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RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE BEHAVIORS AND MARITAL STABILITY IN  
REMARRIAGE: THE EXAMINATION OF STEPFAMILY CONSTELLATIONS  
AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

by

Ron C. Bean

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Psychology

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2019

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## ABSTRACT

Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Marital Stability in Remarriage: The  
Examination of Stepfamily Constellations and Associated Challenges

by

Ron C. Bean, Ph.D.

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D.

Department: Psychology

Understanding contemporary stepfamily life requires investigation of new and diverse variables. This collection of two studies, using dyadic relationship data from 879 newlywed couples, described patterns of stepfamily constellations (based on whether partners had children from previous relationships) and how these constellations relate to relationship maintenance behaviors, and difficulties associated with stepfamily life,.

The roles of relationship maintenance behaviors (positivity, negativity, and sexual interest) in marital stability were explored first using a multi-member multi-group actor-partner interdependence model. Wives reported higher marital instability and positivity. Marital instability was positively correlated with spouses own and partners' negativity ratings for both husbands and wives. It was inversely correlated with their own and partners' ratings of positivity and sexual interest. Restated, the marital instability of the partners with children was positively associated with their spouses' negativity.

The second study investigated stepfamily life difficulties (e.g., Social and family dimension, Role of the spouse, Role of the parent, Role of the stepparent), as they relate

to marital instability. Wives reported higher marital instability and difficulties associated with being a parent and a stepparent across constellations. Strain in the social and family dimension and spouse role difficulties was lower in both husbands and wives in remarriages without children. Wives' stepparent role difficulties were significantly lower in families where both had children compared to families with only husbands' children. The highest levels of parenting and stepparenting difficulties were reported by stepmothers without biological children. This suggests stepfamily challenges can affect family-related stress and stepmother challenges are the highest for those without children of their own. Wives reported higher levels of marital instability. Stepmothers, especially those without children of their own, face higher levels of marital instability and difficulties associated with being a parent and stepparent.

(141 Pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Marital Stability in Remarriage: The  
Examination of Stepfamily Constellations and Associated Challenges

by

Ron C. Bean

Research on stepfamily life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reveals unexplored variables at every turn. This is important because around half of American adults report close step-relationships and the challenges and demographic and relational differences for different types of stepfamilies remains unexplored. The first of these studies explored data for 879 husbands and wives couples to explore how positivity, negativity, and sexual interest levels differ depending which of the couple, both partners, or neither had previous children. Wives reported higher levels of marital instability and positivity than husbands. Marital instability was linked with one's own and one's partners' negativity, and inversely related to one's own and one's partners' positivity and sexual interest. The marital instability of those with children was related with their partner's negativity.

The second study investigated how the marital stability of different stepfamily configurations is related to difficulties associated with the social and family dimension, the role of the spouse, the role of a parent, and the role of a stepparent. Wives' scores of marital instability and difficulties being a parent and stepparent were higher than husbands' across remarriage types. Stepmothers reported the highest levels of parenting and stepparenting strain, especially stepmothers without children of their own. This implies stepfamily challenges can impact family-related stress and marital instability,

with the most profound effects found for stepmothers with no biological children of their own.

We found that parents with children seem to be sensitive to negativity and sexual interest from their partners as a measure of relationship functioning. Stepmothers experienced higher levels of marital instability and difficulties associated with being a parent and a stepparent and this is especially true for stepmothers who did not have children of their own. These findings suggest couples may benefit from strategies that decrease negativity, increase positivity and sexual interest, and help manage the stresses associated with being a parent and stepparent, especially for stepmothers.

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Ron C. Bean



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

According to McCarthy and Ginsberg (2007), “When a marriage functions well, it meets intimacy and security needs better than any other human relationship” (p. 119). An implication of this statement is the need to focus on both supportive and risk-factors linked to marital satisfaction. McCarthy and Ginsberg reported that the rate of divorce from first marriages is between 35% and 40%, not 50% as is commonly reported (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2005). Second marriages face increasing rates of divorce (65% to 70%). More than half of all divorces take place in the first seven years of marriage (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2005), a well-known period of high emotionality and volatility (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). This is possibly because higher levels of everyday stress are associated with lower marital satisfaction and higher rates of divorce and relationship distress (Schramm & Adler-Baeder, 2012). Another critical period for divorce is midlife (Gottman & Levenson, 2000), which often begins when the first child turns 14-years-old and marital satisfaction reaches its lowest point for many (Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996; Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

McCarthy and Ginsberg (2007) indicated that partners in successful second marriages report higher rates of pride in the relationship and marital satisfaction than do people in successful first marriages. This is under debate in the literature, however, as some studies show no differences, and still others indicate marital satisfaction is higher in first marriages (Mirecki, Brimhall, & Bramesfeld, 2013a; Ragsdale, Brandau-Brown, & Bello, 2010). It is possible that first marriages might soon be in the minority when compared to the number of subsequent marriages. Further, those in remarriages have

higher expectations, despite higher divorce percentages that dissolve more quickly (Mirecki, Brimhall, & Bramesfeld, 2013a, McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007).

Research suggests that parenting, stepfamily issues, and the influence of ex-spouses are among the most difficult issues to manage in subsequent marriages. It is therefore important to the integrity of subsequent marriages that individuals avoid allowing the frustration with the behaviors and histories of past relationships to taint the relationship with their current spouses. This is especially important as cooperative co-parenting after a divorce increases the children's likelihood of thriving following marital dissolution (and children who thrive present fewer challenges in return). Reflecting a rising trend, as many as 65% of adults who divorce and remarry bring children from previous relationships into their new marriages (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007; Mirecki, Chou, Elliott, & Schneider, 2013b; Teachman, 2008).

In an effort to justify the investigation of the effects of premarital education in religious and secular settings, Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, Markman, and Johnson (2009) pointed to the negative relationship between marital distress and immune system functioning, the potential development of adult psychological disorders as a result of marital conflict, and resulting difficulties for children in psychological, social, and educational domains. Romantic relationships are of central importance in adulthood due to links with mental and physical health, life satisfaction, well-being, and lower mortality (Bar-Kalifa, Hen-Weissberg, & Rafaeli, 2015; Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Rauer, Pettit, Lansford, Bates, & Dodge, 2013; Slatcher, Selcuk, & Ong, 2015). Therefore, many questions remain that must be answered using current data, more representative samples, and investigating all marriages, not just first and second.

## **Differences Between First and Subsequent Marriages**

The environment in which a relationship exists is a relevant consideration. According to ecosystemic theory (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993), marriage, the surrounding environment, and the interactions between the marriage and the surrounding environment significantly affect one another, and marriages in which there exists the ability to adapt and change to meet increasing levels of and fluctuation in ecosystemic challenges tend to report higher levels of satisfaction (Falke & Larson, 2007). Being a spouse in a stepfamily can introduce numerous additional challenges that increase conflictual interactions, and impact marital stability and quality (Guilbert et al., 2000). Some of these challenges include potential emotional attachment to former spouses or child support obligations (Falke & Larson, 2007; Skogrand, Torres, & Higginbotham, 2010).

Teachman (2008) suggested that in addition to the influences of previous spouses, individuals in subsequent marriages carry with them more complex life histories that include possible multiple spells of cohabitation, children from one or more previous marriages, and the knowledge of the divorce process, which may make them more willing to dissolve a relationship that does not meet their needs. They suggest relatively strong predictors of first marriage dissolution could be weaker or unrelated predictors of subsequent marital dissolution as a result of these complex histories, which further supports exploration of how the variables relevant for marital quality apply for those in remarriages.

Children are a vital consideration, as most studies find that individuals who bring children from previous relationships are at increased risk of marital dissolution and have more to lose in the case of a marital dissolution, as the stepparent has less investment in



the parenting relationship (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Special consideration should be given to the oft misguided assumption that any stepchildren in subsequent marriages are the wife's children, especially as custody cases are increasingly being decided with shared custody or in the father's favor (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Teachman, 2008). Additionally, today's figures could benefit from updated information as much of the valuable research on stepfamilies ages. When studying stepfamilies, who brought children into the relationship is a crucial consideration, as the quality of marriage for stepmothers is lower, especially when the stepchildren were daughters (Mirecki et al., 2013a; Hobart & Brown, 1988). In contrast, Teachman (2008) asserted that men who bring children into remarriage may be more actively involved with parenting and household tasks, which may reduce marital friction. That said, the majority of research in this area indicates that the presence of stepchildren does have at least some amount of negative effect on the quality of remarriage, especially so when the relationship between the stepchildren and the stepparent is unsatisfying (Falke & Larson, 2007). Furthermore, wives who are remarried tend to indicate the quality of their relationship is more influenced by their relationships between the parents and their respective stepchildren than anything else, as they tend to regard problems with their own children as less troubling than those with their stepchildren (Falke & Larson, 2007).

Considering the surrounding environment in ecosystemic theory, the fact that 65% of remarriages include children from previous unions necessitates consideration of the stepparent-child relationship and understanding the role of factors such as which member of the union brought children into the relationship, the children's primary residence, and the structural complexity of the newly-formed family. Importantly,

stepfamily complexity is inversely related to relationship satisfaction (Falke & Larson, 2007). According to White and Booth (1985), there are four measures of marital quality: marital happiness, spousal interaction, the amount of disagreement, and the number of tensions. Those who remarried with children had more problematic scores on all four measures, compared to couples without stepchildren. In fact, Falke and Larson (2007) indicated that between 20% and 60% of remarried spouses reported their marriages would be happier without children. This assertion was supported by the increases in marital dissolution for those who bring stepchildren into a union.

The study of stepfamily make-up, or stepfamily constellation (whether the husband, the wife, both, or neither had children), has been challenging due to inadequate sample sizes of stepmother families, stepfamily stereotypes (e.g., uninvolved stepfather, wicked stepmother), and less willingness to participate in research (Blyaert, Van Parys, De Mol, & Buysse, 2016; Gold, 2010; Gosselin & David, 2007). With the differences between constellations, it stands to reason that the experience of being a stepparent would differ based on related factors (e.g., child support obligations, custody statistics, gender roles).

### **Models of Marital Quality**

A major task in establishing a successful marriage is developing a couple style that is functional, comfortable, and finds a workable balance between the needs of individuality and commitment, autonomy and intimacy, and establishes realistic expectations based on respect for individual differences for both members of the relationship (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007). This is true for first marriages as well as subsequent marriages. The first two years of any marriage are the most crucial in

establishing relational patterns and learning styles of negotiating marital difficulty and disagreement (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007). To foster understanding of remarriages, the lack of research exploring remarital associations must be addressed. Understanding pertinent relationship variables and the links among them has led to models of marital interaction that may now serve as a foundation on which to develop models of interactions pertaining to remarriages.

**Marital interaction models.** Gottman, Coan, Carrère, and Swanson (1998) explored seven marital interaction process models that included “(a) anger as a dangerous emotion, (b) active listening, (c) negative affect reciprocity, (d) negative start-up by the wife, (e) de-escalation, (f) positive affect models, and (g) physiological soothing of the male” (p. 5). They investigated what they called the “specificity of negativity hypothesis,” to determine if all types of negative affect are equally destructive in marriages. They claimed the recipient of anger could feel “brutalized,” even in the absence of physical confrontation, and that anger was corrosive to relationships *in any form*. The same was not found for other types of negative affect (Bradley, Drummey, Gottman, & Gottman, 2014).

The active listening model, which serves as the foundation for myriad marital treatments, was cited as the most influential process theory in conflict resolution. This is believed to be an important point of intervention, especially as conflict in relationships is inevitable. Active listening can be described as an interaction in which one’s expressed negative affect is met with validation of the negative affect by their partner (e.g., humor, affection, apparent interest), which may be a refreshing approach for the couple when

contrasted with typical maladaptive communication (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Gottman et al., 1998).

Gottman et al. (1998) claimed the negative affect reciprocity model has been “the most reliable empirical discriminator between happy and unhappy marriages across laboratories, within the U.S. and cross-nationally” (p. 6). They found that partners have a much higher likelihood of being more negative than they usually would be when faced with negativity, possibly due to difficulty “hitting the brakes” to regulate the exchange of negativity. This is additional evidence that the “start-up” of a conversation is an important consideration, as Gottman (1994) reported that 96% of the marital interactions in their study ended with the same affective tone as they began in the first few minutes. In their study of first-time newlyweds, Huston and Vangelisti (1991) also claimed husbands’ and wives’ initial satisfaction levels may contribute to an atmosphere that reinforces behavior that reflects initial levels of satisfaction. It is important to understand that negativity does have benefits to the relationship (e.g., identifying conflict triggers, relationship repair and potential growth after conflict), however, and therapists should be careful to help couples learn from negativity (Gottman, Swanson, & Swanson, 2002).

Another model is the rapid escalation model of negativity, in which negative affect of a lower intensity is met with escalated negative affect (e.g., belligerence, contempt, or defensiveness; Gottman & Silver, 2015; Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2015). Struggles with power sharing may be related to negative affect reciprocity in couples who rapidly escalate negativity, whereas affect dysregulation may be more influential for couples who reciprocate negativity (Kim, Capaldi, & Crosby, 2007). Negative affect can become a pervasive experience from which it is challenging to escape (Gottman &

Tabares, 2017), leading to marital instability and poorer marital quality (Guilbert, Vacc, & Pasley, 2000). Gottman (1998) found women were more likely to engage in harsh or negative start-up as a result of increased frustration with unresponsiveness and maladaptive affective responses from their husbands during neutral affective interactions. In fact, they reported that most conflict discussions in their laboratories were started by women and Gottman et al.'s (2015) findings that around 80% of issues for discussion were introduced by the wives supported this claim.

The underlying function of positivity in relationships may be conflict de-escalation and the soothing of oneself and one's partner physiologically (Gottman et al., 2015). In addition to softened startup and adding positivity to the relationship, skills that help avoid affective influence from the spouse and de-escalate conflict are pivotal to healthy relationships. This entails evolving from one partner's negative affect to the other's neutral affect in conversations. Gentle start-ups are aided by efforts by the husband to turn toward his wife's emotional need of connection and by efforts to convey to each other a strong sense of being a team. They can also be accomplished through mutual demonstrated affection, agreement, humor, taking responsibility for one's part in the conflict, mutual reassurance and understanding, empathy, and self-disclosure (Gottman et al., 2015). Further, low levels of positivity have been associated with higher levels of flooding and diffuse physiological arousal (Gottman et al., 2002).

Findings suggest that happy marriages are marked by husbands being more likely to de-escalate low-intensity affect and wives that are more likely to de-escalate high-intensity affect (Gottman et al., 2015; Gottman et al., 1998). Low-intensity negative affect was identified as "anger, sadness, whining, disgust, tension and fear, or

stonewalling” by Gottman et al. (1998), and high-intensity negative affect included negative affect that has been found to be more predictive of divorce, “belligerence, contempt, or defensiveness” (p. 9). They also reported a stronger negative relationship between conflict escalation and positive affect for stable and happy couples than for couples who divorced. Importantly, they suggest this de-escalation and positive affect are only beneficial to the relationship to the extent they involve the physiological soothing of the male.

Physiological soothing of the male couple member is considered the mostly likely determinant of both emotional withdrawal and escalation of negative affect (Gottman & Levenson, 1988). Patterns found to forecast divorce included “negative start-up by the wife, refusal of the husband to accept influence from his wife, the wife's reciprocation of low intensity negativity in kind, and the absence of de-escalation of low intensity negativity by the husband” (Gottman et al., 1998, p. 17). Gottman et al. (1998) reported that men who reject influence from their spouses tend to be more hostile, more likely to be identified as domineering their wives during observations, have suffered financial marital strain, and are more competitive than husbands that are more influenced by their wives. They indicated that only newlywed husbands that accept influence from their wives and women who learn to use a softened start-up find themselves enjoying stable and happy marriages.

The body of research on marital functioning has received considerable attention and contribution for decades, and though similarities likely exist, relatively little of this research has considered remarriages or differences that might exist between first marriages and remarriages. These remarriages, the potential influence of ex-spouses,

challenges associated with being a stepparent in addition to a parent of one's own children, possible financial consequences of remarriage, and a host of other factors might hinder remarried couples and place additional roadblocks on efforts to positively engage with one another and social supports that do not exist for those married for the first time.

**Family stress models.** Family stress models describe the influence stress has on relationship development, as high stress levels are regularly linked to decreased marital quality and stability (e.g., Backes et al., 2017; Hilpert et al., 2018). Outside stressors (e.g., economic pressure, work, other relationship demands) can inhibit healthy and loving interactions (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Conger et al., 1990). Healthy and loving interactions can be further challenged by stressors related to managing the stepfamily and co-parenting relationships with former spouses, which can be even more difficult when conflict is high. Stepmothers, in particular, can sometimes be caught in this place, as attempts to avoid competition with other family units may lead them to engage in fewer attempts to increase stepfamily cohesiveness. Further, marital satisfaction can be negatively impacted by shared parental responsibilities (Favez et al., 2015; Katz & Gottman, 1996; Klaus, Nauck, & Steinbach, 2012; Yuan & Hamilton, 2006). Laxman, Higginbotham, MacArthur, and Lee (2019) explored the family stress model in remarriages. They suggested the family stress model may be especially applicable in remarriage as each spouse may experience different levels of challenges, and stress felt by one partner may affect the remarriage less than stress experienced by both.

## **Variables Linked to Marital Quality**

This series of studies explores remarriage and stepfamily functioning, as related to a number of variables that have been found relevant in the broader marital quality literature. We began by assessing relationship maintenance behaviors of positivity, negativity, and sexual interest that previous research suggests are relevant in marriages broadly, to explore their relevance in remarriage. We then explored challenges related to stepfamily life that include elements related to social and family dynamics and challenges associated with being a spouse, a parent, and a stepparent.

Relationship maintenance behaviors (RMB) play a role in marital commitment and quality. These behaviors may influence the levels of everyday stress, which is associated with increased chances of being distressed or divorced within five years and difficulty maintaining marital satisfaction over time (Schramm & Higginbotham, 2009). Huston and Vangelisti (1991) suggested that marital satisfaction is a function of the extent to which partners engage in behaviors that increase pleasure for the partner. They also suggested spouses with higher levels of satisfaction express more warmth and less hostility. These positive relationship maintenance behaviors could include examples like compliments, saying “I love you,” sharing feelings, and making one’s partner laugh. Examples of negative relationship behaviors could include indifference, dominating conversations, sneering, and criticism (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991).

The reasons a couple may choose to divorce are as unique as the number of couples who do, though additional exploration of potential common factors related to higher marital dissolution for remarried couples may clarify those associations that remain nebulous (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007). Mirecki et al. (2013a) stated some



researchers point to higher conflict in second marriages as the reason for higher rates of divorce (about 10% higher for subsequent marriages than for first marriages). Many studies of marital functioning point to conflict resolution differences like defensive, self-protective behaviors, and the use of more openly destructive communication patterns (Bradley, Drummey, Gottman, & Gottman, 2014; Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Gottman, 1999; Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2015; Madhyastha, Hamaker, & Gottman, 2011; Mirecki et al., 2013a).

Positive links between sexual desire and relationship satisfaction and marital stability are widely reported (Carpenter et al., 2007; McNulty et al., 2015), though the intimacy differences between men and women have revealed mixed results (Liu, 2003; Heller & Wood, 1998). The study of intimacy and sexual interest in remarriage remains an unexplored opportunity and relevant for study as sexual challenges for stepparents are common (Khajehei, 2015; Negash, Nalbone, Wetchler, Woods, & Fontaine, 2015).

### **The Present Study**

Due to the considerable number of factors that influence relationships, combined with the lack of established predictors of marital instability and marital quality for those in remarriages, it is necessary to update existing literature to reflect 21<sup>st</sup> century realities. This collection of two studies is novel in that it will use dyadic relationship information collected using self-report measures to increase the knowledge and understanding in the field of relationships and remarriage.

The first article sought to establish the current landscape of remarriage in our sample and examine associations between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital stability. This article explored self-reported marital behaviors for different

stepfamily constellations. Second, this article investigated whether associations among relationship maintenance behaviors and marital stability are moderated by stepfamily type.

The second article examined the varying types of difficulties faced by partners in remarriages and how these challenges differ across stepfamily constellations. The types of challenges examined included difficulties associated with the social and family dimension, difficulties associated with the role of a spouse, difficulties associated with the role of a parent, and difficulties associated with the role of a stepparent. The second article compared experiences of stepfathers and stepmothers to explore potential differences across remarriage types to identify strains specific to each type of remarriage experience.

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## **CHAPTER II**

### **PAPER I:**

#### **Associations Between Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Marital Stability in Remarriages**

#### **ABSTRACT**

Nearly half of adults in the U.S. indicated they had a close step-relative that included stepparents, stepchildren, and other close relationships. The prevalence of stepfamilies is rapidly increasing and represents a population that remains largely understudied. This study explored the roles of relationship maintenance behaviors (positivity, negativity, and sexual interest) on marital stability for different remarriage constellations (depending which of the couple, both partners, or neither had previous children). This study uses dyadic relationship data from 879 couples. Positivity and sexual interest were inversely related with marital instability and negativity was correlated with marital instability differently based on remarriage type.

*Keywords:* remarriage, stepfamily, stepchildren, divorce, marital stability

## Associations Between Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Marital Stability in Remarriages

In the United States, 42% of adults indicated they had a close step-relative that included stepparents, stepchildren, and other close relationships (Pew Research Center, 2011). Individuals under 30 years of age reported numbers as high as 52%. Further, data suggests these numbers are likely to increase as 36% of individuals under 30 claimed their parents divorced, separated, or were never married (compared to 21% for ages 30-49 years, and 10% for those over 50).

Given the understudied prevalence of stepfamilies, the current paper assessed the experiences of partners for whom the union represents a remarriage for at least one member of the couple. This is important as marital functioning is said to meet intimacy and security needs better than other relationships (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007) and healthy romantic relationships are linked with well-being and lower mortality (Bar-Kalifa, Hen-Weissberg, & Rafaeli, 2015). Ferreira, Narciso, Novo, and Pereira (2014) further stated, “Couple satisfaction is currently viewed as a public health issue due to its recognized associations with positive outcomes regarding both physical and mental health, and with relationship outcomes such as stability and child adjustment” (p. 390).

Mirecki, Brimhall, and Bramesfeld (2013) reported that more people will soon be in subsequent marriages than first marriages and they expect a better new marriage than their last. The findings on whether subsequent marriages are better than previous marriages are mixed, however. For example, McCarthy and Ginsberg (2007) found relationship pride and marital satisfaction are higher in second marriages, while some studies reported no difference or higher satisfaction in first marriages (Mirecki et al.,

2013; Ragsdale, Brandau-Brown, & Bello, 2010). Mirecki et al. found no difference in mutual constructive communication between first and second marriages and only marginally higher levels of reported demand-withdraw in first marriages. However, divorce rates are about 10% higher for subsequent marriages, which also tend to end more quickly than firsts (Falke & Larson, 2007; McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007).

### **The Effect of Children on Marital Instability**

How children factor into marital quality remains understudied and unclear. Myriad studies link parenthood to decreased marital quality, which contributes to marital instability (Belsky, Spanier, & Rovine, 1983; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Gudmunson, Beutler, Israelsen, McCoy, & Hill, 2007; Lehrer, 2006; Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006), though these results may be tempered by Huston and Holmes' (2004) conclusion that children have less effect on marital satisfaction than does relationship length.

Aside from debates about children's presence in the relationship, research has focused mostly on the effects of having children and little on the processes that result in these effects (Belsky, 1990) and how differences exist for stepfamilies (Beaudry, Parent, Saint-Jacques, Guay, & Boisvert, 2001). The present study explored dyadic data from 879 remarried couples and used a multiple group approach to consider whether the wife, the husband, neither, or both have children, and how the use of relationship maintenance behaviors like negativity, positivity, and sexual interest, relate to marital instability (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). We examined associations for partners' own levels of negativity, positivity, and sexual interest, as well as the other partner's levels of these relationship maintenance behaviors for both husbands and wives.

## Negativity

Huston and Vangelisti (1991) suggested negative behaviors were more predictive of daily marital satisfaction than positive behaviors. Gill, Christensen, and Fincham (1999) asserted that husbands' and wives' negativity predicted satisfaction declines, especially when issues were met with blame, pressure, and negative judgments. Further, negativity is said to result in marital instability (Gudmunson et al., 2007; Guilbert, Vace, & Pasley, 2000). In Gottman's (1994) study of married couples, four negative interaction constructs emerged that were dubbed *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. These negative interactions were observed to produce negativity and marital instability (Gottman, 1994; Guilbert, Vace, & Pasley, 2000). Persistent consideration of separation and divorce, poor communication, and external stress have also been established as reliable predictors of divorce (Booth & White, 1980). No known studies have investigated how partners in different constellations of remarriages experience negativity.

Gottman, Swanson, and Swanson (2002) reported that negative affect is correlated with marital satisfaction and longevity predictions in a study of married couples. However, they also identified potential benefits of negativity in relationships (e.g., identifying conflict causing behaviors) and cautioned therapists to avoid making war on negative affect. They claimed a limited range in affect inhibits intimacy central to closer relationships. Finally, they indicated that relationship healing after conflicts can reduce emotional distance and marital instability (Yeh et al., 2006).

Gender differences exist in the response to negative affect in close relationships. Gottman and Levenson (1988) suggested that men were more likely than women to

emotionally withdraw in conflict, creating a climate of imbalance and negativity. Men's higher reactivity to stress may result from sex differences including endocrine responses and the adrenergic components of the cardiovascular system (i.e., adrenaline and noradrenaline). Thus, negative affect may be more physiologically punishing and aversive for men, who are more likely to experience affect flooding (Gottman, 1994). It is for these reasons Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1994) suggested men may look more to bodily cues to signal emotions, where women tend to look to the social environment. Further, Mirecki et al. (2013) suggested men resort to self-defensive and protective behaviors when faced with anxiety more than women, while Huston and Vangelisti (1991) said wives are more likely to use negativity toward their spouses; possibly due to higher relationship commitment. They claim this may be related to the tendency for husbands to suppress negative conflict behaviors (Gill et al., 1999; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Mirecki et al., 2013). Other findings suggest distressed wives were less likely than distressed husbands to de-escalate conflict using positivity to respond to negative interactions (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; Notarius, Benson, Sloane, & Vanzetti, 1989). In this study, we expected negativity to be related with marital instability for both husbands and wives. Furthermore, we expected the patterns of association to depend on the presence or absence of children for each spouse.

### **Positivity**

In contrast to findings about negativity, other research suggests it is not the presence of negative affect that predicts marital instability, but the absence of relationship positivity (Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Gudmunson et al., 2007; Schramm & Adler-Baeder, 2012). Huston and Vangelisti (1991) defined positivity as the extent to which one

behaves in a manner intended to produce pleasurable feelings for oneself and one's partner. Gottman et al. (2002) said married couples with low positivity tend to experience increased flooding, diffuse physiological arousal, and they arrange parallel lives that limit interaction, which ultimately makes them more vulnerable to loneliness or seeking other relationships. Gottman and Levenson (2000) reported that 80% of all men and women cited growing apart, losing the feeling of closeness, and not feeling loved or appreciated by the partner as the major reasons for seeking divorce, rather than anger, arguments, or negative affect (as was reported by 44% of women and 35% of men). They said positive affect was the only variable that discriminated between happy and unhappy couples and predicted marital stability in their study. This contrasts with findings related to earlier-divorcing couples, who have been found to show higher rates of *the Four Horsemen*, which may suggest people learn to engage in these behaviors less as the relationship progresses. Changing the affective communication in mundane conversations may establish an emotional connection that could positively influence the way the couple approaches conflict (i.e., start-up). Further, emotional investment has been positively linked with commitment (Carpenter, Nathanson, & Kim, 2007) and emotional well-being is linked with marital stability (Gudmunson et al., 2007; Yeh et al., 2006).

Madhyastha, Hamaker, and Gottman (2011) claimed continued mutual negativity is common in unhappy couples, where happily married couples approached conflict with a "climate of agreement" (p. 292). Their study of married couples sought to explore how one spouse influences another, both in the interaction and in a consistent (i.e., positive or negative) fashion. This suggests emotional malleability during conflict may depend on a sense of "we-ness" and adaptive responses (i.e., positivity) during times of peace



(Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, & Bradbury, 2010; McNulty, Wenner, & Fisher, 2015). Improved awareness is also important as misunderstandings obfuscate the meanings of nonverbal communication. For example, Huston and Vangelisti (1991) found men more likely to interpret the absence of affection and positivity as hostile, while more women interpret the absence of hostility as love. Madhyastha et al. (2011) suggested couples should increase positivity during conflict and work to lower the amount each partner allows their own emotions to affect the partner. An answer that remains elusive due to inconsistent research findings is whether negative affect has more ability to harm stability in the relationship than positivity does in creating it (Gottman et al., 2002; Madhyastha et al., 2011; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996).

Positive interaction engagement differences have been found for distressed and nondistressed couples. During laboratory observation, Gottman, Coan, Carrère, and Swanson (1998) reported that nondistressed couples engaged in significantly more positive interactions, 1.93 per minute, contrasted with 1.49 per minute in distressed couples. They also reported that nondistressed partners reported significantly more pleasing events in the home environment than distressed couples. These data further support Gottman's (1994) findings that stable couples engaged in five positive interactions to every negative interaction during conflict resolution, where unstable couples' ratio was .8 to 1. According to Gill et al. (1999), social learning theory suggests that each partner's positivity predicts marital satisfaction improvement for both spouses. We expected positivity was expected to be negatively correlated with marital instability in this study.

## **Sexual Interest**

The literature has historically shown intimacy and sexual desire have positive associations with relationship satisfaction and marital stability. The amount of sexual satisfaction in marriage has been argued to be a barometer of the couple's marital satisfaction (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; McNulty et al., 2015), a predictor of stability in intimate relationships (Carpenter et al., 2007), and vital to well-being (Patrick & Beckenbach, 2009). Methodologically disparate studies report a decrease in sexual satisfaction as one ages (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983; Carpenter et al., 2007; Edwards & Booth, 1994; Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 1997). Previous studies suggest women have rated intimacy higher than men (Heller & Wood, 1998), contrasted with findings that women rated sexual satisfaction lower than men (correlated with decreased orgasm frequency and unmet sexual fulfillment expectations) (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Liu, 2003). Decreased sexual desire has been linked to numerous psychological, physical, sexual, and relational challenges in addition to life-stage factors (Ferreira et al., 2014; Sims & Meana, 2010). The links between sexual satisfaction and marital stability for parents is an understudied topic, though findings suggest sexual difficulties and decreased sexual and marital stability are common for parents (Khajehei, 2015; Negash, Nalbone, Wetchler, Woods, & Fontaine, 2015). No studies that explored sexual interest for those in remarriages or stepfamilies were found. In this study, we expected that sexual interest would be inversely related to marital instability.

## **The Present Study**

In the current study, we used a dyadic approach and investigated the associations between relationship maintenance behaviors (i.e., positivity, negativity, sexual interest) and marital instability in a large, state-wide sample of remarried dyads. We hypothesized that positivity and sexual interest would be inversely related with marital instability, while negativity would be positively correlated with marital instability. We also assessed partner effects between dyad members (interpersonal effects) as well as within the members of the dyad (intrapersonal effects), and explored whether the presence of children brought to the marriage by either the husband or wife moderated associations between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital instability. The following research questions were tested using a multi-member multi-group Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (MMMGA-APIM) framework (Ledermann, Rudaz, & Grob, 2017), which permits exploration of relationship maintenance behaviors and marital instability in remarriages.

RQ1: What are the associations among husband and wife relationship maintenance behaviors and marital instability in remarriages?

RQ2: Do the relationships between husband and wife relationship maintenance behaviors and marital instability differ across stepfamily constellation types?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The sample for the current study was recruited through the Office of Vital Statistics in the State of Utah. The sample included couples who married in the State of Utah in 2006 and reported that the marriage was a remarriage for at least one member of the couple. Of the surveys received, 34% were couples married in rural counties. Ages

ranged from 18 to 89 ( $M = 42.90$ ,  $SD = 15.13$ ) for the men and 17 to 89 years ( $M = 39.53$ ,  $SD = 14.30$ ) for the women in the study. Couples were married an average of 10.77 months at the time of the initial surveys ( $SD = 15.67$ ). Fifty-one percent of men and 54% of women indicated the current marriage was their second, while 21% of men and 17% of women indicated the current marriage was their first. Third marriages made up 20% and fourth marriages represented 5% of the sample for both men and women. The remainder of the sample were married for at least the fifth time. These numbers are consistent with national averages (Teachman, 2008). The number of previous marriages ranged from zero to five for men and zero to eight for women. Approximately 60% of the sample reported an annual household income of more than \$50,000, and 15% indicated a household annual income of more than \$100,000. The size of the families ranged from two to eleven people, with approximately 49% of the sample having two people. Three-person homes made up approximately 16% of the sample, 17% had four, and 17.6% indicated a family size of five or more.

## **Procedures**

The original survey study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [Masked for Review]. The current study utilized a fully deidentified dataset for secondary analyses. The [Masked for Review] IRB made an exempt determination. A survey packet was sent in April of 2007 to each of the identified remarried couples and included questionnaires for both the husband and the wife, based on state licenses recognizing only opposite sex couples. A total of 4,886 packets were originally sent. In addition to the surveys, participants received a pre-notice letter, a thank you letter, and reminder postcards. The couples were instructed to complete the surveys

separately. Responses were received from 939 men and 1,101 women, reflecting return rates of 19.2% and 22.5%, respectively. There were 879 cases in which data was received from both members of the couple. Almost 97% of the sample was White, though the state's marriage licenses did not differentiate participants with Latina/o origin. One percent of the sample was Black and approximately 1% was Native American. Number of years of education ranged from 2 to 17 years for men ( $M = 13.63$ ;  $SD = 2.17$ ) and 0 to 17 years for women ( $M = 13.63$ ;  $SD = 2.13$ ). Couples cohabitated between 0 and 216 months ( $M = 10.71$ ;  $SD = 22.00$ ). The number of children in the home ranged from 0 to 9 ( $M = 1.07$ ;  $SD = 1.39$ ). The religious makeup of the sample was approximately 70% Latter-Day Saints, 4% Catholic, 3% Baptist, 1% Methodist, 1% Episcopalian, and 7% Other. Approximately 14% of the sample claimed no religious affiliation. Of the 879 couples, 358 reported they both had children from previous relationships, 234 did not have previous children, 138 indicated only the husband had children, and 138 reported only the wife had previous children.

## Measures

**Marital instability.** Marital instability was measured with the Marital Instability Index (MII-SF; Booth et al., 1983). This measure has five items (e.g., "Have you or your spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce?") that can be answered by selecting one of three possible answers; *never* (1), *yes, but not recently* (2), and *yes, recently* (3). Scores for these five items are summed, with higher scores indicating greater instability. The MII-SF has been found to discriminate high and low risk for divorce for couples. Reliability estimates for the present sample were .80 for wives and .84 for husbands.

**Relationship maintenance behaviors.** The Socio-Emotional Behavior Index (SEBI; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991) was used to measure relationship maintenance behaviors. This measure is comprised of 30 items; 15 items about the participant's frequency of relationship behaviors and 15 items about the spouse's frequency of relationship behaviors. Sample questions ask the participant to rate the frequency with which they "Do something nice for your spouse?" and "Fail to do something your spouse asked?" Respondents answer on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from *never* (1) to *always* (5). The three subscales of the SEBI are Affectional Expression (Positivity), Sexual Interest, and Negativity. In this study, reliability coefficients for positivity were .83 for husbands and .82 for wives. Reliability coefficients for negativity were .73 for husbands and .67 for wives. The reliability coefficients for sexual interest were low at .19 for husbands and .43 for wives. Instead of using the sexual interest scale, we used one item from the measure that assessed the frequency of initiation of sexual intimacy.

### **Statistical Analyses**

We used the Multi-member Multi-group Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Ledermann et al., 2017) and Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to assess the associations between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital stability, as moderated by stepfamily constellation. Figure 1 shows the APIM. The four groups were marriages in which neither had children (i.e., 0), both had children (i.e., 1), the husband had children (i.e., 2), and the wife had children (i.e., 3).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Means and standard deviations (*SD*) of the study variables are displayed in Table 1. Paired-samples *t* tests were conducted to test whether husbands and wives differed across outcome variables. Wives reported higher average levels of marital instability,  $t(863) = -2.084, p = .037$ , and positivity,  $t(814) = -4.277, p < .001$ , than their husbands.

Pearson correlations among the variables are shown in Table 2. Using Cohen's (1998) criteria to interpret effect size, a large effect size was found for the relationships between husbands' and wives' ratings of marital instability. Correlations with a medium effect size were found for husbands' ratings of marital instability and husbands' ratings of negativity, wives' ratings of marital instability with both wives' ratings of positivity and husbands' ratings of sexual interest. Husbands' ratings of negativity also revealed medium effect sizes for wives' ratings of marital instability and wives' ratings of negativity. Wives' ratings of marital instability revealed medium effect sizes for wives' own ratings of positivity and negativity. Wives' ratings of sexual interest and positivity also had a medium effect size. Most other correlations revealed small effect sizes except for the relationships between husbands' ratings of sexual interest and husbands' negativity, wives' marital instability, and wives' negativity, which were not significant. The absolute values of correlations ranged from .019 to .618.

### Primary Analyses

**Negativity.** For couples in which both the husband and wife had children, results revealed significant actor effects for both husbands and wives, such that higher negativity related to higher marital instability (see Figure 1). There were also significant partner

effects for both husbands and wives. Comparisons indicate the effect of the husband's own negativity was significantly stronger than the partner effects from his wife. That is, husbands' and wives' marital instability were associated with both their own and their partners' negativity, with a stronger actor effect for husbands (see Table 3). That is, the husbands' own negativity was stronger than their wives.

For couples in which only the husband had children, the actor effect was significant for wives, but not for husbands. Additionally, only the partner effect from the wives to the husbands was significant. No significant differences were found among the actor effects and the partner effects. That is, the wife's negativity was related with her own and her husband's marital instability.

For couples in which only the wife had children, there were significant actor effects for both husbands and wives. Further, a significant partner effect emerged from husbands to the wives, but not from wives to husbands. No significant differences were found among actor and partner effects. These findings mirror the pattern found for couples in which only the husband had children and suggest that the marital instability of the partner with children was associated with the other partner's negativity.

For couples in which there were no children from previous relationships, there were significant actor effects for both husbands and wives. Additionally, there were also significant partner effects for both husbands and wives. All effects for both husbands and wives were approximately equal in magnitude with no significant differences. That is, both the husbands' and the wives' marital instability were associated with both their own and their partner's negativity, which is similar to the findings in couples in which both had children.



**Positivity.** For couples in which both the husband and wife had children, results revealed negative and significant actor effects for both husbands and wives, meaning the higher the positivity the lower the participant's own marital instability. Additionally, there were also significant negative partner effects for both husbands and wives that were approximately equal in magnitude to their respective actor effects. No significant differences existed when comparing the two actor effects and the two partner effects. That is, for both husband and wife, one's own marital instability was inversely associated with both one's own and the partner's positivity (see Table 4).

For couples in which only the husband had children, results revealed negative and significant actor effects for both husbands and wives, while no significant partner effects emerged. Again, no significant differences were found among actor effect and partner effects. That is, one's own marital instability was associated with one's own positivity but not with the partner's positivity.

For couples in which only the wife had children, there were no significant actor effects for husbands or wives, but a significant partner effect emerged from the husband to the wife. The partner effect from the husband to the wife was also significantly stronger than her actor effect. That is, wives' marital instability was related with their partners' positivity, but not with their own positivity.

For couples in which neither had children from previous relationships, there was a negative and significant actor effect for husbands, but not for wives. Additionally, there were also significant partner effects for both husbands and wives. The partner effect from husband to wife was significantly more negative than was wives' actor effect. That is, husbands' marital instability was inversely associated with his own and his partner's

positivity, while the wives' marital instability was inversely associated with their husbands' positivity but not with their own positivity.

**Sexual interest.** For couples in which both the husband and wife had children, results revealed significant negative actor effects for wives, but not for husbands; meaning the higher the wife's sexual interest the lower her perceived instability. Additionally, only the partner effect from the wives to the husbands was significant. No significant differences existed when comparing the two actor effects and the two partner effects (see Table 5). That is, the wives' marital instability was inversely associated with their own sexual interest and the husbands' marital instability was inversely associated with their partners' sexual interest.

For couples in which only the husband had children, a significant negative actor effect was observed for husbands, but not for wives. There were no significant partner effects. No significant differences were found among actor and partner effects. That is, the husband's marital instability was inversely associated with his own sexual interest and no other significant actor or partner effects emerged.

For couples in which only the wife had children, results revealed significant negative actor effects for wives, but not husbands. No significant partner effects emerged. No significant differences were found among actor and partner effects. That is, similar to couples where only the husband had children, marital instability of the partner who had children was inversely associated with their own sexual interest and no other significant effects emerged.

For couples in which neither had children from previous relationships, there were no significant actor effects for husbands or wives. Additionally, there were no significant

partner effects for husbands or wives. No significant differences were found among actor and partner effects. That is, marital instability was not associated with one's own or one's partner's sexual interest.

## **Discussion**

With increasing numbers of stepfamilies and the benefits of healthy relationship functioning for adults and children, this study adds to the literature by exploring the understudied experiences of remarried couples and how these experiences differ depending on stepfamily constellation. This study used a multigroup approach to explore how relationship maintenance behaviors that included positivity, negativity, and sexual interest were related to marital instability based on different stepfamily constellations. In this study, we used dyadic relationship information to explore how each constellation experiences the relationship maintenance behaviors of negativity, positivity, and sexual interest.

### **Relationship Maintenance Behaviors**

**Negativity.** Negativity has been linked with declines in day-to-day marital satisfaction (Gill et al., 1999; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991) and is highly predictive of early divorce (Gottman, 1994) and marital instability (Guilbert, Vace, & Pasley, 2000; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996; Yeh et al., 2006). Unfortunately, nearly all the research is on married couples (or research where no distinction was made), with little-to-no attention paid to those in remarriages and stepfamilies. In this study, findings suggest that one's own and one's partner's negativity is related to increased marital instability for both husbands and wives in couples where both had children and in couples with no previous children. A unique finding in this study was that for couples where only the

husband or the wife had previous children, there were partner effects for negativity observed only from the partner who did not bring children to the marriage. Thus, the parent with offspring appears to observe, and be sensitive to, their partner's negativity to gauge their perception of marital stability. Marital negativity may spark an instinct to leave to protect the child(ren). Another novel finding was that no actor effect for negativity was present for husbands in couples where only the husband had children, while both actor effects were significant for couples where only the wife had children, which could mean husbands are more focused on their partner's negativity to gauge the family climate when they had children prior to the remarriage. Gender differences have been found for responses to negative affect, where men are more likely to withdraw (Gottman et al., 1998) and resort to self-defensive and protective behaviors (Mirecki et al., 2013), where women have been found to engage in more negative behaviors toward their spouses (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991).

**Positivity.** Gottman et al. (1998) caution therapists to be mindful of the need for humor, interest, and affection to be organic, especially during conflict resolution. Therefore, engagement and helpful affective responsiveness during times of neutral affect can forecast both lower levels of negative start-up by the wife and more willingness for the husband to accept influence from his wife. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) also suggested wives should be less concerned with being positive and compliant and more focused on helping their husbands openly confront disagreements and anger.

Other studies indicate that the absence of positivity leads to later divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Schramm & Adler-Baeder, 2012) and marital instability (Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). Low levels of positivity have been linked with

increased flooding, diffuse physiological arousal, and limiting interaction via living parallel lives (Gottman et al., 2002). Madhyastha et al. (2011) suggested that happily married couples approach conflict with a “climate of agreement” that may be developed through adaptive responses and positivity during times of peace (Gottman et al., 2015; Gudmunson et al., 2007; Ledermann et al., 2010; McNulty et al., 2015). With regard to gender differences, women have been found less likely to use positivity to de-escalate conflict (Notarius et al., 1989). The findings in this study suggest that marital instability for husbands was inversely related to their own and their wife’s positivity for couples where both had children and where neither had children. The husband’s own positivity was inversely related to marital instability in couples where only husbands brought children into the relationship and unrelated when only the wives had children. Thus, husbands appeared to focus on their own positivity to manage stepfamily problems with their own children. Marital instability for wives was inversely related to their own positivity only when both had children or when only their husband had children, possibly suggesting wives may focus on positivity to cope with the stresses of being a stepmother in these couples. Partner effects for wives emerged in stepfamilies where both had children, when neither had children, and in couples where only the wife had children. The partner effects from the husbands in these families may suggest that positivity from the husband helps wives feel more stable when they brought children into the new stepfamily, and when the couple does not have children.

**Sexual interest.** Intimacy and sexual desire have been linked to higher relationship satisfaction (Carpenter et al., 2007; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; McNulty et al., 2015; Patrick & Beckenbach, 2009) and lower marital instability (Lehrer, 2006; Yeh

et al., 2006). Extant findings regarding gender differences are mixed, suggesting more attention may be indicated (Heller & Wood, 1998; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Liu, 2003). Further, the links between sexual and marital stability are understudied for parents and seemingly unstudied for stepfamilies (Khajehei, 2015; Negash et al., 2015). Results of this study indicate that marital instability for the partner who alone brought children into the relationship was inversely associated with their own sexual interest. This may suggest that sexual interest is important to the parents of the children and couples that can still enjoy physical intimacy in the face of parental demands may stay invested in their marriages. For couples where both had children, marital instability was inversely associated to the wife's own sexual interest and the wife's partner effect on the husband, possibly due to other familial demands superseding sexual interest. This could be related to sexual scripts in our society that suggest that men push for and always want sex and women are the gatekeepers of sex, who are socialized to consider sex a duty or responsibility instead of a joy or pleasure. If women were able to embrace their sexuality and initiate sex (which is really what this variable measures), it may indicate a more intimate and passionate (or perhaps a more egalitarian) relationship. Sexual interest was not associated with marital instability for couples with no children. If parenting (especially if you have brought a child of your own in to the marriage) restricts availability, energy, and interest in sex (especially for women), then those who do not have that responsibility may just take the sexual interest for granted and not use it so much as a barometer for the marriage.

## **Therapeutic Implications**

In order to assist couples in increasing positivity and decreasing negativity, therapists could use several existing strategies to address couple interaction and normalize remarriage experiences. Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) focuses on attachment theory, which emphasizes underlying insecurities as the source of marital hostility (Bean, 2015; Bowlby, 1976). EFT seeks to reframe marital hostility into “vulnerable” or “soft” emotions for which the partner may find more empathy, like fear or sadness in lieu of contempt and anger. Gottman et al. (2015) inferred attempts at relationship repair that include humor, affection, self-disclosure, agreement, and empathy are most likely to result in increased emotional closeness and improved marital stability.

A model of marital therapy that is most likely to be effective should be based on several factors that include softened start-up by the wife, increased mutual gentleness, a problem-centered focus, and a husband’s willingness to both accept influence from his wife and to de-escalate her low-intensity negative affect. This will require augmenting the active listening model with a focus on a healthy ratio of positivity to negativity (at least five to one) in the relationship and using positive affect to de-escalate marital conflict and to physiologically soothe the husband (Gill et al., 1999; Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). Therapists are also cautioned to avoid making war on negative affect, as negative affect can draw attention to conflict-causing behaviors and help reduce emotional distance through relationship healing after a conflict (Gottman et al., 2002).

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study is limited by a number of factors. The sample for this study was drawn from a highly religious state with relatively limited diversity. While invitations were sent to every couple in the state that indicated the marriage was a remarriage, selection bias may be present based on couples that completed the surveys. Additionally, some items in the questionnaires were altered from the validated measures (e.g., sexual interest subscale items for the SEBI). It is also possible that answers to questions about sexuality may be influenced by the religious majority context from which these data were collected. The aim of the original study from which these data originate did not focus specifically on the levels of the relationship maintenance behaviors and thus we did not have a measurement by which to determine the levels or ratio of positive to negative interactions for these couples (Gottman, 1994). Further, gathering additional data pertinent to the relationship maintenance behaviors themselves may elucidate specific benefits/challenges for different types of positivity, negativity, and sexual interest. For example, does the perception of sexual interest from one's spouse result in different evaluations of marital stability, or are differences reserved for actual sexual contact?

While this study adds to the study of remarriage and stepfamilies in the United States, future studies should attempt to gather data from diverse populations and cultures. Further, using unaltered validated measures may improve the low alpha found for the sexual interest subscale of the SEBI. It would be beneficial for future studies to collect quantitative data about the levels of relationship maintenance behaviors to ascertain the ratios of positive to negative behaviors for analysis. Additionally, future studies could employ a longitudinal design to explore how the levels of relationship maintenance



behaviors influence relationships over time. These data could also guide treatment for couples based upon the stages or length of their marriages in the event these findings change over time.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables for Husbands and Wives*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Both had Children (n = 358)	<b>Husband</b>			
	MII	355	6.01	1.89
	Positivity	334	3.85	0.70
	Negativity	356	1.73	0.52
	Sex. Interest	347	3.05	1.20
	<b>Wife</b>			
	MII	353	6.14	2.02
	Positivity	356	3.98	0.65
	Negativity	358	1.73	0.43
	Sexual Interest	356	2.86	1.19
Only Husband had Children (n = 138)	<b>Husband</b>			
	MII	138	5.71	1.50
	Positivity	124	3.90	0.66
	Negativity	137	1.71	0.38
	Sex. Interest	135	3.05	1.19
	<b>Wife</b>			
	MII	138	5.82	1.62
	Positivity	135	3.95	0.62
Only Wife had Children (n = 138)	<b>Husband</b>			
	MII	134	6.07	1.77
	Positivity	129	3.77	0.74
	Negativity	138	1.77	0.46
	Sex. Interest	137	2.79	1.16
	<b>Wife</b>			
	MII	135	6.13	1.95
	Positivity	137	3.82	0.65
Neither had Children (n = 234)	<b>Husband</b>			
	MII	233	6.27	2.19
	Positivity	222	3.74	0.85
	Negativity	233	1.65	0.32
	Sex. Interest	225	3.07	1.53
	<b>Wife</b>			
	MII	231	6.18	1.55
	Positivity	229	3.81	0.72
	<b>Husband</b>			
	Negativity	231	1.95	0.54
	Sexual Interest	228	2.75	1.13

*Note.* MII = Marital Instability Index. Positivity, Negativity, and Sexual Interest are the subscale scores for the Socioemotional Behavior Index.

Table 2

*Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables for Husbands and Wives*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. MII - H	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Pos. - H	-.269*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Sex. Int. - H	-.111*	.429*	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Neg. - H	.351*	-.269*	-.036	-	-	-	-	-
5. MII - W	.618*	-.237*	-.061	.337*	-	-	-	-
6. Pos. - W	-.256*	.414*	.199*	-.264*	-.302*	-	-	-
7. Sex. Int. - W	-.134*	.216*	.230*	-.158*	-.135*	.486*	-	-
8. Neg. - W	.262*	-.169*	-.019	.415*	.317*	-.239*	-.132*	-

*Note.* H = husbands; W = wives; MII = Marital Instability Index; Pos. = positivity; Sex. Int. = sexual interest; Neg. = negativity; \* =  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

Table 3

*Results of the APIM for SEBI Negativity on Marital Instability. Actor and Partner Effect Comparisons for SEBI Negativity on Marital Instability.*

Group	Effect	Estimate	SE	Comparison	Chi Square (df = 1)	p
Both had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	1.730***	.027			
	Wives	1.734***	.022	Act. H=Act. W	0.838	.360
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	5.931	.015
	Husbands	1.358***	.192			
	Wives	1.036***	.250	Act. W=Part. H	0.027	.870
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	3.311	.069
	W to H	0.465*	.233			
Only Husband had Kids	H to W	1.099***	.205			
	Intercept					
	Husbands	1.710***	.032			
	Wives	1.760***	.036	Act. H=Act. W	0.726	.394
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	0.158	.691
	Husbands	0.594	.380			
	Wives	1.113**	.373	Act. W=Part. H	1.791	.181
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	1.210	.271
Only Wife had Kids	W to H	0.845*	.338			
	H to W	0.167	.423			
	Intercept					
	Husbands	1.772***	.039			
	Wives	1.771 ***	.032	Act. H=Act. W	0.041	.084
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	2.055	.152
	Husbands	1.106***	.328			
	Wives	1.222**	.424	Act. W=Part. H	0.007	.934
Neither had Kids	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	2.561	.110
	W to H	0.261	.397			
	H to W	1.170***	.345			
	Intercept					
	Husbands	1.782***	.032			
	Wives	1.756***	.027	Act. H=Act. W	0.319	.572
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	0.002	.964
	Husbands	0.594***	.182			
Neither had Kids	Wives	0.805**	.293	Act. W=Part. H	0.004	.948
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	0.395	.529
	W to H	0.609**	.220			
	H to W	0.834***	.243			

*Note.* SE = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; W = wives; H = husbands; Act. Effect = actor effect; Par. Effect = partner effect; Act. H = husband's actor effect; Act. W = wife's actor effect; Part. H = effects from wife to husband; Part. W = effects from husband to wife. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

Table 4

*Results of the APIM for SEBI Positivity on Marital Instability. Actor and Partner Effect Comparisons for SEBI Positivity on Marital Instability.*

Group	Effect	Estimate	SE	Comparison	Chi Square (df = 1)	p
Both had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	3.853***	.037			
	Wives	3.979***	.034	Act. H=Act. W	0.778	.378
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	0.384	.535
	Husbands	-0.475**	.155			
	Wives	-0.588***	.164	Act. W=Part. H	0.162	.688
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	0.042	.837
	W to H	-0.641***	.159			
	H to W	-0.702***	.169			
Only Husband had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	3.893***	.059			
	Wives	3.953***	.053	Act. H=Act. W	0.504	.478
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	1.047	.306
	Husbands	-0.581**	.219			
	Wives	-0.552*	.230	Act. W=Part. H	0.326	.568
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	1.009	.315
	W to H	-0.186	.227			
	H to W	-0.317	.247			
Only Wife had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	3.765***	.064			
	Wives	3.822***	.055	Act. H=Act. W	3.923	.048
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	0.132	.716
	Husbands	-0.335	.230			
	Wives	0.002	.242	Act. W=Part. H	6.849	.009
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	0.262	.609
	W to H	-0.192	.245			
	H to W	-1.091***	.258			
Neither had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	3.800***	.046			
	Wives	3.931***	.043	Act. H=Act. W	2.474	.116
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	0.644	.415
	Husbands	-0.341**	.130			
	Wives	-0.117	.179	Act. W=Part. H	4.107	.043
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	2.691	.101
	W to H	-0.521***	.137			
	H to W	-0.733***	.187			

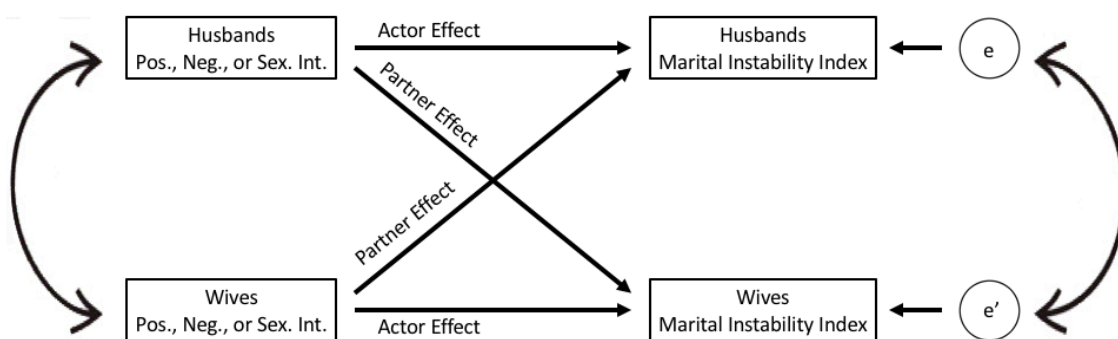
*Note.* SE = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; W = wives; H = husbands; Act. Effect = actor effect; Par. Effect = partner effect; Act. H = husband's actor effect; Act. W = wife's actor effect; Part. H = effects from wife to husband; Part. W = effects from husband to wife. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

Table 5

*Results of the APIM for SEBI Sexual Interest on Marital Instability. Actor and Partner Effect Comparisons for SEBI Sexual Interest on Marital Instability.*

Group	Effect	Estimate	SE	Comparison	Chi Square (df = 1)	p
Both had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	3.063***	.064			
	Wives	2.866***	.062	Act. H=Act. W	1.155	.282
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	1.043	.307
	Husbands	-0.109	.084			
	Wives	-0.253**	.091	Act. W=Part. H	1.591	.207
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	1.722	.189
	W to H	-0.246**	.085			
	H to W	-0.071	.090			
Only Husband had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	3.053***	.102			
	Wives	2.727***	.095	Act. H=Act. W	0.760	.383
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	1.559	.212
	Husbands	-0.265*	.106			
	Wives	-0.116	.124	Act. W=Part. H	0.067	.795
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	0.395	.530
	W to H	-0.057	.113			
	H to W	-0.164	.117			
Only Wife had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	2.786***	.099			
	Wives	2.575 ***	.096	Act. H=Act. W	1.591	.207
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	0.100	.752
	Husbands	-0.068	.134			
	Wives	-0.341*	.151	Act. W=Part. H	2.259	.133
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	0.506	.477
	W to H	-0.137	.139			
	H to W	0.017	.148			
Neither had Kids	Intercept					
	Husbands	2.956***	.074			
	Wives	2.650***	.073	Act. H=Act. W	1.248	.264
	Act. Effect			Act. H=Part. W	1.667	.197
	Husbands	0.007	.082			
	Wives	-0.152	.107	Act. W=Part. H	1.526	.217
	Par. Effect			Part. H=Part. W	2.141	.143
	W to H	-0.154	.080			
	H to W	0.056	.111			

*Note.* SE = standard error; df = degrees of freedom; W = wives; H = husbands; Act. Effect = actor effect; Par. Effect = partner effect; Act. H = husband's actor effect; Act. W = wife's actor effect; Part. H = effects from wife to husband; Part. W = effects from husband to wife. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed).



*Figure 1.* Actor-Partner Interdependence Model. Pos. = positivity; Sex. Int. = sexual interest; Neg. = negativity.

## CHAPTER III

### PAPER II:

#### Adjustment Difficulties and Marital Stability in Remarriages: The Role of Stepfamily Constellation

#### ABSTRACT

Stepfamily complexity and related challenges remain largely neglected in contemporary literature despite links with marital instability. As around 50% of U.S. adults report close stepparents, stepchildren, and other close relationships, this study explored links among difficulties associated with stepfamily life (e.g., social and family dimension, role of the spouse, role of the parent, role of the stepparent) and marital stability for different remarriage constellations (depending which of the couple, both, or neither had previous children). This study used dyadic relationship data from 879 couples. Wives reported higher levels of parenting and stepparenting difficulties across constellation. Challenges in the social and family dimension were highest for stepmothers without biological children of their own, possibly because of unmet parental expectations. Therefore, being a stepmother without one's own children might present unique challenges that place stepmothers at higher risk for family-related strain, these challenges remain understudied in the literature to date.

*Keywords:* remarriage, stepfamily, stepchildren, divorce, marital stability

## Adjustment Difficulties and Marital Stability in Remarriages: The Role of Stepfamily Constellation

Stepfamily research received little consideration prior to the 1970s despite representing considerable and increasing portions of families both in the United States and abroad. This changed when divorce replaced bereavement as the leading precipitant of remarriage. In fact, about 9,100 new stepfamilies are created weekly in the United States (Gold, 2010). Although changes to the nuclear family with the addition of non-biological parental figures have been documented, studies failed to explore the diversity and structural complexity of stepfamilies (e.g., Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000).

Falke and Larson (2007) cite ecosystemic theory in their suggestion that the marriage, the relevant environment, and the interaction between the marriage and environment significantly affect each partner. Therefore, all parts of the marital ecosystem, especially the structural complexity, must be examined to understand remarital satisfaction. They explained simple stepfamilies are those in which one spouse brings children into the relationship, compared with complex stepfamilies in which both partners do. Stepfamily complexity was inversely associated with relationship quality in many aspects, including communication, conflict resolution, and parenting. King, Thorsen, and Amato (2014) stated that changes in or problems with one subsystem of the family (e.g., stepparent-stepchild, parent-stepparent) affect the other subsystems.

Increased structural complexity also results in obfuscated boundaries and societal norms that Falke and Larson (2007) claim result in increased stress levels and partners' role ambiguity that lower their satisfaction with marriage. Aside from strain about household chores, the most common forms of role strain relate to child discipline, the



stepparent/stepchild relationships, and the relationship with non-residential biological parents. Perhaps related to these challenges, it has been reported there is around a 60% divorce rate for remarried and stepfamily couples, a rate that rises to about 73% for third marriages (Gold, 2010).

Approximately 82% of stepfamilies are formed when a custodial mother remarries, forming a stepfather family (Gold, 2010). This makes it more challenging to study stepmother families due to inadequate sample sizes (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Gold, 2010; Gosselin & David, 2007). Further, social constructs and stereotypes (e.g., evil stepmother) perpetuate negative beliefs surrounding stepfamilies, making willingness to participate in research difficult and influencing the way stepfamilies interact (Blyaert, Van Parys, De Mol, & Buysse, 2016).

The current study explored marital instability among remarried individuals and difficulties associated with stepfamilies, with particular focus on to the presence vs. absence of children brought to the family by either partner. Given the complex social construction of stepfamilies, we expected that remarried couples would experience different forms of difficulty depending on whether partners brought children of their own into the new marriage. We consider four different types of stepfamily difficulties. Specifically, difficulties associated with the social and family dimension (SFD), difficulties associated with the role of the spouse (DRS), difficulties associated with the being a parent (DRP), and difficulties associated with being a stepparent (DRSP).

### **Difficulties Associated with the Social and Family Dimension**

According to Falke and Larson (2007), good relationships with friends and relatives was related to higher marital satisfaction and remarital adjustment. They also

indicated a lack of support by loved ones in marrying someone who was previously married and poor integration with in-laws and parents predicted lower remarital stability. This may be related to decreased average courtship time for remarriages, which lowers the amount of time available for building social support. Additionally, financial struggles are more common in second marriages than in first marriages (Falke & Larson, 2007).

Another factor, according to the biosocial perspective, suggests biological links are key to the well-being of children because biological family members may be more involved in the lives of the children (Yuan & Hamilton, 2006). Family systems theory suggests that communication and closeness with family members influences stepfamily development, which is important to consider because stepfamilies experience more internalizing and externalizing behaviors from the children than families with two biological parents (Amato, King, & Thorsen, 2015).

### **Difficulties Associated with the Role of the Spouse**

Gottman (1993) stated that marital instability starts with conflictual interactions and difficulty maintaining positivity. When a remarried couple encounters difficulty resolving conflict, interpersonal negativity and distancing occur, further increasing marital instability (Gottman, 1993; Guilbert, Vacc, & Pasley, 2000). Guilbert et al. (2000) indicated that women's reports of marital instability were related to negativity and distancing, where men reported instability through distancing, or decreased marital interaction.

According to Falke and Larson (2007), 86% of men and women who divorce show evidence of emotional attachment to their former spouses. They stated that 34% of wives were jealous of the husband's former wife. Further, they claimed that as many as

one-third of second wives felt that their husbands still felt married to their first wives and these perceptions were related to lower remarital satisfaction and higher regrets of remarriage. Husbands that reported continued attachment to their former spouses reported reduced emotional and social connection with their current wives and decreased intellectual and sexual intimacy.

As most women were found to view financial stability as a primary role for their husbands, marital dissatisfaction increased when wives perceived excessive financial support for the husband's first family (Falke & Larson, 2007; Skogrand, Torres, & Higginbotham, 2010). They also reported that for husbands, their wife's evaluation of their ex-spouse was more closely related to their remarital satisfaction than their own evaluation of their current wife.

The experience of marrying a partner who has experienced relationship loss could be different for those who were widowed rather than divorced. Barrett (2000) suggested that getting divorced could be a positive, affirming event that was self-initiated, vs. nearly universal uncontrollable and undesired widowhood. In fact, they found that depressive symptoms were significantly higher with each divorce, while multiple widowhood was associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and substance use.

Though wives have been found to disparage their former husbands more than current husbands (possibly linked with previous conflict), more frequent conflict is present with current spouses, which could be more reflective of day-to-day stressors (Favez, Widmer, Doan, & Tissot, 2015). Favez et al. (2015) also indicated that as the stepchildren age, mothers tend to disparage the father of the children less and their current partners more, reflecting increasing marital conflict as the children age.

### **Difficulties Associated with the Role of the Parent**

The amount a former couple supports one another at an emotional and instrumental level in co-parenting tasks (e.g., the expression of affection and warmth, validation of parental efforts, and aiding one another in daily tasks) is key as children who experience co-parental disturbances are more likely to exhibit internalizing and externalizing symptoms, reduced school adaptation, impaired peer relationships, and impaired theory of mind development (Favez et al., 2015). Further, non-custodial parents often disengage from their relationship with the children when conflict is high, while successful co-parenting is linked with improved relationships between ex-spouses (Favez et al., 2015). Positive associations between marital satisfaction and engagement, stepfather-stepchild relationships, and shared parental responsibility are widely reported and instability has been reported to negatively impact these associations (Katz & Gottman, 1996; Klaus, Nauck, & Steinbach, 2012; Yuan & Hamilton, 2006).

Favez et al. (2015) indicated that mothers in stepfamilies engage in fewer active strategies to strengthen family cohesiveness than in first marriage families, possibly as a result of trying to avoid competing with openness with other family units to which the children might belong, or by attention being demanded by management of daily life. Maternal relationships are the strongest emotionally and these relationships can influence the strength of the relationships the children have with both their biological fathers and stepfathers (King, Amato, & Lindstrom, 2015; Klaus et al., 2012).

Developmental tasks like the formation of autonomy and establishing greater independence are potential barriers to the genesis of closeness and identity in newly formed stepfamilies. For example, triangulation can result in conflicts for loyalty, power

struggles, and boundary issues that further complicate remarital and stepfamily functioning (Gosselin & David, 2007). Furthermore, steps taken by parents to avoid the children being “pulled in” to parental disagreements, strain, and negotiations helps to avoid confusion, insecurity, and attachment and adjustment problems in the children (Taanila, Laitinen, Moilanen, & Järvelin, 2002). Developing effective boundaries communicates a united front from which parents can support positive relationships among stepfamily members (Gosselin & David, 2007).

### **Difficulties Associated with the Role of the Stepparent**

Between 20% and 60% of stepparents reported they would enjoy a happier marriage without their stepchildren in Falke and Larson's 2007 study. Stepparents with poor stepparent/stepchildren relationships tend to ascribe more marital problems to their stepchildren than their own children. Wives in stepfamilies report that their relationships with their husbands and their husbands' relationships with their children impact the stability of the remarital relationship more than any other factor and these relationships influence their satisfaction more than their husbands' (Falke & Larson, 2007; Favez et al., 2015). Children who have experienced the departure of multiple stepfathers may be especially reluctant to build relationships (King et al., 2014). Conversely, stepfathers who have lost previous relationships with stepchildren may be more reluctant to form relationships to buffer the amount of loss in the event of a breakup (Blyaert et al., 2016).

Gosselin and David (2007) suggested that research should view the stepparent-stepchild relationship as a complex system that involves conflict and cooperation as well as closeness and distance, compared to the more common “either-or” approach reflected in the literature. They advocate attendance to the power children have in stepfamilies as

stepchildren are more involved in the family executive system than are children in more traditional families. Gosselin and David further noted that stepchildren sometimes have even more say in decisions than do the stepparents, which may introduce power issues and lead to marital adjustment, triangulation, and dissatisfaction problems in the remarital relationship. They suggest children become closer following divorce through what is often referred to as “traumatic bonding.” Traumatic bonding refers to the “strong emotional ties that develop between two persons” through the experiences of trauma (Dutton & Painter, 1981, p. 147). They claim this closeness can further magnify problems with triangulation against stepparents, especially in the beginning stages of stepfamily formation. Gosselin and David (2007) reported there is a positive association between effective communication between the parents and their children and adolescents’ stepfamily adjustment, which builds with time (King et al., 2014). They caution that while fewer stepchild/stepparent cohabitating days are associated with better parental and stepfamily adjustment, fewer cohabitating days are also linked with increased triangulation and boundary problems with the children.

**Stepfathers.** Considering the differences described, it is logical that husbands and wives likely experience differences in how these variables affect their stepfamilies. Different gender role expectations, different amounts of stepchild presence as a result of custody, societal expectations, and myriad variables can be based in gender. For stepfathers, arguments with or wishing the stepchildren did not live in the home was related to lower marital satisfaction (Falke & Larson, 2007). Problems in the stepfather-stepchild relationship may stem from split custody or living full-time with their mother and stepfather, and this may be due to children’s attempted avoidance of hurting their

biological father's feelings (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Gosselin, 2010; Wampold, 2008). They suggest that adolescents perceive that problematic relationships with stepparents is linked with having to spend more time with them, but the parents of these children can play an important role in helping them develop a positive relationship with their stepparents, especially in stepfather families. An important consideration in this development is the finding that stepfathers tend to build relationships with stepsons easier than with stepdaughters (Favez et al., 2015; King et al., 2014). Improving the relationship with the stepchildren may engender a better co-parental relationship, which includes more frequent contact between the mother and her partner than between she and the father of the children (though mothers are likely to maintain unity with previous families) (Favez et al., 2015).

Stepfathers experience pervasive and unfavorable stereotypes that include beliefs they are less caring than biological fathers, which have been shown to be incorrect. For example, Gold (2010) found no differences for child rearing and the quality of interactions between biological fathers and stepfathers. Further, Gold stated that stepfathers with their own biological children living in the home generalized their love and feeling responsible for the stepchildren as much as their own. This is only possible when the mother and nonresidential father participate in cooperative co-parenting. In fact, adolescents who are close with both fathers have improved educational performance and have fewer behavioral problems (Dunn, OConnor, & Cheng, 2005; Gold, 2010; King et al., 2015). Importantly, research suggests that stepfathers should support the child's relationship with non-residential fathers, as this support engenders a deeper relationship with their stepchildren (Blyaert et al., 2016; Gold, 2010; Marsiglio & Hinojosa, 2007) .

**Stepmothers.** Unique challenges for stepmothers and marital stability include the belief that stepmothers' input is less important (Gosselin, 2010), role ambiguity, that they are "wicked stepmothers," or the belief they must experience instantaneous love for the stepchildren (Craig & Johnson, 2011). These issues may be accentuated for women with no biological children as they may expect to be more involved with parental decision making (Craig & Johnson, 2011) and thereby feel they may be playing the part of a mother (Blyaert et al., 2016). Increased remarital distance, boundary issues, and stepmother-stepchildren conflict are made worse due to exclusion of the stepmothers by adolescents that perceive high levels of distress and poor communication between their fathers and stepmothers and limited time with their stepchildren (Craig & Johnson, 2011).

The stepmother's feelings could result from triangulation as stepmother adjustment is also related to higher father's self-rated level of stepfamily adjustment (decreased father-child conflict), which may make stepmothers feel excluded, less supported, and less satisfied in their roles because of perception of conflict with the stepchildren (Gosselin, 2010). These problems are even greater for older stepmothers, who tend to have more problematic stepmother-stepchild relationships than younger stepmothers (Gosselin & David, 2007). More boundary ambiguity has been reported in stepmother families than in stepfather families, possibly because nonresidential mothers often remain more present in their children's lives than do nonresidential fathers (Gosselin, 2010; Gosselin & David, 2007). In fact, mother-custody households are found to have the fewest boundary issues (Gosselin & David, 2007; Taanila et al., 2002).



## **The Present Study**

The current study explored marital instability and the challenges for couples in stepfamilies in a large, state-wide sample of remarital dyads ( $n = 879$ ). Further, we assessed the role of stepfamily constellation in understanding stepfamily adjustment difficulties and relationship stability for both husbands and wives. Specifically, the primary research question for this study was: What are the effects of gender, stepfamily constellation (i.e., husband brought children (HC), wife brought children (WC), both brought children (BC)), and the interaction between the two on marital instability and difficulties associated with stepfamilies for husbands and wives in remarriages? We expect to discover differences in stepfamilies where either the husband or wife had previous children.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

The sample for this study was acquired through the Office of Vital Statistics in Utah. Couples from Utah who married in 2006 and indicated the marriage was a remarriage for at least one member of the couple were recruited for the sample. Each of the identified remarried couples (4,886 couples) were mailed a survey packet containing separate surveys for husband and wife in April of 2007. Using current best practices, mailings included a pre-notice letter, a thank you letter, and a reminder postcard. To study dyadic data, the couples were instructed to complete the surveys separately. Return rates were 19.2% for men ( $n = 939$ ) and 22.5% for women ( $n = 1,101$ ). Data was received from both members of 879 newlywed couples.

Age ranged from 18 to 89 ( $M = 42.90$ ,  $SD = 15.13$ ) for men and from 17 to 89 years ( $M = 39.53$ ,  $SD = 14.30$ ) for women. At the time of the initial surveys, couples were married for an average of 9.89 months. Twenty-one percent of men and 17% of women indicated the marriage was their first, while 51% of men and 54% of women indicated the union was their second. Third marriages comprised 20% of the sample for both men and women, while fourth marriages comprised 5% for both men and women. The marriage was the fifth or greater for the remainder of the sample. These numbers appear to be consistent with national averages (Teachman, 2008). The total number of marriages for men ranged from one to five and women ranged from one to eight. Income of more than \$50,000 was reported for approximately 60% of the sample with 15% reporting an annual household income of greater than \$100,000. Approximately 49% of the sample reported a family size of two, 16% reported a family size of three, 17% reported four. Family sizes of five or greater comprised 17.6% of the sample. The number of children ranged between 0 and 9 ( $M = 1.02$ ,  $SD = 1.373$ ). Because the State of Utah marriage licenses did not differentiate participants of Latina/o origin, the sample was approximately 97% White, 1% Black, and 1% Native American. Number of years of education averaged 13.67 for men (range = 8-17 years) and 13.58 for women (range = 7 – 17 years). Cohabitation was reported from 0 to 156 months ( $M = 8.73$ ). The sample was around 70% members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), 4% Catholic, 3% Baptist, 1% Methodist, 1% Episcopalian, and 7% other. Approximately 14% of the sample indicated no religious affiliation.

## Measures

**Marital instability.** The Marital Instability Index (MII-SF; Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983) is a measure of marital instability that is comprised of five items (e.g., “Have you or your spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce?”) that can be answered by three possible answers, “Never;” “Yes, but not recently;” and “Yes, recently.” This measure has been found to discriminate between couples at high and low risk for divorce. Alpha coefficients in this study were good (wives = .84; husbands = .80).

**Difficulties in stepfamilies.** The Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies (QCS; Beaudry, Parent, Saint-Jacques, Guay, & Boisvert, 2001) was used to assess difficulties in each partner. The 52 questions of the QCS provide four subscales: difficulties associated with the social and family dimension (e.g., “Having to function in society as a stepfamily,” “Participating in family events in the context of a stepfamily”); difficulties associated with the role of the spouse (e.g., “Showing affection to my spouse in front of the children,” “Being recognized as a couple by each of our families of origin”); difficulties associated with the role of the parent (e.g., “Reconciling the way my spouse and I feel about raising children,” “Supporting my spouse when he or she deals with my children”); and difficulties associated with the role of the stepparent (e.g., Establishing a relationship of trust with my spouse’s children,” “Living with children whose values and lifestyles are different than mine”). Participants rated the extent to which each of the items matched the level of stress from 1 (*not at all a current difficulty*) to 5 (*significant difficulty*). Reliability coefficients for this instrument exceed .80 for each of the listed subscales in this study. Participants’ responses to questions about their own children was used to determine family types.

## Statistical Analyses

To explore whether ratings on marital instability and difficulties associated with stepfamilies differed by gender, stepfamily constellation, and the interaction of gender by stepfamily constellation, a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Gender was used as within-subject factor and constellation as a between-subject factor. The data were analyzed using SPSS.

## Results

### Preliminary Results

The means and standard deviations (*SD*) of the study variables are displayed in Table 1. To test whether husbands and wives differed on means, paired-samples *t* tests were conducted. Wives reported higher average levels of marital instability  $t(863) = -2.084, p = .037$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.071$ , difficulties associated with being a parent  $t(273) = -3.130, p = .002$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.189$ , and difficulties associated with being a stepparent  $t(287) = -3.630, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.214$ , than husbands.

Pearson correlations are displayed in Table 2. The absolute values of the correlations ranged from .265 to .721. A small effect size was found for the association between DRP and husbands' marital instability. A medium effect size was found for the associations between husbands' marital instability and both SFD and DRSP. All other husbands' score-related associations revealed large effect sizes using Cohen's (1998) criteria to interpret effect size. Further, husbands' marital instability had a large effect size with wives' marital instability and medium effect sizes with wives' SFD, DRS, DRP, and DRSP. Wives' marital instability revealed medium effect sizes with wives' SFD,

DRP, and DRSP. A large effect size was found for the association between wives' marital instability and DRS.

### Primary Results

The results of the repeated measures ANOVAs are presented in Table 3. There was a non-significant trend for wives to report higher marital instability than husbands. With regard to the SFD, the interaction between partner and family type was significant with a small effect size (see Figure 1 for a graph of this interaction). The main effect for family type was also significant with a small effect size. Tukey's HSD post hoc tests indicated that the only significant difference was between HC stepfamilies and WC stepfamilies ( $p = .024$ ). However, interpretation of the interaction in Figure 1 indicates that the effect was only present for wives. Wives in HC stepfamilies reported much higher difficulties associated with the SFD than wives in WC stepfamilies. No significant main effects or interaction effects were found related to difficulties associated with the role of a spouse.

Thus, a series of independent samples  $t$  tests were conducted to assess patterns of difference for husbands and wives on each scale. Regarding DRP, there was not a significant difference in the scores for wives in BC stepfamilies ( $M = 20.14$ ,  $SD = 9.38$ ) and WC stepfamilies ( $M = 20.29$ ,  $SD = 8.05$ ),  $t(465) = -.155$ ,  $p = .148$ . Similarly, there was not a significant difference in DRP for husbands in BC stepfamilies ( $M = 18.79$ ,  $SD = 7.87$ ) versus HC stepfamilies ( $M = 18.55$ ,  $SD = 7.52$ ),  $t(464) = .307$ ,  $p = .759$ . Wives' scores for DRSP were significantly lower in BC stepfamilies ( $M = 27.10$ ,  $SD = 12.74$ ) relative to HC stepfamilies ( $M = 30.05$ ,  $SD = 12.68$ );  $t(396) = -2.015$ ,  $p < .05$ . There was not a significant difference in DRSP for husbands in BC stepfamilies ( $M =$

24.29,  $SD = 10.46$ ), relative to WC stepfamilies ( $M = 26.91$ ,  $SD = 11.24$ );  $t(413) = -2.146$ ,  $p = .031$ .

## **Discussion**

The level of complexity in stepfamilies is an important factor to consider as it can be negatively related to marital stability, due to unclear boundaries and societal expectations. This role ambiguity may degrade marital stability and parenting/discipline, linking it to incrementally increased divorce risk (Gold, 2010). The historically low prevalence of step-mother families (about 18%; Gold, 2010), stereotypes, consequences of the social construction of stepmothering, and reluctance to participate in research have made stepfamilies challenging to study (Blyaert, Van Parys, De Mol, & Buysse, 2016). The present study explored the quality of remarriage and stepparenting difficulties, taking into account different remarriage types and gender. We hypothesized that remarried couples would experience different kinds of difficulties depending on which partner(s) brought children into the relationship and partners' gender.

### **Marital Instability**

Marital instability is related to difficulties maintaining positivity and increased negative interactions (Gottman, 1993; Guilbert, Vacc, & Pasley, 2000). We observed a non-significant trend in our data for ratings of marital instability to be higher for wives than husbands, and this was not dependent on stepfamily constellation. Other tests of simple effects indicated that wives also reported higher levels of parenting and stepparenting difficulties. Although our findings only indicated a non-significant trend, we cautiously interpret these findings in the context of gender role socialization within U.S. culture, which places responsibility for nurturing intimate relationships and for

parenting more squarely on the shoulders of women. The inequitable distribution of the burden of relationship maintenance and parenting responsibilities likely contributed to the higher instability scores reported by women in our sample.

The presence of past relationships in the remarital relationship is nearly unavoidable and emotional attachment to former spouses is reported by up to 86% of remarried spouses. Jealousy of former wives was reported by 34% of remarried wives, even to the point of feeling husbands were “still married” to former wives, reducing emotional, intellectual, social, and sexual intimacy and financial stability (Falke & Larson, (2007). The relationship maintenance strategies observed in the larger literature on marital satisfaction may be even more relevant in remarriages, as spouses may experience additional challenges. Guilbert et al. (2000) reported that women’s marital instability reports were related to both negativity and distancing, whereas men experienced instability through distancing or decreased marital interaction. Dyadic communication and conflict resolution processes best predict remarital satisfaction (Falke & Larson, 2007) and stable couples are reported to engage a ratio of approximately five positive interactions for each negative interaction, compared to the ratio of .8 to 1 for unstable couples (Gottman, 1994).

### **Social and Family Difficulties**

The SFD in relationships can present ample opportunities for challenges, which can be mitigated by strong friend and family relations, increased support for those previously-married, improved remarital financial outlooks, and improved in-law and parental relationships (Falke & Larson, 2007). Being in a stepfamily further complicates remarriage because ties with biological children are likely different than those with

stepchildren (Yuan & Hamilton, 2006). Closeness improves stepfamily development and decreases child internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Amato, King, & Thorsen, 2015). In this study, women who were in HC stepfamilies reported the highest levels of SFD, particularly in comparison to WC stepfamilies. In fact, if wives were the only ones to bring children to the marriage, their scores on SFD were the lowest of all participants. This suggests that being a stepmother without one's own children may be uniquely challenging or that children in families with biological ties to the mother only may present fewer challenges. This could reflect feeling marginalized and having little to say in family decisions or feeling on an equal or lesser level with the children on decisions normally reserved for couples, due to entering an existing family culture (Gosselin, 2010). Our findings are especially intriguing given the lack of representation of the experiences of stepmothers in the literature to date. Women in stepparenting roles appear to be increased risk for general family-related strain. This may be a function of the demand for higher levels of interaction with the partner's ex-spouse, the stereotype of the "wicked evil step-mother" that impacts the quality of relationship between the step-mother and the step-child (Craig & Johnson, 2011), lack of support or integration in to the larger family system, or the challenge of adopting a mother identity in stepparenting circumstances. We see further research into the experiences of stepmothers as a critical next step.

### **Parenting and Stepparenting**

Parenting presents unique challenges and co-parental emotional support and task management may help mitigate co-parental disturbances, internalizing and externalizing symptoms, and improve peer relationships (Favez et al., 2015). Although we found, as



previously mentioned, that wives reported higher parenting and stepparenting difficulties than husbands, our subsequent analyses indicated that the difficulties were most pronounced for wives who were stepparenting and had not brought children of their own into the marriage (versus wives in families with children from both partners). As a stepparent, triangulation may arise when loyalty, power, and boundaries are in play which impede healthy remarital and stepfamily functioning (Gosselin & David, 2007).

Being a spouse can be challenging enough without extra considerations. Developing effective boundaries can foster positive relationships among stepfamily members (Gosselin & David, 2007) and buffer against the negative impacts associated with being a stepparent that are often blamed on stepchildren. In previous research, women in stepfamilies felt most stable in their marriages when their relationships with their husbands and their husbands' relationship with their children were the strongest, more so than any other explored factor (Favez et al., 2015).

It is important to note that the bulk of previous research has focused on factors that support or challenge biological mothers and stepfathers in their marital and co-parenting efforts. This literature suggests that, in contrast to a simplistic "good vs. bad" conceptualization of the quality of stepchild-stepparent relationships, this relationship is a complex system, involving conflict and cooperation as well as closeness and distance (Gosselin & David, 2007). The power uniquely held by stepchildren in executive family systems is an important consideration as some stepchildren reportedly have more say in decisions than some stepparents, further complicating power issues, triangulation, and dissatisfaction with the relationship. This is made even more challenging through "traumatic bonding" associated with children being closer after divorce (Gosselin &

David, 2007). Improving the relationship with the stepchildren may engender a better co-parental relationship, which includes more frequent contact between the mother and her partner than between she and the father of the children (though mothers are likely to maintain unity with previous families; Favez et al., 2015). However, we do not yet understand these dynamics when mothers are in the stepparenting role.

### **Therapeutic Implications**

Therapists should try to understand the real obstacles faced by the clients they see. Helping to engender understanding about the potential inequities and demands faced by women, be they relational, parenting, and stepparenting challenges, could foster better personal, relationship, and stepfamily outcomes. It seems that with increasing complexity (i.e., being a stepmother) may come higher inequity. In particular, understanding that women with no children of their own may be particularly disappointed with unmet expectations about input regarding parental decision-making (Blyaert et al., 2016; Craig & Johnson, 2011).

These factors may exacerbate remarital distance, boundary issues, impaired communication between fathers and stepmothers, and heightened stepmother-stepchildren conflict (Craig & Johnson, 2011). Differences in perception of stepchildren conflict are higher for older stepmothers who experience more problematic stepmother-stepchild relationships (Gosselin, 2010; Gosselin & David, 2007). Stepmother families must also face higher levels of boundary ambiguity than stepfather families, possibly related to nonresidential mothers tendency to remain more present in their children's lives than do nonresidential fathers (Gosselin, 2010; Gosselin & David, 2007). In fact, mother-custody households are found to have the fewest boundary issues (Gosselin & David,

2007; Taanila et al., 2002). In addition to providing psychoeducation and teaching strategies to couples (e.g., active listening, assertive communication, conflict resolution), therapists can also provide resources to stepfamilies that are tailored to their individual needs. Stepmothers, especially those without children of their own, may benefit from increased social and family support that may help potential feelings of not having a voice in a previously-established family system.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study is limited by a number of factors that make future stepfamily functioning exploration a fruitful area of study. An important limitation of this study relates to the non-representative sample from which these data originate (e.g., 97% White, 70% LDS). While this study adds data for consideration to the debate on how to address stepfamily challenges, issues central to parents in different stepfamily constellations would benefit from additional exploration. Stepmother families are especially underrepresented in research. Increasing understanding for this underrepresented group and other unknown factors could clarify stepfamily experiences in varying family structures (Gosselin & David, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

This study explored marital instability and the challenges for couples in stepfamilies in a large, state-wide sample of remarital dyads. Further, we assessed the role of stepfamily constellation in understanding stepfamily adjustment difficulties and relationship stability for both husbands and wives. Overall, difficulties associated with being a stepmother for those without children of their own seems to be a particularly challenging experience.

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Table 1

Means and standard deviations of the study variables

GROUP	PARTNER	VARIABLE	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>BOTH HAD CHILDREN</b> ( <i>N</i> = 358)	Husband	MII	358	6.01	1.87
		SFD	338	16.16	7.16
		DRS	346	16.71	6.36
		DRP	339	18.82	7.85
		DRSP	322	24.44	10.53
	Wife	MII	358	6.13	2.01
		SFD	341	16.72	7.10
		DRS	350	16.91	6.69
		DRP	346	20.22	9.38
		DRSP	301	27.10	12.86
<b>ONLY HUSBAND HAD CHILDREN</b> ( <i>N</i> = 138)	Husband	MII	138	5.76	1.61
		SFD	127	15.62	5.69
		DRS	130	15.33	4.48
		DRP	133	18.54	7.49
		DRSP	-	-	-
	Wife	MII	138	5.84	1.63
		SFD	112	18.35	7.03
		DRS	99	16.99	6.07
		DRP	-	-	-
		DRSP	105	29.99	12.54
<b>ONLY WIFE HAD CHILDREN</b> ( <i>N</i> = 138)	Husband	MII	138	6.07	1.76
		SFD	117	15.45	5.82
		DRS	105	16.75	5.27
		DRP	-	-	-
		DRSP	120	26.32	10.84
	Wife	MII	138	6.13	1.93
		SFD	131	14.66	5.56
		DRS	130	16.74	6.54
		DRP	131	20.33	8.04
		DRSP	-	-	-

*Note.* *SD* = Standard deviation. MII = Marital Instability Index. QCS = Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies. SFD = Difficulties associated with the social and family dimension on QCS. DRS = Difficulties associated with being a spouse on QCS. DRP = Difficulties associated with being a parent on QCS. DRSP = Difficulties associated with being a stepparent on QCS.



Table 2

*Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables for Husbands and Wives*

Partner	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Husband	1. MII-H	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2. SFD	.385	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	3. DRS	.546	.679	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4. DRP	.280	.674	.576	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	5. DRSP	.343	.721	.606	.681	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wife	6. MII-W	.618	.320	.514	.265	.303	-	-	-	-	-
	7. SFD	.356	.552	.500	.459	.472	.425	-	-	-	-
	8. DRS	.449	.421	.608	.375	.431	.621	.682	-	-	-
	9. DRP	.327	.491	.489	.542	.628	.381	.702	.672	-	-
	10.DRSP	.345	.397	.383	.516	.411	.383	.717	.600	.664	-

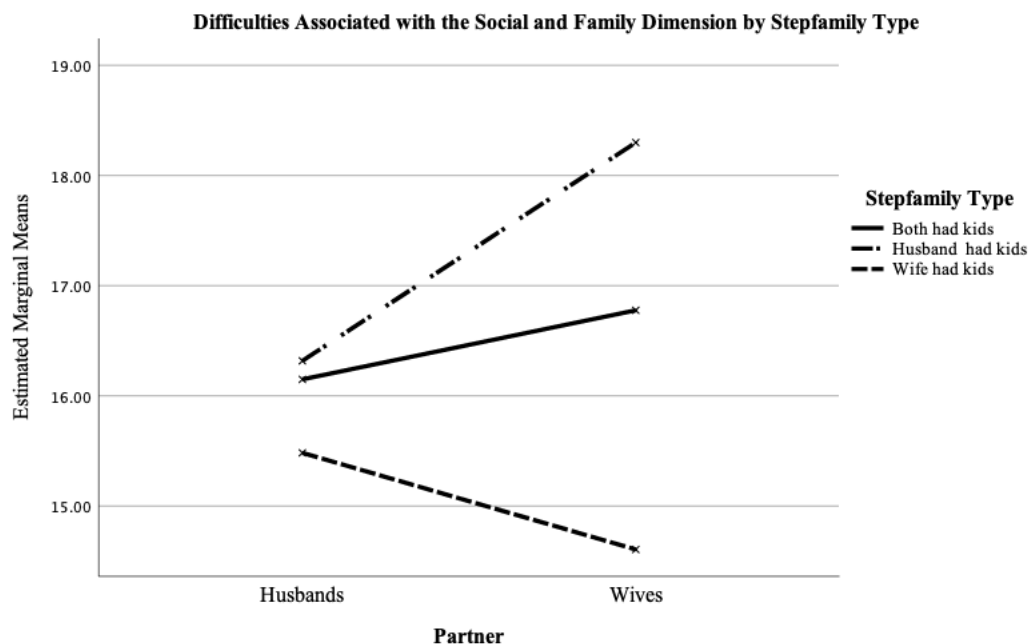
*Note.* MII = Marital Instability Index. QCS = Questionnaire for Couples in Stepfamilies. SFD = Difficulties associated with the social and family dimension. DRS = Difficulties associated with being a spouse. DRP = Difficulties associated with being a parent. DRSP = Difficulties associated with being a stepparent. All variables were significantly correlated at  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

Table 3

Mixed ANOVA Results Using the Marital Instability Index as the Dependent Variable

DV	Predictor	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial $\eta^2$
Marital Instability Index	Partner	3.968	1	3.968	3.222	.073	.004
	Fam Type	32.273	3	10758	2.096	.099	.007
	Partner x Fam Type	0.721	3	0.240	0.195	.900	.001
	Error	1058.946	860	1.231			
Social and Family Difficulties	Partner	0.913	1	0.913	0.045	.832	.000
	Fam Type	790.669	3	263.556	3.758	.011	.020
	Partner x Fam Type	276.979	3	92.326	4.574	.004	.024
	Error	38783.740	553	70.133			
Role of the Spouse Difficulties	Partner	1.086	1	1.086	0.073	.787	.000
	Fam Type	45.075	3	15.025	0.248	.863	.001
	Partner x Fam Type	31.174	3	10.391	0.700	.552	.004
	Error	32360.179	534	60.600			

*Note.* *df* = degrees of freedom. Partner = Husbands and wives. Family type = Both had children, husband had children, or wife had children. DV = dependent variable.



*Figure 1.* Difficulties Associated with the Social and Family Dimension by Family Type.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Conclusion**

The prevalence of stepfamilies continues to increase in 21<sup>st</sup> century American society, but the field of stepfamily research has received surprisingly little attention for decades. With up to 50% of adults reporting close step-relationships and first-time marriages soon-to-be in the minority if trends continue, it is important to explore the understudied phenomenon of remarriage with specific attention to different stepfamily structural makeups. This dissertation, based on two studies, is novel in that it used dyadic relationship data from 879 newlywed couples who reported the marriage was a remarriage for at least one member of the couple. This exploration was the first to our knowledge to use dyadic data and a multimember-multigroup approach to explore how husbands and wives experience relationship maintenance behaviors, marital quality/stability, and stepfamily difficulties, based on whether one partner, both, or neither had biological children before the remarriage.

### **The Barometers of Partner Satisfaction**

The links of marital quality/instability with negativity, positivity, and sexual interest for both husbands and wives were explored for each stepfamily constellation. Negativity is historically linked with marital quality and marital stability declines and earlier divorce (Gill et al., 1999; Gottman, 1994; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991), but limited research focuses on remarriages, let alone different stepfamily constellations' within remarriages. Consistent with previously published research, one's own and one's partner's negativity was related to increased marital instability for both husbands and wives in couples in which either both or neither had children. However, a unique

contribution of the current findings indicates that for stepfamilies in which *either* the husbands *or* the wives brought children into the relationship, the biological parents of the children appear to attend more closely to their partner's negativity to gauge the climate of the relationship, perhaps as a function of their felt obligation to provide a positive parenting context for their children.

While many studies focus on negativity, other research extols the benefits of positivity in preventing divorce and reducing marital instability (Gottman et al., 2015; Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996; Schramm & Adler-Baeder, 2012). Couples in which either both or neither had children demonstrated links between positivity and marital instability in expected ways when compared with the broader literature on marriages. Again however, when only one partner brought children, differences emerged. The husband's positivity was only relevant to his own marital instability when he had children. This pattern was different for wives - those in which husbands alone had children (i.e., stepmothers who did not bring children of their own), who demonstrated the strongest associations between their own positivity and instability, perhaps suggesting important strategies to cope with stepmother difficulties. For these wives, their husband's positivity may be less impactful than the demands associated with the role of stepmother when considering marital instability.

Marital stability and relationship satisfaction have been linked with intimacy, sexual desire, and reduced marital instability (Carpenter, Nathanson, & Kim, 2007; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; Lehrer, 2006; Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006), but gender differences have received little attention, particularly for stepfamilies. In this study, relationships for partners who had children before the remarriage were

stronger when sexual interest was strong, but sexual interest was not a significant predictor of marital instability for couples with no children. For parents, sexual interest was an important correlate - relationships that maintain physical intimacy despite parental challenges may enjoy the best outcomes. In our data, wives' sexual interest in couples who both had children was associated with their own and their husbands' marital stability, and if only one person brought children to the marriage, that person's own sexual interest predicted their own marital instability. Parenting demands are associated with additional strain, and our data speak to the potential difficulty associated with maintaining intimacy in the context of parenting stress. Interestingly, in the most complex stepfamily structure (children from both spouses), the wives' capacity to sustain sexual interest in the context of parenting stress was the only correlate of instability for both partners. These findings highlight the complex intersections of gender roles, parenting, and step-parenting experiences as couples strive to create and sustain intimacy.

### **The Vulnerability of Stepmothers**

Stepmother families' low prevalence rates, "wicked stepmother" stereotypes, reluctance to participate in research, and conflicting and often negative social constructions of stepmotherhood have led to limited understanding of stepmother families in particular. Coupled with the limited amount of exploration for stepfamilies compared to "traditional families," less is known about the experience of step-parenting generally (Blyaert, Van Parys, De Mol, & Buysse, 2016; Craig & Johnson, 2011; Gold, 2010). This study sought to contribute to these data by exploring remarital stability and stepfamily adjustment difficulties for each stepfamily constellation. We anticipated remarried couples would experience different kinds of stepfamily difficulties depending on who

brought children to the relationship. Wives in our study reported higher levels of marital instability, parenting, and stepparenting difficulties than husbands, which may reflect an inequitable division of relationship and parenting responsibility or that these aspects are more indicative of wives' priorities for marital satisfaction and stability.

**The social and family influences.** Experiencing harmony in the social and family dimension can be associated with strong friend and family relations, increased support for those previously-married, improved remarital financial outlooks, and improved in-law and parental relationships (Falke & Larson, 2007). While husbands in couples who both had children reported the highest level of difficulties (a predictable finding given the higher level of complexity), difficulties for wives were the highest for those stepmothers who did not have children of their own. When wives are the only ones with children, they report the fewest challenges. Thus, engaging in the role of stepmother, without the additional role of mother, may impede wives' perceived experience of harmony and connection with family and friends. The additional strain for stepmothers may be linked to their lack of self-efficacy in parenting roles due to inexperience, difficulties associated with co-parenting with their partners' ex-spouses, and the aversive stereotypes of stepmothers in the larger step-family societal scripts.

**The experiences of parents.** The role of a parent comes with unique challenges and co-parental emotional support and equitable task management may reduce relationship disturbances, internalizing and externalizing symptoms in children, and improved peer relationships in children, which can reduce relationship conflict in remarriage (Favez, Widmer, Doan, & Tissot, 2015). Being a parent is common in remarriages with as many as 65% of remarried individuals bring children into the

relationship (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007; Mirecki, Chou, Elliott, & Schneider, 2013b). Of concern is the statistic that between 20% and 60% think their marriages would be better off without children (Falke & Larson, 2007). We observed parenthood to be more difficult for wives, relative to husbands in this study. This could be another example of gender and family role differences and expectations influencing the amount of difficulty experienced by husbands vs. wives.

**The experiences of stepparents.** The highest levels of marital instability in this study were found for stepmothers who did not bring children of their own to the marriage. Thus, being a stepmother without one's own children can be challenging, possibly due to feelings of being "ganged up on," by entering into a family culture with previously established norms, rules and expectations, or by feeling they are on equal (or less than equal) footing with stepchildren in stepfamily disagreements (Gosselin, 2010). Our findings are consistent with existing research that suggests stepmothers report problems with stepchildren being more troubling than those with their own children (Falke & Larson, 2007). Stepmother families face more boundary ambiguity than stepfather families, this might be related to the likelihood of nonresidential mothers remaining more involved in the children's lives than nonresidential fathers (Gosselin & David, 2007; Taanila, Laitinen, Moilanen, & Järvelin, 2002). This increase in general stepfamily-related strain could result from the need to interact with ex-spouses, stepmother stereotypes, unmet expectations of motherhood, and expectations that stepmothers should instantly love and accept everything about their stepchildren (Blyaert et al., 2016; Craig, 2011).



### **Therapeutic Implications**

Therapists who work with couples should be familiar with marital and remarital challenges that face the clients they see. Helping couples to increase positivity and decrease negativity could benefit all couples and could result from using empirically-supported treatments including Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT; based on attachment theory), which conceptualizes insecurities as the basis of marital hostility (Bowlby, 1976). Gottman et al. (2015) identified humor, affection, self-disclosure, agreement, and empathy (examples of positive relationship behaviors) as most effective in increasing emotional closeness and improved marital stability. While these examples are true for all stepfamilies, particular attention placed on understanding the attention to the partner's negativity or one's own sexual interest for those who alone brought children to the relationship may provide avenues for better understanding and relationship functioning. Further, husbands' own positivity was a significant correlate of instability when they alone had children; this is in contrast to wives, who attended to their own positivity to face stepmother difficulties when their husbands had children. Therefore, stepmother demands may be more relevant in stepmother families than the husband's positivity.

Additionally, helping husbands become aware of the inequitable distribution of relationship and stepfamily pressures on their wives can engender a more balanced stepfamily approach. Therapists should be especially sensitive to the emotional support needs, expectations, and demands on stepmothers, and particularly so for those who did not bring children of their own. Stepmothers without children of their own may have limited social supports and feel voiceless in established family systems. Helping husbands acquire emotional support strategies, understand realities of stepparenting, and

understanding the gender roles and experiences of their wives would benefit marital stability and marital quality as the wives experience the most parental and stepparental problems.

These data support the belief that effective therapeutic intervention can be improved by utilizing the active listening model and through a focus on a healthy ratio of positivity to negativity (Gill et al., 1999; Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). Therapists should also consider the positives and negatives associated with negative affect in relationships. This could include increased attention on conflict-causing behaviors and reduced emotional distance made possible through relationship healing after a conflict (Gottman et al., 2002). This requires understanding that one's history is unique and may include challenges like those in these data. Further, stepfamily makeup and increased complexity should be further explored and understood with regard to other factors, such as custody differences, cultural expectations, and gender role differences. Clinicians should use understanding of relevant variables to focus on the sources of marital instability in addition to the traditional therapeutic focus on the symptoms (Guilbert et al., 2000).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While these studies make important contributions to existing stepfamily literature, a number of factors limit these findings. The non-representative sample from which these data originate (e.g., 97% White, 70% LDS) in this sample may limit generalizability of these data (e.g., religious people may be reluctant to answer questions about sexuality). Though data collection targeted all marriages in the state that indicated the union was a

remarriage for at least one member of the couple, a selection bias may be present based on stepfamilies that responded to invitations to participate.

Some items in the original study were altered from the established measures, which could also limit these findings (e.g., sexual interest subscale items for the SEBI). The body of data on which these analyses were performed was gathered to explore different questions than those explored in this study, which may have resulted in the low alphas found for the sexual interest subscale of the socioemotional behavior index. For example, no measurement by which to determine the levels or ratio of positive to negative interactions for these couples was explored in the original dataset surveys. Further, it is unknown if the perception of sexual interest from one's spouse results in different evaluations of marital stability, or if differences are related to the actual level of intimate physical contact. Future work would also benefit from longitudinal designs that explore how these variable associations evolve over time. Finally, this study was the first to study these differences in depth using available measures in an existing dataset. These findings would benefit from the scrutiny that could be afforded by additional exploration and carefully considered methods, based on these and other existing data.

Finally, these data were collected in 2006 and may include findings specific to the historical context from which these data came and are therefore subject to changes over time. Investigation with new datasets that are tailored for questions relevant to these factors would update the literature with current realities, aid in exploring new and evolving variables, and diversify cultural and ethnic consideration.

**Conclusion**

This collection of studies explored the relationship maintenance behaviors of positivity, negativity, and sexual interest and stepfamily adjustment difficulties, as they relate to marital quality and marital instability. A measure of stepfamily complexity was posited as a moderating variable across analyses. Generally speaking, marital quality is better for couples with no children than for those who both had children as there may be some balance in family dynamics. Couples in which only one partner had children seem to experience the highest rate of difficulty, especially when only the husband has children.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

## IRB Approval Letter

USU Assurance: FWA#00003308  
**Protocol # 1627**

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.

## The Remarriage Quality and Stability Study Survey

## The Remarriage Quality and Stability Study

*On your own, please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. All responses will remain confidential and will not be seen by your spouse. Please mark only one answer per question. Your answers will be scanned by a computer, so please fill in the appropriate circle with a dark pencil or pen. If you make a mistake that cannot be erased, mark through the incorrect answer with a BIG X and fill in the correct circle. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.*

*Affix Bar Code here*

## PART A: QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP HISTORY

1. How long have you been married to your present spouse? \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months
  2. If you lived with your spouse before marriage, how long did you cohabit before marrying? *(If you did not live together please enter 0.)* \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months
  3. How many times *(including your current marriage)* have you been married?

3a. If previously married, are you divorced or widowed from your last partner? ☐ ☐ ☐

**Divorced      Widowed      Not applicable**

## **PART B: QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CURRENT MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP**

- | 4. Please estimate the <u>average</u> amount of time <i>per day</i> you and your spouse... <small>(If you are not married, please estimate the amount of time you spend on these activities.)</small> |   | Hours | Minutes |
|---|---|-------|---------|
| a   | Do household activities together (e.g., eat meals, do chores, etc.) |       |         |

b	Do leisure activities together (e.g., play a game, go to movies, etc.)		
c	Engage in conversation together		

5. Please estimate the <u>average</u> amount of time <i>per week</i> you and your spouse do the following <u>without each other</u> :		You		Your Spouse	
		Hours	Minutes	Hours	Minutes
a	Participate in leisure activities alone (e.g., go to the gym)				
b	Participate in leisure activities with friends				
c	Participate in leisure activities with family/kin				

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 <i>marriage</i> ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b How satisfied are you with your <i>relationship</i> with your spouse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Regarding your current marriage...	Never	Yes, in the past but not recently	Yes, recently
a Have you ever thought your marriage might be in trouble?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c Have you discussed divorce or separation from your spouse with a close friend or relative?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d Have you or your spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e Have you and your spouse talked about consulting an attorney regarding a possible divorce or separation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8a. Please think about your <u>daily</u> interactions with your spouse. In a typical day, how frequently do <u>YOU</u> :	Never	Sometimes, but not every day	Once or twice a day	Often	Always
--	-------	------------------------------	---------------------	-------	--------



1.	Compliment your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Make your spouse laugh	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Say “I love you” to your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Do something nice for your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Talk about the day’s events with your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Initiate physical affection with your spouse (e.g., kiss, hug)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Share emotions, feelings, or problems with your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Initiate sex with your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Seem bored or uninterested with your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Dominate the conversation with your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	Show anger or impatience towards your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	Criticize or complain to your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	Turn down or avoid sexual advances from your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	Fail to do something that your spouse asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	Do things that annoy your spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8b. Please think about your <u>daily</u> interactions with your spouse. In YOUR opinion, in a typical day how frequently does your <u>SPOUSE</u> :		Never	Sometimes, but not every day	Once or twice a day	Often	Always
1.	Compliment you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Make you laugh	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.	Say “I love you”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Do something nice for you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Talk about the day’s events with you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Initiate physical affection with you ( <i>e.g., kiss, hug</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Share emotions, feelings, or problems with you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Initiate sex with you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Seem bored or uninterested with you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Dominate the conversation with you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	Show anger or impatience towards you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	Criticize or complain to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	Turn down or avoid sexual advances from you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	Fail to do something you asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	Do things that annoy you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Name the one thing that you and your spouse argue about most: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you and your spouse disagree or agree on:		Almost Always disagree	Frequently Disagree	Equally Agree/Disagree	Frequently Agree	Almost Always Agree
a	Religious matters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b	Demonstrations of affection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

c	Making major decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d	Sex relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e	Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f	Career decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g	Parenting duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**11a. Below are various issues that may be experienced by couples in a REMARRIAGE. Please indicate the difficulty YOU experience:**

1	2	3	4	5
No current difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>low</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate to high</u> level	Currently experiencing a <u>high</u> level of difficulty
1	Working together to resolve our problems as a couple			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
2	Accepting a different kind of life as a couple than I had imagined			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
3	Clearly explaining to my spouse my expectations, needs and limits with regards to our relationship as a couple			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
4	Giving time to my spouse			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
5	Mourning my previous marital relationship			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
6	Devoting time to our life as a couple			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
7	Having friends in common			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
8	Accepting the presence of a former spouse in my life as a couple			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
9	Being recognized as a couple by each of our families of origin			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

*Note: If neither you nor your spouse have children from previous relationship, please skip sections 11b, 11c, and 11d.*

**11b. Below are various issues that may be experienced by couples in STEPFAMILIES. Please indicate the difficulty YOU experience:**

1	2	3	4	5
No current difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>low</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate to high</u> level	Currently experiencing a <u>high</u> level of difficulty
10	Having to function in society as a stepfamily			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

1	2	3	4	5
No current difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>low</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate to high</u> level	Currently experiencing a <u>high</u> level of difficulty
23	Explaining family reconstitution to my children			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
24	Knowing how to react when my children express emotions about our stepfamily (sadness, anger, etc.)			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
25	Respecting the positive feelings that my children have for their father or mother			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
26	Dealing with the negative feelings my children have for their father or mother			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
27	Reconciling the way my spouse and I feel about raising children			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
28	Dealing with the fact that my spouse and my children compete for my attention and love			□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

29	Supporting my spouse when he or she deals with my children	
30	Understanding what my spouse expects of me as a parent	
31	Dealing with the presence of my children's father or mother in my current family life	
32	Dealing with the fact that my spouse criticizes the way I act with my children	
33	Dealing with the fact that my spouse criticizes the way my children are being raised	
34	Dealing with the fact that my children and my spouse argue	
35	Accepting that my family is different from that which I had imagined	

**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 <u>low</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate</u> level of difficulty	Currently experiencing a <u>moderate to high</u> level	Currently experiencing a <u>high</u> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
49	Knowing how to react when my spouse’s children express positive feelings about me	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
50	Knowing what to do when my spouse’s children express negative feelings about me	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
51	Showing affection to my spouse’s children	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
52	Accepting the additional domestic tasks associated with my spouse’s children	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

**PART C: QUESTIONS ABOUT FAMILY FINANCES AND FINANCIAL CONCERNS**

**12. We are interested in evaluating how finances influence remarital quality and stability. Please estimate your current annual household income before taxes. Household income includes ALL money received by individuals who are 15 years or older. This includes wages, self-employment income, pensions, social security, interest and dividends, and non-cash benefits such as food stamps. *Feel free to estimate.***

<input type="checkbox"/> less than \$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 20,001-22,500	<input type="checkbox"/> 32,501-35,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 45,001-50,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 10,001-12,500	<input type="checkbox"/> 22,501-25,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 35,001-37,500	<input type="checkbox"/> 50,001-60,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 12,501-15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 25,001-27,500	<input type="checkbox"/> 37,501-40,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 60,001-80,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 15,001-17,500	<input type="checkbox"/> 27,501-30,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 40,001-42,500	<input type="checkbox"/> 80,001-100,000
<input type="checkbox"/> 17,501-20,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 30,001-32,500	<input type="checkbox"/> 42,501-45,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Over \$100,000

**13. When people get married they often bring debt into the relationship from sources other than a home mortgage. We are interested in evaluating how debt influences remarital quality and stability. Please indicate whether YOU personally had any debt when you married your current spouse. *Do NOT include information about your spouses’ debt.***

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>								
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Credit cards</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-\$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000-\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 or more		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Auto loans</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-\$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000-\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 or more		

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>School loans</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-\$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000-\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 or more
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Medical bills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-\$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000-\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 or more
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>                    </u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-\$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000-\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 or more
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>                    </u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Under \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000-\$5,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000-\$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000-\$15,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15,000 or more

**14. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/mixed	Agree	Strongly Agree
a	My family has enough money to afford the kind of home we would like to have.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
b	We have enough money to afford the kind of clothing we should have.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
c	We have enough money to afford the kind of furniture or household equipment we should have.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
d	We have enough money to afford the kind of car we need.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
e	We have enough money to afford the kind of food we should have.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
f	We have enough money to afford the kind of medical care we should have.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
g	My family has enough money to afford the kind of leisure and recreational activities we want to participate in.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
h	Our income never seems to catch up with our expenses.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
i	I have trouble sleeping because of my financial problems.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
j	I am concerned because I cannot afford adequate health insurance.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
k	I often worry about my poor financial situation.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
l	My financial situation is much worse this year than it was last year.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
m	I do not know how I will be able to support myself this next year.				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

**15. Since getting married, how much difficulty have you had with paying your bills. Would you say you have...**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A great deal of difficulty	Quite a bit of difficulty	Some difficulty	A little difficulty	No difficulty at all

16. Generally, at the end of each month do you end up with...

☐☐☐☐

More than enough money left over

Some money left over

Just enough to make ends meet

Not enough to make ends meet

## SECTION D: QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

17. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Your Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

19a. Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

19b. 2<sup>nd</sup> (or part-time) occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Please indicate your primary religious affiliation (mark only one):

☐ Baptist

☐

Catholic

☐

Episcopalian

☐ Jewish

☐

Methodist

☐

Latter-Day Saint

☐ Atheist

☐

No religious affiliation

☐

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

21. How many related adults above age 18 (including you and your spouse) live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

22. How many related children under the age of 18 live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_ (Include step-, adopted, and biological children. In cases of joint or split custody ONLY include children that live in your home for at least half of the year.)

23. For each of YOUR children from previous relationships, please indicate their age, gender, and custody. Please do NOT include information about your spouses' children from previous relationships. Your spouse will provide this information.

	Age	Gender		Do you have custody?					Age	Gender		Do you have custody?			
		Male	Female	Yes	No	Joint	NA			Male	Female	Yes	No	Joint	NA
Example:	19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4 <sup>th</sup> Child:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 <sup>st</sup> Child:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 <sup>th</sup> Child:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Child:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6 <sup>th</sup> Child:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 <sup>rd</sup> Child:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7 <sup>th</sup> Child:	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

24. Looking back, how prepared do you feel you were for your present marriage?

☐

Very well prepared

☐

Fairly well prepared

☐

Somewhat prepared

☐

Not well prepared

25. Please tell us about the things you did to prepare for your marriage.

a. **PART A:** For each activity that you participated, please rate its helpfulness to you in preparing for this marriage. Please mark "N/A – Didn't do it" for activities that you did NOT participate in.



- b. **PART B:** For each activity that you marked “N/A – Didn’t do it”, please mark the reasons why you DID NOT participate. Mark as many reasons as apply.

Activity	Part A: Degree of Helpfulness						Part B: Reasons for NOT Doing It				
	Very helpful	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	N/A - Didn't do it	Didn't think was needed	Not available	Didn't have the time	Spouse wasn't interested	I was not interested
1. Read a book on marriage	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Professional premarital counseling	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Talked with religious leaders/clergy	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Visited marriage web sites(s)	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Talked with other married couples	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Talked with parents/relatives	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Read pamphlets, magazines, articles	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Viewed videos/movies on marriage	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Attended classes (2 or more)	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Attended a workshop or lecture	5	4	3	2	1	0	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Thank you so much for your time!** Only people in remarriages and stepfamilies can help us really understand the stresses and joys of these relationships. We rely on your assistance and sincerely thank you for your participation! We also value your feedback. We are particularly interested in hearing about what YOU would like to know about regarding remarriages and stepfamilies. We are planning future studies and would like to research topics that are of interest to Utah citizens. If you have any ideas, or would like to comment about this survey, please use the space below:

## Appendix C

## Curriculum Vitae

**Education**

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January 2016 – September 2019

**Utah State University – Logan, Utah** APA - Accredited

**Combined Clinical and Counseling Psychology Ph.D.** GPA 3.93

**Dissertation:** *Relationship maintenance behaviors and marital stability in remarriage: The examination of stepfamily constellations and associated challenges.*

Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D. Chair.

January 2016

**Utah State University – Logan, Utah** APA – Accredited

**Master of Science in Psychology** GPA 4.0

**Thesis:** *Romantic relationship quality and technological communication: Examining the roles of attachment representations and rejection sensitivity.*

Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D. Chair.

August 2010 – June 2013

**Idaho State University – Pocatello, Idaho**

**Bachelor of Science in Psychology – High Honors** GPA 3.97

January 2009 – December 2010

**College of Southern Idaho – Twin Falls, Idaho**

**Associate of Arts Psychology - Magna Cum Laude** GPA 3.92

**Clinical Experience**

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September 2019 – Current

**APA Accredited Post-Doctoral Fellowship – PTSD Clinical Team**

**Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care System, Phoenix, AZ**

**Training Director: Matthew Weyer, Ph.D.**

- **Clinical Training:**
  - I conduct intake PTSD evaluations, provide education on trauma-related symptoms, explore treatment goals, and discuss treatment options within the PTSD Clinical Team (PCT) with veterans.
  - I provide individual psychotherapy for PTSD using CPT, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), Prolonged Exposure (PE), Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT), and Cognitive Behavioral Conjoint Therapy (CBCT).
  - I cofacilitate a women's Military Sexual Trauma CPT group.
  - I attend and participate in weekly multidisciplinary PTSD clinical team meetings.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilize CPT, EMDR, PE and CBCT to treat combat- and MST-related PTSD in veterans. I utilize IRT to effectively address nightmares associated with PTSD.

- **Assessments:** I complete using assessments including the CAPS-5, PHQ-9, GAD-7, PTCI-5, MIES, AUDIT-C, and PCL-5.

**Supervisor: Courtney Baker, Psy.D.**

August 2018 – August 2019

**APA Accredited Pre-Doctoral Internship – PTSD/General Mental Health Track**

**Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care System, Phoenix, AZ**

**Training Director: Matthew Weyer, Ph.D.**

**Faculty Mentor: Donna Price, Psy.D.**

### **PTSD Clinical Team (PCT) Rotation – February 2019 to August 2019**

- **Clinical Training:**
  - I performed intake evaluations to assess PTSD, provide education on trauma-related symptoms, and discuss treatment options within the PTSD Clinical Team (PCT) with veterans.
  - I conducted individual psychotherapy for PTSD using CPT and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR).
  - I cofacilitate a men's CPT group.
  - I provided treatment for trauma-related nightmares using Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT).
  - I attended and participate in weekly multidisciplinary PTSD clinical team meetings.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilize CPT, EMDR, and PE to treat combat- or MST-related PTSD in veterans. I utilize IRT to effectively address nightmares associated with PTSD.
- **Assessments:** I anticipate using assessments including the CompACT, CAPS-5, PHQ-9, GAD-7, PTCI-5, MIES, AUDIT-C, and PCL-5.

**Supervisor: Kyle Lowry, PhD**

### **Health Psychology Rotation – February 2019 to August 2019**

- **Clinical Training:**
  - I engaged in individual treatment of behavioral medicine concerns (e.g., smoking cessation, CPAP adherence, sleep, pain), medical phobias (e.g., white coat hypertension, needle phobia), and health management issues.
  - I provided psychoeducation to veterans about the mind-body connection to explore how developmental factors and traumatic experiences influence the patient's health-related coping.
  - I cofacilitated a CBT-I group to provide psychoeducation and strategies to foster healthy sleep habits and routines.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilized CBT for depression (CBT-D), CBT-I, CBT-CP, ACT, EMDR, and MI to address concerns relevant to the practice of clinical psychology in a health context.
- **Assessments:** I performed assessments using the CompACT, AAQ-2, ATQ, PHQ-9, GAD-7, AUDIT-C, Epworth Sleepiness Scale, Insomnia Severity Index, Sleep Need Questionnaire, and PCL-5.

**Supervisor: Matthew Weyer, PhD**

### **West Valley Vet Center Rotation – August 2018 to February 2019**

- **Clinical Training:**
  - I provided individual treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as couples and family counseling by helping to remove barriers to effective adaptation to civilian life after military services in an outpatient, community-based setting.
  - I provided general mental health services and readjustment counseling to diverse outpatient populations of combat veterans and veterans who have been exposed to combat and military sexual trauma (MST).
  - I co-facilitated a Vietnam-era combat veterans group that provides supportive therapy, psychoeducation, and skills training to encourage and enable peer support, reinforcement of veterans' relationships, authentic expression of emotions, anger management, and emotion regulation.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilized Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), CBT for Insomnia (CBT-I), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), and Interpersonal Psychotherapy in my work with patients in this rotation.
- **Assessments:** I completed assessments using the CompACT, CAPS-5, PHQ-9, GAD-7, PTCI-5, MIES, AUDIT-C, and PCL-5.

**Supervisor: Adam McCray, PhD**

### **General Mental Health Rotation – August 2018 to February 2019**

- **Clinical Training:**
  - I provided evidence-based treatment of a wide range of mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, substance use, pain, challenges with sleep, values clarification, motivational issues, combat-and non-combat-related PTSD, personality disorders, and adjustment difficulty.
  - I worked with an interdisciplinary treatment team to perform intake assessments, treatment planning, crisis intervention, and individual and group psychotherapy in an outpatient mental health population.
  - I co-facilitated a co-occurring treatment group for veterans with co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders.
  - I also co-facilitated an anger management group to encourage and enable peer support, emotion regulation, and the authentic expression of emotions.
- **Assessments:** I completed assessments using the MMPI-2RF, PAI, MCMI-III, CompACT, CAPS-5, PHQ-9, GAD-7, PTCI-5, MIES, AUDIT-C, BDI-II, STAI, ATQ, AAQ-II, VLQ, and PCL-5.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilized CPT, CBT, CBT-I, ACT, MI, Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MSBR), and Interpersonal Psychotherapy in my work with patients in this rotation. I also participate in weekly CPT and MI consultation to improve treatment skills and case conceptualization.

**Supervisor: Carl Isenhardt, Psy.D, ABPP**

### **Assessment Clinic – August 2018 to August 2019**

- **Didactics:**

- *I participated in weekly didactic trainings to develop proficiency in diagnostic interviewing and assessment administration including the MCMI-IV, MMPI-2-RF, and PAI.*
- I received referrals from outpatient general mental health and inpatient clinics.
- I received supervision on test administration, interpretation, case conceptualization, report writing, and provision of feedback.
- **Assessments:** I completed assessments using the MMPI-2RF, PAI, MCMI-III, PHQ-9, GAD-7, AUDIT-C, BDI-II, STAI, and PCL-5.

**Supervisors: Leanne Fierstein, Ph.D. and Lindsay Tracy, Ph.D.**

### **Education and Training**

- **Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) for PTSD Training Workshop - September 2018**
  - Attended a 3-day training workshop to gain knowledge and skills needed to implement CPT with Veterans seeking treatment for PTSD symptoms. Committed to participate in a weekly CPT case consultation group for at least 6 months, 20 consultation calls, or until “provider status” is achieved. Eligible for “CPT Provider Status” upon completion of training, consultation requirements, and licensure.
  - Provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Employee Education System.
- **Motivational Interviewing (MI) Training Workshop - September 2018**
  - Attended a 3-day training workshop to obtain knowledge and skills needed to implement MI with Veterans. I also participate in a weekly MI case consultation group.
  - Provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Employee Education System.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) Training Workshop – October 2018**
  - Attended a training workshop to acquire knowledge and skills needed to implement CBT-I with Veterans.
  - Provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Employee Education System.
- **Breathe, It’s Okay. Pain and Wellness Training Workshop - October 2018**
  - Attended a training workshop to learn knowledge and skills needed to implement a mindfulness-based wellness program for veterans to help manage chronic pain and increase the positive dimensions of their lives.
  - Provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Employee Education System.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Training Workshop – Part 1 February 2019**
  - Attended a 3-day training workshop to learn about the three-pronged protocol of EMDR therapy and components of the EMDR approach designed to provide effective treatment with clients, learn about existing research support for EMDR, and the types of client concerns that are treatable with EMDR therapy.
  - Provided by the EMDR Institute, Inc.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Training Workshop – Part 2 June 2019**
  - Attended a second 3-day training workshop to learn to identify and effectively resolve clinical problem areas in the utilization of EMDR therapy and how to effectively employ specific resources to use with challenging or resistant clients.

- Provided by the EMDR Institute, Inc.

### **Other Training Experiences - August 2018 to August 2019**

- **Didactic Seminar Series:** I attend weekly didactics seminars on a range of topics including diversity, interprofessional communication, evidence-based psychotherapies, assessment, Health Psychology, PTSD, and PC-MHI.
- **Diversity Journal Club:** I participate in monthly Diversity Journal Club meetings and engage in discussion to expand knowledge and understanding of relevant diversity-related issues.
- **Supervision Clinic:** I participated in a 12-week series that included didactic presentations and training to expand knowledge (e.g., diversity, ethics, supervision models) relevant to providing supervision.
- **Program Evaluation:** I performed a program evaluation related to ensuring veterans diagnosed with PTSD receive the appropriate referrals for treatment and to explore issues related to treatment continuity.

### **Graduate Clinical Experience**

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June 2017 – July 2018

#### **Graduate Student Therapist – Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Rotation**

**George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Salt Lake City, UT**

- **Clinical Training:** I conducted individual therapy using cognitive processing therapy with veterans with military sexual trauma from the Vietnam, Korea, and OIF/OEF conflicts.
- **Assessments:** I performed weekly psychodiagnostic PTSD assessment and treatment planning for veterans using the CAPS-5, PHQ-9, GAD-7, PTCI-5, MIES, WHODAS - 2.0, LEC, AUDIT-C, and PCL-5.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I began to learn about and practice CPT at this site.
- **Interdisciplinary Experience:** I consulted with various professionals in myriad disciplines to determine which services are available and would be most beneficial to veterans.
- **Didactics:** I participated in individual and group supervision and weekly didactic training on the CAPS-5, prolonged exposure, and cognitive processing therapy.

**Supervisor: James Asbrand, Ph.D.**

June 2017 – June 2018

#### **Graduate Assistant Therapist – Brigham City Cardiac Wellness, Brigham City, UT**

- **Clinical Training:** I provided counseling services to adult clients with recent cardiac events in a hospital cardiac rehabilitation setting.
- **Interdisciplinary Experience:** I utilized medical records to coordinate with medical staff to develop and support treatment plans. I also taught stress management skills to patients and the hospital staff.

**Supervisor: Scott DeBerard, Ph.D.**

June 2016 – June 2018

#### **Graduate Assistant Therapist – Student Health Services, Logan, UT**

- **Clinical Training:** I conducted psychodiagnostic assessments and provided focused, brief-interventions in a primary care mental health integration setting (PCMHI).
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilized CBT, ACT, CPT, MBSR, Interpersonal Process (IPT), and Motivational Interviewing at this site.
- **Interdisciplinary Experience:** I attended weekly staff meetings where we discussed topics relevant to practice in a healthcare setting. I coordinated the psychology therapeutic team and organized scheduling, directed referrals, and provided peer-consultation with my colleagues who were new to the site.
- **Assessments:** I completed assessments using the CompACT, BAARS-IV, BDI-II, BAI, STAI, ATQ, AAQ-II, VLQ, PHQ-9, and GAD-7.
- **Didactics Provided:** I participated in case consultation with my practicum team and conducted case presentations and psychoeducational presentations that included risk assessment, behavioral activation, psychotropic medications, and motivational interviewing to clinicians in their first year of clinical training.

**Supervisor: Scott DeBerard, Ph.D.**

June 2015 – June 2018

**Graduate Assistant Therapist – Long-Term Trauma-Focused Therapy, Logan, UT**

- **Clinical Training:**
  - I co-lead a support group for spouses of women with severe childhood sexual abuse.
  - For three years, I co-led a support group for individuals who experienced severe childhood sexual abuse, several of whom were diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder.
  - I provided individual therapy and psychodiagnostic testing to individuals with histories of physical, emotional, and sexual trauma.
  - I provided supervised treatment for anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, narcissistic personality disorder, PTSD, and childhood and adult sexual abuse/assault.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilized ACT, CPT, Interpersonal Process, and Motivational Interviewing in this clinic.

**Supervisor: Carolyn Barcus, Ed.D.**

May 2015 – July 2016

**Graduate Assistant Therapist – Up to Three Early Intervention Program, Logan, UT  
Center for Persons with Disabilities**

- **Clinical Training:** I provided in-home behavior modification strategies and support to parents and families of children with developmental delays or disabilities.
- **Interdisciplinary Experience:** I collaborated and consulted with multidisciplinary professionals for a wide variety of children's health and development needs.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I used behavioral parent management training and used MI to explore the ambivalence experienced by parents to correct problem behavior and to augment the efforts of other professionals (e.g., occupational, physical, and speech therapists).

**Supervisor: Gretchen G. Peacock, Ph.D.**



August 2015 – May 2016

**Graduate Student Therapist - Counseling and Psychological Services, Logan, Utah**

- **Clinical Training:** I provided individual and group therapy to college-aged clients. I co- led an Understanding Self and Others process group for men and a psychoeducational mindfulness group for men and women.
- **Treatment Approaches:** I utilized CBT, ACT, MBSR, IPT, and MI at this site.
- **Assessments:** I completed assessments using the BDI-II, BAI, STAI, ATQ, AAQ-II, VLQ, PHQ-9, and GAD-7.
- **Didactics:** I participated in case consultations, case presentations, and weekly didactic trainings.

**Supervisors: Amy Kleiner, Ph.D. and Charles Bentley, Ph.D.**

August 2014 – October 2015

**Practicum Therapist - Integrative Practicum with Adults, Adolescents, and Children Logan, Utah**

- **Clinical Training:** I provided supervised treatment for anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, adjustment disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and ADHD. I participated in weekly case consultation with members of the practicum.
- **Didactics:** I participated in weekly classes that focused on promoting knowledge and awareness about assessment and the practice of clinical and counseling psychology with child, adolescent, and adult populations in a community clinic.
- **Assessments:** I completed assessments using the WAIS-IV, WISC-IV, Woodcock Johnson III, Barkley Scales, Achenbach Scales, ABI-II, CBCL, BASC-2, BAARS-IV, BDI-II, BAI, STAI, ATQ, AAQ-II, VLQ, PHQ-9, and GAD-7.
- **Presentations:** I presented on case conceptualization, multicultural issues, and treatment strategies using CBT, MI, and ACT.
- **Supervisors: Susan L. Crowley, Ph.D. and Jenna Glover, Ph.D.**

**Additional Clinical Training**

August 2015 – May 2016

**Graduate Student Trainee – Utah Regional Leadership and Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (URLEND)**

**Supervisor: Gretchen G. Peacock, Ph.D., Utah State University**

- This training emphasized an interdisciplinary model and was comprised of didactic, clinical, and research training experiences.
- **Observational component:** This interdisciplinary clinical training consisted of shadowing pediatric psychologists and other clinical professionals who provided therapy to children and families around medical and behavioral issues (e.g., craniofacial abnormalities, spina bifida, developmental disabilities, disruptive behaviors, eating difficulties).
- **Didactics:** I participated in weekly seminars that focused on promoting knowledge and awareness about medical, home, life course, transition, and family-centered concerns.
- **Research:** I also participated in the design, data collection, analysis, and writing of a journal article about the awareness of the needs of those diagnosed with autism in university settings.



- **Presentations:** I co-lead a bilingual (English and Spanish) presentation about social services that were available for parents of children with autism at the Salt Lake County Health Department.

May 2018 **Working with Core Beliefs of ‘Never Good Enough’**

Online Training through NICABM - National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine

May 2018 **How to Work with Shame**

Online Training through NICABM - National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine

March 2016

**Level 1 Training - Gottman Method Couples Therapy**

February 2014

**ACT Boot Camp – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy 4-day Training**

Reno, Nevada

**Invited Presentations/ Workshops**

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May 2019

**Co-Presenter**, *PTSD Treatment at the Phoenix VA*, 1-hour presentation conducted at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care System, Phoenix, AZ.

May 2018

**Presenter**, *Stress Management and Assertive Communication in the Workplace*, 1-hour training presentation conducted at Brigham City Community Hospital, Brigham City, UT.

May 2018

**Presenter**, *Stress Management and Assertive Communication in the Workplace*, 1-hour training presentation conducted at MountainStar Healthcare, Elwood, UT.

March 2017

**Co-Presenter**, *Basic Motivational Interviewing Strategies*. 1-hour presentation conducted at the Student Health and Wellness Center at Utah State University, Logan, UT.

May 2016

**Presenter**, *Motivational Interviewing Techniques, Part II*, 1-hour training presentation conducted at the Up-to-3 Program at the Center for Persons with Disabilities, Logan, UT.

April 2016

**Co-Presenter**, *University Faculty and Staff Knowledge and Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder*, 30-minute training presentation conducted at the URLEND Program, Logan, UT.

March 2016

**Presenter**, *Social Opportunities for Children with Autism*. 30-minute presentation conducted at the Salt Lake County Health Department, SLC, UT.

November 2015

**Presenter,** *Motivational Interviewing*, 1-hour training presentation conducted at the Up-to-3 Program at the Center for Persons with Disabilities, Logan, UT.

October 2015

**Presenter,** *Applying Behavioral Principles to the Multicultural Classroom*, 1.5-hour workshop conducted at Centro de la Familia de Utah in Providence, UT.

October 2015

**Presenter,** *Behavioral Principles for Children*, 2-hour workshop conducted at Citizens Against Physical and Sexual Abuse (CAPSA) in Logan, UT.

July 2015

**Presenter,** *Applying Behavioral Principles to the Multicultural Classroom*, 1.5-hour workshop conducted at Centro de la Familia de Utah in Honeyville, UT.

### **Practicum Presentations**

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October 2017

**Co-Presenter.** *Risk Assessment.* Integrative Practicum with Adults, Adolescents, and Children.

September 2017

**Presenter.** *Case Presentation.* Integrative Practicum with Adults, Adolescents, and Children.

March 2017

**Co-Presenter.** *Behavioral Psychopharmacology.* Integrative Practicum with Adults, Adolescents, and Children.

December 2016

**Presenter.** *Case Presentation.* Integrative Practicum with Adults, Adolescents, and Children.

November 2016

**Co-Presenter.** *Behavioral Activation* Integrative Practicum with Adults, Adolescents, and Children.

October 2016

**Co-Presenter.** *Risk Assessment.* Integrative Practicum with Adults, Adolescents, and Children.

### **Publications**

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**Bean, R. C.,** Ledermann, T., Higginbotham, B. J., & Galliher, R. V. (2019). Associations between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital stability in remarriages. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*. Doi: 10.1080/10502556.2019.1619385

Kugler, J., Andresen, F. J., **Bean, R. C.,** & Blais, R. K. (2019). Couple-based interventions for PTSD among military veterans: An empirical review. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 75, 1737-1755. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22822>

**Bean, R. C.,** Ledermann, T., Higginbotham, B. J., & Galliher, R. V. (Submitted). Adjustment difficulties and marital stability in remarriages: The role of stepfamily constellation. Manuscript submitted for publication to *Marriage and Family Review*.

**Bean, R. C.,** & Galliher, R. V. (2017) Examining the roles of technology, attachment, and rejection sensitivity on romantic relationship quality. In K. Hughes (Ed.), *Romantic Relationships: Perceptions, Social Influences, and Gender Differences* (pp. 61-96). NY: Nova.

**Bean, R. C.,** Ong, C. W., Lee, J., & Twohig, M. P. (2017) Acceptance and commitment therapy: An empirical review. *The Behavior Therapist*, 40(4), 145-150.

Blume, A., **Bean, R. C.,** & Galliher, R. V. (2017). Texas Social Behavior Inventory. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackleford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Springer Publishers.

### **Oral and Poster Presentations**

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Kugler, J., Andresen, F. J., **Bean, R. C.,** & Blais, R. K. (November 2018). Couples-Based Interventions for PTSD and Relationship Satisfaction Among Military Veterans and Their Romantic Partners: An Empirical Review. Poster presentation at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies Conference, Washington, D.C.

Mitchell, G. E., Wright, S., Atehortúa, N. A., Fulk, H. R., Ahlers, K. P., **Bean, R. C.,** Hammer, J. E., & Kuznia, A. (August 2016). Autism, what you know, what you don't know, and what you need to know. Panel symposium at the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, Annual Conference, Washington, D.C.

**Bean, R. C.,** & Galliher, R. V. (March 2016). Romantic relationship quality and technological communication: Examining the roles of attachment representations and rejection sensitivity. Poster presentation at the biennial Society for Research on Adolescence conference, Baltimore, MD.

Mendez-Gallardo, V. A., **Bean, R. C.,** & Brumley, M. R. (August 2013). Persistent effects of a proprioceptive perturbation on expression of a reflexive action pattern in neonatal rats. Poster presented at International Society for Developmental Psychobiology conference, San Diego, CA.

Holloway, K. S., **Bean R. C.,** Jones, J. L., & Letzring, T. D. (January 2013). The Relationship Between Personality and State Affect Variability Across Situations. Poster presentation at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology conference, New Orleans, LA.

**Bean, R. C.,** Roberto, M. E., & Brumley, M. R. (October 2012). Unilateral limb weighting affects spatial but not temporal parameters of the leg extension response (LER) in neonatal rats. Poster presented at International Society for Developmental Psychobiology conference, New Orleans, LA.

**Bean R. C.,** Holloway, K. S., Jones, J. L., & Letzring, T. D. (October 2012). The relationship between personality and state affect variability across situations. Oral presentation at ISU "Data Blitz" Research Symposium, Pocatello, ID.

**Bean, R. C.,** Roberto, M. E., & Brumley, M. R. (August 2012). The leg extension response (LER) in newborn rats is affected by unilateral limb weighting. Poster presented at Idaho INBRE (IDeA Network for Biomedical Research Excellence) conference, Moscow, ID.

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## Teaching Experience

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December 2016

**Guest Lecturer.** Introduction to Counseling. Fall 2016. 1-hour lecture: Mindfulness.  
Supervisor: Carolyn Barcus, Ed.D.

January 2015 – May 2015

**Course Instructor.** Lifespan Development. Spring 2015. Supervisor: Dr. Gretchen G. Peacock.  
Responsibilities included organizing the course and planning all lectures, quizzes, exams, and assignments, lecturing, meeting with students, and grading. Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

Summer 2014 – Fall 2014

**Graduate Teaching Assistant.** Introductory Psychology.  
Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Grewe. Utah State University, Logan, Utah.  
Responsibilities included Office Hours, grading, discussion groups, and lecturing.  
**Guest Lectures:** Motivation, Consciousness

Fall 2013 - Spring 2014

**Graduate Teaching Assistant.** Scientific Thinking and Research Methods.  
Supervisor: Christopher Johnson, Ph.D.  
Responsibilities included Office Hours, grading, discussion groups, research and writing guidance, and lecturing.  
**Guest Lectures:** Complex Research Designs, Data Collection

Fall 2013 - Spring 2014

**Graduate Teaching Assistant.** Scientific Thinking and Research Methods.  
Supervisor: Mary Sweeney, Ph.D.  
Responsibilities included Office Hours, grading, discussion groups, research and writing guidance, and lecturing.  
**Guest Lectures:** Survey Research, Research Ethics

## Research Grants

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January 2012 - December 2012

**Undergraduate Research Grant** “Does Unilateral Limb Weighting Disrupt Expression of the Bilateral Leg Extension Response in Newborn Rats?” (Undergraduate Research Grant Committee, Idaho State University and Idaho INBRE – Idea Network for Biomedical Research Excellence, Idaho State University). Total Amount Awarded: \$2,000. **PI: Ron C. Bean.**

## Leadership Experience

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June 2015 – June 2016

**Student Representative. Combined Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychology Program.**  
Responsibilities included attending faculty meetings and coordinating student meetings. Created several surveys to assist the faculty in making program decisions during preparation for changing the program from a three-emphasis program to a program emphasizing Clinical and Counseling Psychology. Updated information required for reaccreditation.

November 2014 – August 2016

**American Psychological Association of Graduate Students Advocacy Coordinating Team  
State Advocacy Coordinator.**

Responsibilities include facilitating the exchange and dissemination of information between APAGS and Campus Representatives throughout the state of Utah and increasing advocacy for the profession of psychology across all participating campuses in the state.

May 2014 – August 2016

**American Psychological Association of Graduate Students Advocacy Coordinating Team  
Campus Representative for Utah State University.**

Responsibilities included facilitating the exchange and dissemination of information between APAGS and the graduate students at USU and being involved with advocacy for the profession of psychology at the state level.

October 2014 – August 2015

**Utah Psychological Association Board Member.**

Responsibilities included serving on the graduate student committee for the Utah Psychological Association serving student and graduate student needs. Coordinated available resources and disseminated information about available programs and services to psychology students in the state.

### **Awards and Honors**

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- 2017 – 2018 - **Utah State University – Nielsen Scholarship.** Total Amount Awarded: \$1,200.
- 2016 – 2017 - **Utah State University – Borg Scholarship.** Total Amount Awarded: \$3,000.
- Spring 2016 - **Utah State University Psychology Department Graduate Student Travel Award.** Total Amount Awarded: \$300.
- Spring 2016 - **Utah State University Office of Research and Graduate Studies Graduate Student Travel Award.** Total Amount Awarded: \$300.
- 2015 – 2016 - **Utah State University – Michael Bertoch Scholarship.** Total Amount Awarded: \$1,000.
- 2013 – Current - **Utah State University – Annual Kranz Research Award.** Total Annual Amount Awarded: \$420.
- Spring 2013 - **Idaho State University College of Arts and Letters Travel Award.** Total Amount Awarded: \$500.
- Fall 2012 - **Idaho State University UgRC (Undergraduate Research Committee) Travel Award.** Total Amount Awarded: \$260.
- Fall 2012 - **NIH (NICHD) and the Sackler Institute Travel Award** to attend the ISDP meeting. Total Amount Awarded: \$450.
- 2011 - 2013 Dean's List Idaho State University
- 2009 - 2010 President's List/Dean's List College of Southern Idaho

### **Professional Memberships and Organizations**

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2010 to Current      American Psychological Association Student Affiliate

**APA Division memberships**

**Division 44** (LGBT Issues), **Division 56** (Trauma Psychology), **Division 19** (Military Psychology), **Division 12** (Clinical Psychology), and **Division 8** (Personality and Social Psychology)

**Professional Memberships**

2014 to Current	Association for Contextual Behavioral Science
2012 to Current	Society for Personality and Social Psychology
2011 to Current	Psi Chi, The International Honor Society in Psychology
2010 to Current	Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society