus subscale of the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS). The consensus subscale consists of six questions that measures couples' agreement in regards to decision making, values, and affection. Again, males' and females' responses were separated in order to determine which (if any) difficulties are specific to gender, and which are shared by both genders. Stepwise regressions were used to predict scores on the RDAS by scores on the stepparent subscale of the QCS.

The QCS questions were used to predict marital adjustment scores of men and women using stepwise regression analyses. Again, men's and women's analyses were run separately in order to discover which difficulties (if any) were specific to men, which (if any) were specific to women, and which (if any) were shared. $R^2 = .066$.

For men, only one stepparenting issue was retained in the model to predict marital adjustment: question 41 ('adapting myself to my spouse's children's schedule with regards to custody and visits') (see table 4). For women, three stepparenting difficulties predicted marital adjustment: questions 36, 45, and 52 ('clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent', 'accepting that my family is different from that which I imagined', and 'accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children' respectively). The combined R^2 for marital adjustment was higher than the men's at $R^2 = .106$. None of the significant difficulties reported by the men were also significant for the women. Two of the three items reported

as significant difficulties of marital adjustment for men were also reported as difficulties of marital satisfaction for women (i.e. questions 36 and 45, 'clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent', and 'accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined', respectively).

Difficulties associated with stepparenting were more predictive of marital satisfaction than adjustment. R^2 values for adjustment were lower in comparison to satisfaction (i.e. men's satisfaction = .123 and women's satisfaction R^2 = .243 compared to men's adjustment R^2 = 0.66 and women's adjustment R^2 = .106). Difficult stepparent issues were also more predictive of women's marital satisfaction and adjustment than men's marital satisfaction and adjustment.

Male v. Female differences

As hypothesized, women reported more difficult issues regarding stepchildren than did the men in the study. This was true for adjustment as well as marital satisfaction. Women's reports of difficult issues were also more predictive of marital satisfaction and adjustment. In both cases, women had significantly higher R^2 scores than the men. Surprisingly, none of the hypothesized significant difficult issues were confirmed in the results for either the women or the men.

DISCUSSION

Only one of the QCS items that were hypothesized to be a difficult issue was predictive of marital satisfaction. However, the items that were found to be significant fit into the same categories as the hypothesized items – specifically, difficulties related to stepfamilies as an incomplete institution, and issues of transitional adjustments, emotional responses, family dynamics, and stepfamily expectations. In addition to the

categories that were most predictive of marital satisfaction, the specific items that were reported as significant predictors are also important to guide professionals in the human services field and direct future research in these areas.

Question 36 ('clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent') was the only question that was hypothesized to be a difficulty and found to be reported as such in the results. Only women, however, reported this as a significant difficult issue. Men also reported a difficult issue that deals with ambiguous roles in stepfamilies. Men reported difficulties of 'making direct requests to my spouse's children without using him or her as an intermediary' (question 44). Especially when first married, this may be due to ambiguous boundaries and the father not knowing his expectations and prerogatives in his new role and may lean on his spouse when making requests. Each of these items relate to ambiguous roles as a stepparent.

Most of the responses reported as statistically significant for both men and women can fit into Ganong and Coleman's (2004) transitional adjustment category; specifically, questions 41, 52, and 46 ('adapting myself to my spouse's children's schedule with regards to custody and visits', 'accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children', and 'living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than mine, respectively'). Even questions 44 and 36 ('making direct requests to my spouse's children without using him/her as an intermediary', and 'clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent', respectively) may be seen as transitional adjustments. Since the participants are still newlyweds, this stands to reason that issues of transitional adjustment will be reported more frequently than any other issue. As couples become acquainted with a new family and new lifestyles, just as

any newly wed couple would, this may be compounded by the addition of stepchildren and ambiguous familial boundaries.

Although the participants, both men and women, were similar in reporting that issues of transitional adjustments are more common at this stage, comparatively, the next most reported difficult issues were in the realms of emotional responses for women and family dynamic issues for men. Women reported items 43, 48, and 45 ('Dealing with negative feelings my spouse's children have for their mother/father', 'accepting the negative feelings I have for my spouse's children's mother/father', and 'accepting that my family is different from that which I imagined') as difficult issues. Interestingly, two of the three items deal directly with the presence of the husband's ex-spouse and the other deals with personal expectations. This may mean that women, along with dealing with more practical, transitional adjustment difficulties, are also experiencing internal issues such as the presence of their spouse's ex-wife in their relationship and accepting their new life in a stepfamily. The failed fantasy of meeting Mr. Right and living 'happily ever after' in their first marriage may now be coming more to mind as the difficult issues of being in a stepfamily are compounded with the common issues of a biological family as well. As seen in this study, issues surrounding the husband's ex-spouse are seen as difficult by the wife also. These issues may include: co-parenting (as it were), competing for the love and attention of the children, jealousy, and insecurity with ones' self - just to name a few.

Suggestions for future research

Very few studies on the presence of stepchildren as it effects marital satisfaction are longitudinal. Especially in light of the results of this research, this is important to investigate in order to understand the changing dynamics of stepfamilies over time.

Many studies that investigate the presence or absence of stepchildren as it affects marital satisfaction do not investigate specific stressors or difficulties (see Cherlin, 1978; Kurdek, 1989, White & Booth, 1985; Guttman & Lazaar, 2004; Carlson & McLanahan, 2006). More studies need to be done that investigate the dynamics in stepfamilies and how they affect marital satisfaction. Studies that give more attention to these difficulties may give more reliable results than previous research that has investigated only the presence or absence of stepchildren per se.

One arena where the majority of research varies greatly is the sample and the methods. For example, some researchers have controlled for the time spent together as a couple cohabitating (e.g., Kurdek, 1989), others have controlled for the amount of time in marriage only (e.g., White & Booth, 1985). Each of these types of couples may give different reports and consequently different results. It may be requisite for researchers to be more aware of and meticulously filter out respondents who do not fit their research needs (e.g. investigating divorcees in remarriages instead of widowers in remarriages) thus making results more generalizable to the population in question. This may be difficult, however, considering the many different stepfamily types and their situations.

Ishii-Kuntz and Ihinger-Tallman's (2001) research reports that biological families have greater parental satisfaction than stepparents. These researchers investigated three types of couples (i.e. biological family couples, remarried biological parents, and

stepparents). Their research showed that there was no significant difference in marital satisfaction of any of the three types of couples. There was no statistically significant difference in marital satisfaction whether the wife brought children into the remarriage or the husband. In light of Ishii-Kuntz and Ihinger-Tallman's (1991) research, individuals in couples may compartmentalize their family life satisfaction from their married life satisfaction and from their global life satisfaction. Remarried couples reported a higher marital satisfaction than family satisfaction and of those who are remarried 15% will divorce within three years and 25% within five years (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). If marital satisfaction is high and re-divorce rates are also high, it is probable that marital satisfaction is not a key reason for re-divorce. As a result, more consideration may need to be given to family life satisfaction issues of remarried couples. As was shown in this study, stepparenting difficulties were predictive of marital satisfaction. As family life satisfaction issues such as stepparenting satisfaction increases, it is likely that marital satisfaction will also increase.

Finally, instruments used to investigate biological families may not cross over to measure stepfamilies as well. The intent of their design may not be sensitive to stepfamily specifics. Research has shown that individuals in stepfamilies/remarriages may give different weight to various arenas of family life in comparison to their biological family counterparts (e.g. Guttman & Lazar, 2004; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995). With this in mind, when investigating stepfamilies, it may not be as effective to use instruments that are designed and/or have only been tested for first married couples. Although remarriage research has improved over the last two decades, many of the research articles still rely on social science instruments that have not been validated for

their sensitivity to remarriages (e.g. Ceballo et al., 2004; Carlson & McLanahan, 2006). As mentioned previously, the QCS was the only instrument found that is designed to measure stepfamily-specific difficulties although stepfamily research has been going on long before its invention. Even the QCS needs replication and verification. A call should be made for more instruments designed to measure issues related to stepfamilies and remarriages in order to perform more empirical research.

One of the limitations of this study was the demographical differences between this sample and the generalizable population in regards to race and income. Because of this limitation, more research is needed on minority populations. It may be that those who are divorced and remarried have higher income and are not usually of a minority group. However, before this can be ascertained, more research needs to be done investigating this.

Implications for practitioners

As this study shows, the majority of the difficult issues faced by these remarried couples deal with transitional adjustment. This is especially true for women. Because of the nature of the transitional adjustments reported, it is likely that they may be typical of (but not specific to) newlyweds (e.g. men reported difficulty adapting to children's schedule with regards to custody and visitation; women reported difficulties accepting additional domestic tasks for their stepchildren, and living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than their own). Because the first years of marriage is when the boundaries are often set and the overall rules and expectations for the family are created, it may be the successful resolution of these difficult transitions that 'make or break' the satisfaction of the marriage – at least for the (step)mother. Practitioners who

counsel remarried couples should be mindful of the stage of the development of the stepfamily and help the couples adjust to these transitions accordingly. It may be helpful for couples to express the expected boundaries and rules for their stepfamily and negotiate when differences arise.

In addition to transitional adjustments, women are almost as likely to be dealing with emotional response issues regarding their remarriage and their stepfamily situation. This study indicates that women's highest reported stepparenting difficulty was 'accepting the negative feelings I have for my spouse's children's father or mother.' There are many reasons that a spouse may have difficulty adjusting to the presence of their partner's ex-spouse. These reasons may range from jealousy, to the continued influence of the ex-spouse on the children, etc. Because of the internal nature of these difficulties, practitioners may want to identify these specific issues with the couple that the wife has difficulties with in regards to her husband's ex-spouse in order to make both partners aware of the issues and quell any concerns that either may have. Additionally, new rules may need to be set within the marriage that do not mimic the rules of the previous marriage. Establishing new rules with the (step)children, both residential and non, may help form a family identity that is unique to the stepfamily. This may aide in identifying and setting transitional adjustment boundaries as mentioned earlier.

The next highest difficulty reported by women was coping with the idea of having a family different than that which was imagined. Because stepfamilies are still stigmatized in western society (Ganong & Coleman, 2004), there may be a feeling of inferiority or shame that women are more sensitive to than men. There may also be a feeling of failure from the first marriage and even a feeling that remarriages are

inherently inferior to first marriages. Practitioners may want to normalize stepfamily life to the couple and help them set new goals for their family that excite and satisfy the couple. This may help identify and quell any unrealistic expectations or stigmas that couples may have about their stepfamily.

Men's most difficult issues were also related to transitional adjustment. Although the models were not as predictive as the women's, there are still implications for practitioners. All of the transitional adjustment issues dealt specifically with the schedules of, or dealing with the stepchildren. Many of the practices mentioned for helping women in transitional adjustments could apply for men too. However, since they are mostly about practicalities surrounding their stepchildren (e.g. adapting to custody visits), the practitioner may want to focus specifically on practical methods.

It is important to note that of the three items that were found to be predictive, the one that was reported to be most difficult for men was regarding family dynamics: 'feeling support from my spouse when dealing with his/her children.' Though there was no opportunity in the questionnaire for examples of this to be given, these issues may include such difficulties as the wife not enforcing her spouse's rules and/or disagreeing with her spouse when decisions are made regarding her children.

Because there is a difference in the specific difficulties of men and women in remarriages, practitioners would do well to be more gender-conscious in counseling remarried couples - especially when addressing specifics. In addition to counseling couples together, it may even be beneficial to make a separate appointment with each of the couple to advise them separately in order to address gender-specific issues more thoroughly.

CONCLUSION

Difficult issues with stepparenting were shown to be significantly predictive of marital satisfaction and adjustment. Three specific difficulties were found to be predictive of marital satisfaction and adjustment for men and six were found to be predictive for women. Although the specific items hypothesized to be predictive turned out to be non-significant, when grouped categorically, at least one item from each category were found to be significant.

Men and women in remarriages are likely to experience the same category of marital difficulties with their stepfamilies. The most frequently reported difficulties by men and women categorically were in the realm of transitional adjustments. Although this may be expected from the newlywed sample, the specific difficulties reported may be valuable information for practitioners counseling stepfamilies in any stage of development. The next highest category of difficulties was different for men and women. Women reported difficulty with issues regarding emotional responses, and men reported difficult issues regarding family dynamics.

Men and women reported no specific issues that were the same. This may help practitioners even more as they counsel couples by knowing what issues men are likely to experience in comparison to women. Because this study investigated newlyweds, these results may be typical of adjusting families. As these families progress developmentally, these responses may change.

As a result of these findings, practitioners who counsel remarried couples may want to give more attention to the clients' stepparent-stepchild relations. Additionally, because men and women reported the difficult issues in the same category it may be

possible to counsel the couple together with relative success. However, because men and women reported different specific difficult issues, it may be necessary to be gender-conscious when counseling.

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TABLES

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of men's scores on the QCS

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
36. Clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent.	203	1	5	1.57	0.97
37. Dealing with the presence of the father or mother of my spouse's children and his or her family.	200	1	5	1.63	1.06
38. Establishing a relationship of trust with my spouse's children	203	1	5	1.62	0.96
39. Disciplining my spouse's children.	199	1	5	1.72	1.17
40. Feeling I have 'my' place in the family	202	1	5	1.49	0.90
41. Adapting myself to my children's schedule with regards to custody and visit.	197	1	5	1.33	0.78
42. Feeling my spouse's support when I deal with his or her children	201	1	5	1.48	0.97
43. Dealing with the negative feelings my spouse's children have for their father or mother.	200	1	5	1.37	0.81
44. Making direct requests to my spouse's children without using him or her as an intermediary.	199	1	5	1.37	0.81
45. Accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined.	200	1	5	1.46	0.84
46. Living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than mine.	196	1	5	1.45	0.91
47. Accepting the positive feelings I have for my spouse's children.	201	1	5	1.19	0.54
48. Accepting the negative feelings I have for my spouse's children's father or mother.	198	1	5	1.42	0.84
49. Knowing how to react when my spouse's children express negative feelings about me.	201	1	5	1.23	0.62
50. Knowing what to do when my spouse's children express negative feelings about me.	200	1	5	1.54	0.92
51. Showing affection to my spouse's children	200	1	5	1.54	0.96
52. Accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children.	198	1	5	1.42	0.87

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of women's scores on the QCS

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
36. Clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent.	220	1	5	1.55	0.87
37. Dealing with the presence of the father or mother of my spouse's children and his or her family.	217	1	5	1.87	1.27
38. Establishing a relationship of trust with my spouse's children	222	1	5	1.84	1.18
39. Disciplining my spouse's children.	214	1	5	1.83	1.29
40. Feeling I have 'my' place in the family	224	1	5	1.88	1.25
41. Adapting myself to my children's schedule with regards to custody and visit.	211	1	5	1.42	0.89
42. Feeling my spouse's support when I deal with his or her children	219	1	5	1.63	1.09
43. Dealing with the negative feelings my spouse's children have for their father or mother.	217	1	5	1.47	0.99
44. Making direct requests to my spouse's children without using him or her as an intermediary.	218	1	5	1.76	1.24
45. Accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined.	219	1	5	1.63	1.10
46. Living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than mine.	214	1	5	1.70	1.14
47. Accepting the positive feelings I have for my spouse's children.	218	1	5	1.22	0.67
48. Accepting the negative feelings I have for my spouse's children's father or mother.	216	1	5	1.75	1.19
49. Knowing how to react when my spouse's children express negative feelings about me.	220	1	5	1.20	0.61
50. Knowing what to do when my spouse's children express negative feelings about me.	221	1	5	1.72	1.10
51. Showing affection to my spouse's children	220	1	5	1.65	1.04
52. Accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children.	219	1	5	1.55	0.98

Table 3

Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting marital satisfaction for individuals with stepchildren

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Men*			
42. Feeling my spouses support when dealing with his/her children.	-0.772	0.168	-0.319
44. Making direct requests to my spouse's children without using him/her as an intermediary.	-0.528	0.252	-0.174
Women**			
45. Accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined.	-0.918	0.151	-0.395
52. Accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children.	0.425	0.192	0.163
46. Living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than mine.	-0.461	0.183	-0.207
43. Dealing with the negative feelings my spouse's children have for their mother/father.	0.361	0.172	0.141
48. Accepting the negative feelings I have for my spouse's children's mother or father.	-0.403	0.159	-0.195

Note: All variables shown were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

* R^2 for men's model = .123.

** R^2 for women's model = .243.

Table 4

Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting adjustment for individuals with stepchildren

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Men*			
41. Adapting myself to my spouse's children's schedule with regards to custody and visits	-1.503	0.415	-0.256
Women**			
36. Clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent	-1.36	0.376	-0.247
45. Accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined	-0.676	0.322	-0.151
52. Accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children	0.992	0.422	0.197

Note: All variables shown were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

* R^2 for men's model = .066.

** R^2 for women's model = .106.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

QCS Stepparenting Subscale as given to respondents

11d. Below are a number of issues that may be experienced by STEPPARENTS*. If you are NOT a stepparent (i.e., your spouse does NOT have children from previous relationships) please skip these questions. Please indicate the difficulty YOU experience with:

	1	2	3	4	5
	No current difficulty	Currently experiencing a low level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a moderate level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a moderate to high level	Currently experiencing a high level of difficulty
36	Clearly understanding my spouse's expectations with regards to my role as a stepparent				
37	Dealing with the presence of the father or mother of my spouse's children and his or her family				
38	Establishing a relationship of trust with my spouse's children				
39	Disciplining my spouse's children				
40	Feeling I have "my" place in the family				
41	Adapting myself to my spouse's children's schedule with regards to custody and visits				
42	Feeling my spouse's support when I deal with his or her children				
43	Dealing with the negative feelings my spouse's children have for their mother or father				
44	Making direct requests to my spouse's children without using him or her as an intermediary				
45	Accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined				
46	Living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than mine				
47	Accepting the positive feelings I have for my spouse's children				
48	Accepting the negative feelings I have for my spouse's children's father or mother				
49	Knowing how to react when my spouse's children express positive feelings about me				
50	Knowing what to do when my spouse's children express negative feelings about me				
51	Showing affection to my spouse's children				
52	Accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse's children				

Appendix B

Consensus subscale of RDAS as given to respondents

10. Do you and your spouse disagree or agree on:		Almost Always disagree	Frequently Disagree	Equally Agree/Disagree	Frequently Agree	Almost Always Agree
i ₁	Religious matters	①	②	③	④	⑤
i ₂	Demonstrations of affection	①	②	③	④	⑤
i ₃	Making major decisions	①	②	③	④	⑤
i ₄	Sex relations	①	②	③	④	⑤
i ₅	Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	①	②	③	④	⑤
i ₆	Career decisions	①	②	③	④	⑤

Appendix C

Marital satisfaction scale as given to respondents

6. Regarding your current marriage...	Extremely Unhappy/ Dissatisfied	Very Unhappy/ Dissatisfied	Somewhat Unhappy/ Dissatisfied	Mixed	Somewhat Happy/ Satisfied	Very Happy/ Satisfied	Extremely Happy/ Satisfied
a. How happy are you with your marriage?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
b. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

Appendix D

IRB approval

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD OFFICE
9530 Old Main Hill
Military Science Room 216
Logan UT 84322-9530
Telephone: (435) 797-1821
FAX: (435) 797-3769

10/4/2006

SPO #:
AES #: UTA00980

MEMORANDUM

TO: Brian Higginbotham
Aaron I. Anderson

FROM: True M. Rubal-Fox, IRB Administrator

SUBJECT: Relationship Quality and Stability in Rural Newlywed Remarriages: The Remarriage Quality and Stability Study

Your proposal has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board and is approved under expedite procedure #7.

- X There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file for the period of one year. If your study extends beyond this approval period, you must contact this office to request an annual review of this research. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the Board prior to implementation. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board.

Prior to involving human subjects, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each subject or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after the project ends. Each subject must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for their personal records.

The research activities listed below are expedited from IRB review based on the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human research subjects, 45 CFR Part 46, as amended to include provisions of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, November 9, 1998.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Aaron Anderson was born in Ogden, Utah in the summer of 1981. He was raised on a small farm in Bear River City, Utah where his favorite past times were restoring classic cars and singing in local choirs. Aaron graduated from Bear River High School in June of 1999 with an emphasis in Fine Arts. Shortly after graduating from high school, he served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in London, England. Upon returning from his mission in the fall of 2002, he enrolled at Utah State University studying Family, Consumer and Human Development. Although not admitted to the university at first, as a result of poor academic achievement in high school, Aaron soon caught the study bug and began an enriching academic career.

Academically, Aaron has served in various positions for clubs at USU including Vice President and then as President for the Marriage and Family Therapy Student Association. He also served as a Communications board member for the Students of Family, Consumer and Human Development. Aaron was also a Dean's List member twice in a row for Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 semester.

Aaron began his research career after he met Dr. Brian Higginbotham during a department colloquium in the fall of 2005 where Dr. Higginbotham was presenting on remarriage research in the state of Utah. He began working as a volunteer for Dr. Higginbotham and then as a research assistant assisting in a variety of projects. As a result of this opportunity, Aaron has been the recipient of the Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities grant as well as the Undergraduate Researcher of the Year award for the College of Education and Human Services.

Aaron will graduate from Utah State University in Summer 2007 with a Bachelor's degree in Family, Consumer and Human development with an emphasis in Family and Community Services. After graduation he will pursue a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Afterwards, he intends to further his academic career by pursuing a Doctorate degree at a reputable university.