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# Individual Endorsement of Remarriage beliefs, Consistency of Cognitions between Spouses, and Outcomes in Remarriage

Lyndy Sue Agee  
*Utah State University*

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INDIVIDUAL ENDORSEMENT OF REMARRIAGE BELIEFS,  
CONSISTENCY OF COGNITIONS BETWEEN SPOUSES,  
AND OUTCOMES IN REMARRIAGE

by

Lyndy Sue Agee

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

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

Approved:

---

Brian J. Higginbotham, Ph.D.  
Major Advisor

---

Kathy Piercy, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Deborah Ascione, M.S.  
Committee Member

---

Byron R. Burnham Ed.D.  
Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2009

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## ABSTRACT

Individual Endorsement of Remarriage Beliefs,  
Consistency of Cognitions Between Spouses,  
and Outcomes in Remarriage

by

Lyndy Sue Agee, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2009

Major Professor: Dr. Brian Higginbotham  
Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

Despite the increasing prevalence of remarriages over the last several decades, little work has been done in establishing theories and models specific to remarried couples and stepfamilies. To address this gap, the multidimensional cognitive development model for individuals in stepfamilies was utilized. To evaluate the model, this study tested the consistency tenet, which is central to the model. Consistency of cognitions is assumed to be of primary importance in stepfamily relationships and a balanced system is one that is defined by consistency of cognitions. Data were analyzed from the “Relationship Quality and Stability in Utah Newlywed Remarriages” study. With a sample of 447 husband and wife couples, paired sample *t* tests and hierarchical regression were completed. The results indicate that individual endorsements of remarriage beliefs are more predictive of remarital outcomes than is consistency of cognitions between husband and wife. A critique of the multidimensional cognitive-

development model is discussed. Limitations of the current study are addressed and recommendations for future research are given.

(87 pages)

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Lyndy Sue Agee

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Coleman and Ganong (1985) wrote of remarriage as a little understood, but rapidly growing phenomenon in our society. In fact, rates of remarriage are high in most industrialized countries and nearly half of all marriages are a remarriage for at least one partner in the United States, which is the highest rate in the world (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Despite the growing prevalence and acceptance of remarriages in society, these unions still end in divorce at a rate slightly higher than that of first marriages (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Nevertheless, the number of people in our society choosing to remarry remains high, showing that many still have hope for happiness and stability in remarriage (Ganong & Coleman). This hope offers good reason for family life scholars to continue researching and studying remarital quality.

The literature on remarriage calls attention to the existence of unique issues and stressors in remarriages (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). Many adults choosing to remarry have children from past relationships, adding complexities to the structure of the new arrangement. Along with a more complex structure, stepfamilies face many unique challenges in functioning such as relationships with ex-spouses, unique financial obstacles, stepparenting issues, and living arrangements (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

These challenges may lead to the adoption of unique cognitions for both the stepfamily members themselves and society. Higginbotham (2005) wrote, "Combined with our culture's nuclear family bias, a context is created for the development of unique beliefs and assumptions pertaining to remarriages and stepfamilies" (p.10). Endorsement of these beliefs may potentially affect remarital outcomes.

Though there is little empirical evidence of the influence of cognitions in remarital quality, many studies have found significant links between cognitions and quality of relationships in first marriages and dating relationships (see Baucom et al., 1996; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Gordon, Baucom, Epstein, Burnett, & Rankin 1999; Kurdek, 1992). Fincham (1994) stated, “Research on marital behaviors has consistently emphasized the importance of cognitive variables in understanding marital satisfaction” (p. 185). Although remarried couples encounter unique situations and challenges, their relationships also share similarities with those in first marriages. If cognitions are important predictors of outcomes in first marriages, it may be hypothesized that cognitive variables are also important predictors of outcomes in remarriages.

Empirical evidence to support the claim that cognitions do affect remarital outcomes is rare because of a lack of valid measures to assess marital cognitions and theoretical frameworks on which to base research questions (Fine & Kurdek, 1994). This study addresses these issues by utilizing the Multidimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model (MDCD; Fine & Kurdek) and the Remarriage Belief Inventory (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008). Fine and Kurdek recognized the need for a well-articulated theory of cognitions in stepfamilies and created the Multidimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model of stepfamily adjustment. The model (a) describes stepfamilies as a four-tiered system, (b) portrays family members as information-processing organisms, who are trying to make sense out of experiences in the stepfamily life course, (c) depicts adjustment on a continuum ranging from maladaptation to adaptation, and (d) provides a framework for creating testable hypotheses to guide research with stepfamilies. Fine and Kurdek posited that *consistency* of cognitions was of “primary importance” in stepfamily

relationships and stated that a balanced system is one that is defined by consistency of cognitions. This study assessed the degree to which consistency between partners regarding remarriage cognitions predicted remarital adjustment.

The Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI) is a new measurement tool that assesses specific remarriage beliefs and can also be used with couples to ascertain the importance of consistency in cognitions. The internal validity of the RMBI has been demonstrated (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008), but the external validity of the measure has yet to be tested. This study utilized the RMBI in measuring cognitions specific to remarriage and assessed its ability to predict remarital outcomes. The development of the MDCC model and the RMBI is evidence that clinicians and researchers believe that cognitions specific to stepfamilies may be important in predicting outcomes. This study explored the effect of individual endorsement of cognitions, as well as the effects of consistency on remarital cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature presents an overview of empirical studies assessing the role of cognitions in marital and relationship outcomes referencing studies with first marriages or general samples of individuals in intimate relationships. Next, the effects of cognitions specific to remarriages on remarital outcomes are reviewed. Subsequently, the development and content areas of the Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI) are reviewed, after which the guiding theoretical model for this study is presented and discussed. The consistency tenet of the model is discussed along with past research on consistency of cognitions in relationships. The review concludes with an introduction to the research questions and hypotheses for the current study.

#### The Role of Cognitions in Outcomes

##### *Empirical Research on Cognitions in Marriage and Intimate Relationships*

Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing interest in and emphasis on the importance of the role of cognitions in relationship functioning. Baucom and colleagues (1996) pointed to the importance of standards, attributions, and other cognitive factors of importance in the context of marital quality, such as selective attention, expectancies, and assumptions. They also recognized that, although research on marital cognition is in the beginning stages, there are "...at least preliminary empirical findings indicating that each of these classes of cognitions is related to marital distress and conflict" (p. 210).

In researching cognitions in marriage, Baucom and colleagues (1996) conducted a study in which 241 couples participated. Participants were randomly chosen from lists that matched the general U.S. population in terms of age, race, and income for married couples. These couples were mailed a letter with a description of the study and how to participate. Of the couples selected, 52% agreed to participate in the study, and 53% of them completed and returned the materials.

Couples who gave their consent were mailed two packets containing questionnaires for each spouse. The Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards (ISRS) was used to measure marital standards, which was reported to have adequate internal consistency. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was also used to discriminate between distressed and nondistressed couples. The Relationship Attribution Questionnaire (RAQ) was utilized to assess relationship functioning. The RAQ contains scales that are predictors of marital adjustment and self-reported responses to relationship problems. Hypotheses were tested by computing Pearson product-moment correlations. Data for men and women were analyzed separately (Baucom et al., 1996).

The results of the study indicated that attributions and standards were both factors in predicting marital adjustment (Baucom et al., 1996). The authors reported that the degree to which a spouse's standards were unmet, along with their tendency to become upset as a result of unmet standards, was associated with negative attributional, affective, and behavioral responses to marital problems. Unmet standards were also associated with a response of doing unkind things in order to build distance from the partner. These findings support the rationale that dysfunctional beliefs contribute to marital distress

because partners who are unable to achieve standards set in their relationships may become upset (Baucom et al.).

In another study examining cognitions in relationships, Kurdek (1992) discussed the difference between faulty assumptions and faulty beliefs. Kurdek stated, “*Faulty assumptions* refer to problematic views regarding how people and relationships are” (p. 164). He suggested that these conceptions contribute to a negative cognitive set about thinking through and dealing with relationship problems. Offering an example, Kurdek suggested that a partner who believes that *Disagreements should be avoided because they are destructive*, is endorsing a faulty assumption. This assumption can be detrimental to the relationship because it is likely to lead to withdrawal from problem-solving behavior (Kurdek). *Faulty standards* have been referred to as irrational beliefs and refer to views about the way people and relationships should be in general. Unmet standards that are unrealistic are likely to result in disappointment and/or anger.

In attempting to empirically validate the distinction between two types of cognitions: assumptions and standards, Kurdek (1992) contributed additional evidence to the influence they have in relationships. Participants were recruited from longitudinal studies of relationship quality. The sample consisted of 264 heterosexual married couples and 92 homosexual couples. Participants completed surveys assessing relationship satisfaction, assumptions, and standards. In regards to assumptions and standards, husbands and wives in remarriages did not differ from husbands and wives in first marriages according to a one-way multivariate analysis of variance. Therefore, they were combined into one sample. Gay and lesbian partners were also combined to make another sample.

As a result of two separate groupings in a factor analysis, this study presented evidence that standards and assumptions are two separate relationship cognitions. Although faulty assumptions were endorsed more strongly than faulty standards, both were significantly negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Assumptions were also found to mediate the relation between standards and relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1992).

Epstein and Eidelson (1981) conducted a study in which 47 couples in marital therapy completed inventories measuring unrealistic beliefs about self and marital relationships. The couples also completed a questionnaire regarding their expectations and goals for therapy and their levels of marital satisfaction. Clients' unrealistic beliefs, especially those about relationships, were found to be negatively associated with perceived chance of improvement in therapy, desire to improve the relationship rather than end it, preference for joint treatment, and overall marital satisfaction (Epstein & Eidelson).

Another article reviewed considered how standards in marriage and communication might jointly contribute to marital adjustment (Gordon et al., 1999). The researchers found that the interrelations between communication and marital adjustment for women depended on how relationship-focused their standards were. The level of women's relationship standards was found to be connected with how closely their dyadic communication was associated with marital satisfaction. This interaction was not found in men. An explanation offered by the authors regarding this gender discrepancy was that women monitor their relationships more closely, and may notice inconsistencies between standards and communication as a result (Gordon et al.).



An additional article that recognized the increasing attention dedicated to the cognitive components of relationships was written by Eidelson and Epstein (1982), who stated, “In particular, attention has focused recently on how holding certain beliefs about relationships may diminish interpersonal satisfaction, limit positive expectancies regarding treatment, and impede partners’ collaboration for mutual change” (p. 715).

In order to aid research in this area, Eidelson and Epstein (1982) developed an inventory measuring five dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and named it the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI). The five dysfunctional beliefs included in the RBI were: (a) Disagreement is destructive, (b) mindreading is expected, (c) partners cannot change, (d) sexual perfectionism, and (e) the sexes are different. Scales were developed to measure each of these beliefs. This was done by contacting 20 marital therapists, who generated a pool of 128 items that consisted of beliefs about intimate relationships that seemed to cause the most marital difficulties for their clients. The inventory was administered to a sample of 47 clinical couples (Eidelson & Epstein).

The RBI was administered, along with the Marital Adjustment Scale and the Irrational Beliefs Test, to 100 couples, 52 of which were nonclinical. The couples also completed a Therapy Goals and Expectations Questionnaire. Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated for each 8-item scale of the RBI to assess internal consistency.

The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the RBI scales ranged from .72 to .81, demonstrating adequate internal consistency. Moderate evidence of convergent validity was shown with significant positive correlations with the Irrational Belief Test. Results illustrated construct validity in that all five RBI scales were negatively correlated with marital adjustment. Eidelson and Epstein (1982) concluded, “Thus, these relationship

beliefs do indeed appear to be part of a maladaptive cognitive set regarding relationship functioning” (p. 719).

The reviewed empirical findings and the development of an inventory to measure relationship beliefs (RBI) demonstrate the opinion of clinicians and researchers that cognitions are important in determining outcomes in marriage and other intimate relationships. Empirical findings have shown that those cognitions do have significant effects on relationship satisfaction and adjustment; however, the samples have been mainly generic and specific to first marriages and dating relationships. Studies regarding general relationship cognitions in remarried couples and, more specifically, distinct remarriage beliefs endorsed by remarried couples are comparatively sparse (Allen, Baucom, Burnett, Epstein, & Rankin-Esquer, 2001). It is currently unknown whether results from studies using first married and dating samples will generalize to remarried samples.

### *Cognitions in Remarriage*

As in other relationships, cognitions are believed to be important influences on quality in remarriages. Because partners in remarriages experience unique structural, cultural, financial, and other situational obstacles, the stage is set for unique cognitions pertaining to those experiences. Coleman and Ganong (1985) focused on a specific type of cognitions known as myths, which they described as “oversimplified, but firmly held, beliefs that guide perceptions and expectations” (p. 116). They also pointed out that they usually contain an element of truth and have power to influence attitudes and behavior. Speaking to that power of myths they stated, “Problems develop when myths serve as

blindness to actual experience and lead people into painful situations that could have been prevented” (p. 116).

Coleman and Ganong (1985) discussed eight remarriage myths based on their several years of experience leading remarriage workshops, teaching graduate courses and conducting research on remarriage. Common myths included the belief that things must work out, that one should keep criticism to oneself and focus on the positive, and that if things are not going well, one should focus on what went wrong in the past and make sure it does not happen again. The belief that one should see oneself as part of the couple first, and as an individual second or that one should see oneself as an individual first, and as part of a couple second are both myths. They also discussed the belief that one must always consider everybody else first. Referring to this myth, they stated that juggling everyone’s needs in a stepfamily is very stressful and basically impossible.

The beliefs that “what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours,” “marriage makes people significantly happier,” and “what is best for us must be harmful for the children,” are also myths described by Coleman and Ganong (1985). Endorsing these remarriage myths has the potential to restrict open communication and to create desperation, stress, and denial in remarried relationships.

In discussing twenty major issues in remarriage families, Walsh (1992) also emphasized cognitive factors that influence outcomes. In addition to Coleman and Ganong (1985), Walsh recognized that the belief that feelings of affection should develop early between stepparents and stepchildren can be a considerable source of tension in remarriages. He also cited society’s concept of the remarriage family, familial self-concept, and individual self-concept as issues that must be worked through. Also, he

addressed a cognitive component of financial concerns as a source of conflict in remarriages. Walsh explained that, to some, the method used to handle finances may reflect the commitment expressed by remarried couples to their partners and to each other's children.

In another article, Coleman and Ganong (1995) reemphasized the role cognitions played in remarriage, and said that, "Expectations about what should be experienced serve as the basis for evaluating one's satisfaction with family life; the closer 'real life' comes to matching expectations, the more likely one is to feel satisfied" (p. 102). They continued by saying that remarried couples, especially those with children from prior relationships, have a more complicated task because they have to negotiate the beliefs of the children as well. This task of building an inclusive model of remarried family life can be even more complicated because of the "relative absence of societal norms for remarried family behaviors..." (p. 102).

Remarried couples and stepfamilies must also deal with negative stereotyping from people outside of the family. For example, stepfamilies are often assumed to be full of tension and conflict and beset by problems. These negative stereotypes have the potential to damage interactions in stepfamily relationships (Coleman & Ganong, 1985).

Thus, based on the literature, couples entering remarriages will not be influenced solely by general relationship cognitions and beliefs. They also have the task of sorting through additional beliefs and/or myths specific to their new remarriage arrangement. These beliefs are viewed as having the potential to affect outcomes in remarriages and stepfamilies.

*Empirical Research on Cognitions in Remarriage*

In terms of empirical research, Kurdek and Fine's (1991) study addressing the cognitive correlates of satisfaction in stepfather families was one of two articles identified that is specifically aimed at remarriage beliefs. In this study, Kurdek and Fine looked at three types of cognitive correlates, common myths members of stepfamilies endorsed, and reports of relationship satisfaction. Of couples who were participating in a larger longitudinal study of relationship quality, twenty-seven couples in stepfamilies were recruited for the study. The participants rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with certain cognitions specific to stepfamilies and completed various measures of satisfaction such as: personal, marital, and step-parenting (Kurdek & Fine).

The results of the study indicated that stepfathers believed in myths regarding stepfamily life more strongly than mothers did. In comparison to mothers, stepfathers were also less optimistic about life in a stepfamily. Kurdek and Fine (1991) also reported that, for mothers, belief in myths was negatively correlated with marital, personal, family, and parental life satisfaction. For stepfathers, there was a significant negative correlation only with parenting satisfaction. While this study was informative, it was focused on stepfamily relationships in general and did not emphasize the relationships between remarried spouses.

One other study was identified with the aim of examining cognitions in stepfamilies. Fine, Coleman, and Ganong (1998) performed a study to analyze consistency of perceptions regarding the stepparent role between stepfamily members. In addition, they assessed how the degree of consistency in perceptions among stepfamily members related to adjustment in stepfamilies. Forty stepfamilies from the Midwest

participated in the study. They completed a number of questionnaires (i.e., the Stepparent Role Questionnaire, Stepparent Behavior Inventory, and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale). Pearson correlations were computed to assess for the relationship between consistency in perceptions and stepfamily adjustment.

Results showed that parents' and stepparents' responses regarding the stepparents' role were not significantly different. On the other hand, children had significantly differing perceptions of the same role in comparison to parents and stepparents. A modest correlation between consistency and adjustment was also reported. Greater discrepancies in consistency were found to be related to parents' reports of less close stepparent-stepchild relationships and other negative outcomes (Fine et al., 1998).

In summary, the results of these studies suggest that stepfathers may endorse myths more often, and negative correlations were found with parenting satisfaction, but not marital satisfaction. For mothers, belief in myths was negatively related to satisfaction in multiple roles. Results suggested that consistency in perceptions may also play a role in satisfaction. Very little empirical literature was identified on consistency of cognitions in stepfamilies and one important limitation of both studies reviewed was small sample sizes. Fine and colleagues' (1998) study also lacked discussion of the remarital relationship, and rather, focused on stepparent relationships with stepchildren. Nonetheless, these empirical studies provided some preliminary insights into the role cognitions may play in remarital satisfaction.

The limitations of empirical literature on cognitions in remarriage can be linked to two major issues: the lack of reliable and valid measures related to remarriage and stepfamily issues, and the lack of guiding theoretical frameworks on which to base

research questions in this area. Referring to the lack of reliable and valid instruments for remarriage and stepfamily issues, Fine and Kurdek (1994) stated that there are “relatively few measures that assess cognitions” (p. 31). They also claimed that the psychometric properties of existing measures need to be established in order for them to be useful in advancing research. This review will address these limitations by discussing the Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI) to assess cognitions in remarriage and the Multidimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model (MDCD) of stepfamily adjustment as a guiding framework.

### The Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI)

To address the scarcity of sound measures associated with beliefs specific to remarriage, Higginbotham and Adler-Baeder (2008) developed the Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI). They explained, “Although the clinical literature provides numerous examples of unique remarriage beliefs, the direction and mechanism of the relationship with remarital quality continue to be empirical questions, mostly owing to measurement issues” (p. 34).

The RMBI focuses on two types of cognitions: beliefs and assumptions.

Higginbotham (2005) explained:

Of the five main cognitive dimensions in the cognitive-behavioral literature (i.e., perceptions, attributions, expectancies, assumptions, and beliefs/standards) that could be explored in remarriages it has been “beliefs” and “assumptions” that have received the most clinical attention and what little empirical attention exists to date. (p. 24)

Higginbotham pointed out that empirical studies use terms like “myths,” “expectations,” and “standards” interchangeably and do not use the same terminology for the same cognitions consistently. Higginbotham noted that care was taken to review and incorporate articles that “may have used other terms but which were used in such a way that was consistent with the cognitive-behavioral definitions” (p. 24). He further explained the adoption of the definitions of beliefs and assumptions for the RMBI:

Assumptions refer to cognitions about how certain types of people behave (i.e., new partners, stepparents, etc.), how relationships usually work (i.e., remarriages and stepfamilies), and the way in which one sees oneself in particular roles (i.e., the second wife, the stepparent, etc; Baucom & Epstein, 1990). Standards differ from assumptions in that they are beliefs about how people, things, and relationships *should* be rather than how they *are* (Baucom & Epstein, 1990). In a study of both heterosexual and homosexual couples, Kurdek (1992) demonstrated that assumptions and standards are related but distinct cognitions which each influence relationship satisfaction. As the literature utilizes the terms ‘standards’ and ‘beliefs’ interchangeably (i.e., Baucom & Epstein, 1990) the paper will continue to use the term ‘belief’ when referring to cognitions about the ways people, things, and relationships *should* be. This decision was made in light of ‘belief’ being used more often than ‘standard’ in the literature reviewed. (p. 25)

In using the same operational definitions being used in current empirical literature, the RMBI provides clinicians and researchers with a tool to assess beliefs and



assumptions in remarriages. It was designed for use in (a) research of couples in remarriages and/or stepfamilies in order to gain knowledge about the increased risk of divorce in remarriage, and (b) create and improve program work for couples preparing for remarriages or living in stepfamilies (Higginbotham, 2005).

The development of the RMBI began with a review of the clinical and empirical literature on cognitions in remarriage (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008). Afterward, “prominent, applicable, and previously utilized” theories about remarriages and stepfamilies were reviewed. Content areas were then organized and constructs were operationalized.

#### *Content Areas of the RMBI*

Although other general content areas are addressed in literature, Higginbotham (2005) identified seven main content areas of unique remarriage beliefs: adjustment, the new partner, the new relationship, past partners, structure, priorities, and finances.

*Adjustment.* Part of what makes a family feel like a family is shared history. Shared history can be experiences such as family routines, celebrations, and traditions. These are experiences that new stepfamilies lack in the beginning (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Nonetheless, a commonly identified belief for stepfamilies is that adjustment does, or should come quickly (Higginbotham, 2005). This assumption has been labeled as unrealistic, as stepfamilies are more complex, receive less social support, and deal with a relative absence of norms in comparison with nuclear families (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Coleman and Ganong (1985) warned against this myth of ‘instant love’ or ‘if you love me you will love my children,’ stating that it can cause a great deal of grief and misunderstanding. Emotional bonds take time to form, and sometimes that bonding never occurs (Walsh, 1992). Walsh stated that because two adults love one another does not mean that they will love each other’s children. Also noted was the tendency of believers of this myth to seek someone to blame (e.g., stepchildren), or to start expecting the dissolution of the marriage, if the remarriage does not result in happiness sufficiently, or quickly enough (Coleman and Ganong).

Beneficial implications have resulted from literature on expectations for adjustment in stepfamilies. For example, Hetherington and Kelly (2002) suggested that stepparents refrain from expecting instant love from stepchildren. They asserted that it is important to go slowly because it takes time to build a relationship (p. 201). Although this seems intuitive for any other human relationship, it is helpful for stepfamilies to be reminded of this and assured that needing time to build relationships is not a sign of malfunction. By understanding that certain expectations pertaining to quick adjustment are unrealistic, newly remarried couples may exercise more patience with each other and other members of the stepfamily, easing the strain on the relationship.

*The new partner.* Sometimes even for couples in love, building and sustaining a strong remarriage in a stepfamily can be difficult (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). When addressing beliefs and expectations about the new partner, the compensation myth is commonly cited by authors. Belief in this myth often occurs among people who have had an unsatisfactory spouse in the past and see the second spouse as a form of compensation. This myth has the potential to cause conflict in the remarriage because it may cause new

partners to become angry and resistant if they are expected to be everything the problematic old spouse was not (Hetherington & Kelly).

Along the same line, in some cases a person who experienced an abysmal previous marriage will only accept a perfect remarriage. These beliefs that the new spouse should fill all holes that the previous spouse left empty may lead to assumptions of “partner perfectionism.” It is understandable that someone would want to avoid the negative traits of their previous spouse when choosing a new partner, but the assumption that they will be “everything and more” is unrealistic because no one is perfect (Higginbotham, 2005). As previously mentioned, this may cause resentment because people prefer to be who *they* are, rather than what their partner’s ex-spouse was not (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). An item of interest that was not found in the literature was how the expectation of partner perfectionism might directly affect the individual holding the view. It could be assumed that, because no one is perfect, this view would cause disappointment for the individual and potentially hurt the relationship.

Hetherington and Kelly (2002) wrote that another set of expectations promote realism. From experience, some people realize that marriage and humans are imperfect. They stated that in the end, reality generally trumps fantasy. It is possible for someone with “realistic” expectations learned from a previous marriage to shut down their partner’s attempts to show affection or gain trust, for fear of being hurt. They may feel that they have learned by experience that no one is 100% trustworthy. Fine and Kurdek (1994) wrote that because remarried individuals typically have experienced a distressful prior marriage, they may perceive marriage more pragmatically and less romantically than people in first marriages. This belief has the potential to have negative effects on the

relationship by reducing optimism, intimacy and openness to the new spouse. The literature did not address the possible effects of this belief on remarital outcomes.

*Priorities.* According to Coleman and Ganong (1985), trying to juggle the needs of everyone in a stepfamily is not only stressful, it is impossible. Loyalty conflicts and the stress of effective prioritizing are additional issues addressed by the authors. Coleman and Ganong identified many mutually exclusive beliefs that may be operating all at one time. These were: “‘always consider yourself first,’ ‘always consider the other person first,’ ‘always consider your marriage first,’ ‘always consider yourself and your children first,’ and, ‘always consider everybody first’” (p. 117). Attempting to fulfill these conflicting myths may be incredibly frustrating for remarried individuals.

Adults in single-parent households have been observed to confide in their children before they remarry. Children enjoy their elevated status and may perceive the new stepparent as a threat (Visher & Visher, 1996). Children may then try to sabotage the new marriage in order to return to their previous status. In addition, effects of the divorce or loss of a parent on children can foster the belief that they need extra time or special attention (Higginbotham, 2005). In light of these views, couple relationships may become neglected because of the belief that other relationships demand or deserve more attention (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Beliefs that children’s needs and wants should come before those of the spouse may have a negative impact on outcomes in the remarriage (Higginbotham, 2005). These beliefs may lead to actions that make the new spouse feel that they are not a priority, causing strain in the relationship. There is consensus even among researchers and clinicians who believe the stepparent-stepchild relationship to be the pivotal relationship

in stepfamilies that the new couple relationship is extremely important to the well-being of everyone in the stepfamily as a whole (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Some authors seemed to hold contrasting views on the importance of the stepchild-stepparent relationship in relation to the adult couple relationship. It has been speculated that the belief that children should come first may harm the quality of the remarriage. Empirical evidence supporting this view was absent from the literature.

*Structure.* Remarriage families have complex psychological and structural characteristics that differ from nuclear families. Unfortunately, they have not been fully recognized by many public institutions, such as legal, medical, and school systems, despite the growing number of remarriages and stepfamilies in American society. Authors of stepfamily literature suggested that this may be because the nuclear family remains the cultural standard and cultural beliefs still regard stepfamilies as deviant or inferior substitutes (Walsh, 1992). Cultural influences suggesting inferiority may lead to efforts and/or expectations or assumptions that stepfamilies should be like and function just like a nuclear family (Higginbotham, 2005). To avoid being seen as deviant from the norm, stepfamilies often try to pass themselves as a nuclear family and attempt to assume nuclear family roles within the stepfamily.

A common expectation from custodial fathers is that the stepmother will take over primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of the stepchildren (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). This can cause tension between the remarried couple relationship and in the stepmother-stepchild relationships. Another potentially harmful expectation resulting from the nuclear family ideology is that children must accept stepparents as replacement for nonresidential parents (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Another myth that may be harmful to a remarriage is that effective co-parenting should come naturally. Although remarried couples may share common beliefs and values in raising children, Leslie and Epstein (1988) pointed out that expecting a newly remarried couple to co-parent effectively is like expecting them “to work like a team even though they have had no practice” (p. 154). This expectation may present another source of conflict for a remarried couple.

By failing to recognize the uniqueness and complexity of their family structure, stepfamilies run the risk of succumbing to feelings of inadequacy and frustration. They may feel this way about themselves, their partner, the institution of remarriage, or the stepfamily in general. Literature examining how each of these beliefs about structure directly affects remarital outcomes is minimal.

*Finances.* Higginbotham (2005) recognized that beliefs and decisions about organizing resources are not limited to remarried couples, because all couples need to manage their finances. However, financial beliefs and concerns are often cited as a major source of conflict in remarriage, as one or both partners may have financial obligations to another family (Walsh, 2003). Hetherington and Kelly (2002) identified the belief about who should bear financial responsibility for the child as a common source of conflict for remarried couples. Should it be the biological non-custodial parent or the custodial parent and stepparent?

Coleman and Ganong (1985, p. 117) identified a myth involving financial resources and claim that it moves developmentally through family stages from marriage (“what is mine is yours”), to divorce (“what is yours is mine”), to single parenthood (“what is mine is mine”), to remarriage (“what is mine is mine, what is yours is yours”).

The authors point out that the problem with this myth is the lack of an “ours” orientation.

The lack of an “ours” orientation could introduce concerns about commitment.

Research analyzing pooled versus individual resources as methods of organizing finances in remarriage have found each to prove satisfactory depending on the couple (Coleman & Ganong, 1985). It appears that shared beliefs about handling finances are more important than the actual method utilized by remarried couples (Higginbotham, 2005).

*Potential for new relationship.* Some couples may enter remarriages with the assumption that the new marriage will be better than the first because they’ve had experience (Higginbotham, 2005). While this belief may not be dysfunctional, if it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy it can be destructive if the second marriage is expected to be easier or less likely to fail. Coleman and Ganong (1985) also warned that if couples endorse these beliefs, they may panic when situations occur that were similar to their first marriage. They explained, “couples who convince themselves that everything was negative in their previous marriages and that everything is going to be perfect in their new marriage are building a relationship based on denial” (p. 117). Coleman and Ganong said that this process may hinder open and honest communication between partners.

Additionally, in contrast to the belief that everything will be perfect in the new remarriage is the belief that ‘success is slim’ for remarriages, which was also noted in literature. Future empirical studies could address the effects of this belief on remarital outcomes (Higginbotham, 2005). For instance, this belief could have a positive effect on remarital outcomes because a person with low expectations might put in extra effort to improve the relationship. They may be pleasantly surprised with the quality of the new

arrangement. From another perspective, this view could also negatively affect outcomes if an individual sets low standards for the relationship or invests less in the relationship for fear that it wouldn't pay off.

*Feelings towards past partners.* Beliefs and feelings about the memory and influence of past partners were also noted by Higginbotham (2005). He explained that some couples expect their past with their ex-partners to disappear. Although this belief may not be completely realistic, Higginbotham stated, "Empirical evidence supports the belief that the *Past feelings should end*. Research has indicated that both a highly negative and a highly involved relationship with a former spouse can negatively affect the new couple's relationship quality" (p. 14). Further research is needed to determine the direction of the relationship between the belief that *Past feelings should end* and remarital outcomes.

#### *Validating the Factorial Structure of the RMBI*

In order to refine and validate the factorial structure of the RMBI, a study was conducted with both an online sample and a remarried sample from the Utah Newlywed Study. Participants completed questionnaires including: demographic questions, the RMBI, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, and the Marital Adjustment Test. Confirmatory factor analyses supported the seven-factor structure of the RMBI: (1) Adjustment comes quickly; (2) Stepfamilies are second-class; (3) Children are priority; (4) Past emotions should stay in the past; (5) Partner is perfect; (6) Success is slim; and (7) Finances should be pooled.



In testing for the factorial validity of the seven individual constructs of the RMBI, measurement models for each construct were formed, refined, and tested. Sources of poor fit in the models were detected and eliminated after reviewing individual items to ensure that removing them would not change the theoretical make-up of each factor. Of the retained items, a second round of models was tested using: the chi-square statistic, the goodness-of-fit-index, the comparative fit index, and the root-mean-square-error of approximation. The goodness-of-fit indicators supported most of the models and several factors prompted the decision to accept the rest of them.

The full seven-factor model was then evaluated with the sample of online participants through confirmatory factor analysis. The estimates and goodness-of-fit indices supported the factorial structure. Low correlations among factors also supported the distinction of seven separate constructs.

The subsample of remarried couples from Utah, which differed from the online sample on many demographic variables, was used to cross-validate the factorial structure. The data from Utah fit the model although the goodness-of-fit indicators were not as strong as they were for the online sample.

Now that the constructs of the RMBI have been validated they may be used in studies involving remarriage cognitions. As Higginbotham and Adler-Baeder (2008) suggested, “The RMBI may be utilized in basic research efforts to understand processes involved in the etiology and the impact of remarriage beliefs on remarriage quality or stepfamily functioning” (p. 50). They also claimed that, using the RMBI, future studies could “further develop and analyze the

propositions advanced by the multidimensional cognitive-developmental model” (p. 51).

### The Multi-Dimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model

Fine and Kurdek (1994) developed a Multidimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model (MDCD) of stepfamily adjustment to address the lack of well-articulated theories of stepfamily adjustment. The creators of this theoretical model recognized the complex processes by which stepfamilies adapt to the unique stresses and challenges they face. It is focused on the stepfather system, but the authors stated that they expect the relation between cognitions and adjustment to be similar in more complex stepfamilies. It is noted, however, that complexity increases with more subsystems, making a well-functioning stepfamily more difficult to maintain (Fine & Kurdek).

The Multidimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model consists of four dimensions, which are: (1) Units in the stepfamily system, (2) Types of cognitions, (3) Continua of Adjustment, and (4) Developmental stages of the stepfamily system.

#### *Dimension 1: Members of the Family System*

Subsystems are called multi-person units and are viewed as structural units made up of stepfamily members that have a history and pattern of interaction. This model includes two-person units (i.e., the mother-stepfather marital subsystem), three-person units (i.e., the mother-stepfather-child residential subsystem, and a four-person unit (the mother-stepfather-child-nonresidential father system). In each unit, the model considers direct relations that occur when members are involved in the same interaction and

indirect relations that occur in larger units when one or more members influence the situation between a smaller subsystem. An example of indirect relations is the way in which nonresidential father involvement with the child influences the mother-stepfather marital relationship.

### *Dimension 2: Cognitive Elements of the Model*

Fine and Kurdek (1994) asserted that, “Cognitions provide meaning, order, and a sense of control” (p. 19). Baucom and Epstein (1990) described cognitions as the processing of information that allows individuals to understand their environments and decide how to interact with others. Kurdek and Fine used the taxonomy of Baucom and Epstein to organize their discussion of cognitions in stepfamilies. The two cognitions relevant to the current study are: assumptions and standards.

*Assumptions.* Assumptions were explained by Fine and Kurdek (1994) as “cognitions regarding how certain types of people typically behave, how relationships usually work, and the way in which one sees oneself in certain roles” (p. 21). They may represent stereotypes or models developed as a result of life experiences or internalized cultural beliefs.

*Standards.* Standards were referred to as an ideal comparison level that experiences are compared to and are explained as beliefs about how things should be, rather than how they really are. Fine and Kurdek (1994) stated, “Whether the resulting comparison meets or exceeds that standard will affect levels of perceived satisfaction” (p. 22).

### *The Relation Between Cognitions and Adjustment*

*Assumptions and adjustment.* Marital satisfaction has been related to the kinds of assumptions that spouses make about how relationships function (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). If remarried couples are unsure of their roles, that role ambiguity may result in maladaptive assumptions that are based on negative stereotypes, which may lead to adjustment difficulties. Adaptive assumptions involve role clarity, in which members have a clear idea about how to fulfill their role and how to function.

*Standards and adjustment.* Kurdek (1992) found marital satisfaction to be linked with standards that spouses have about how a relationship should function. One standard that is unlikely to be met in stepfamilies is the belief that they should function as an equivalent to an intact family. This unmet standard would most likely result in frustration and conflict within the stepfamily.

### *Dimension 3: Continuum of Adjustment*

In the MDCD model, outcomes are anticipated to occur for each unit. The outcomes are depicted on a continuum ranging from maladaptation to adaptation. For one-person units individual psychological adjustment is of relevance. For multi-person units, adjustment is visualized as a global evaluation of the functioning of the subsystems.

### *Dimension 4: Developmental Stage of the Stepfamily*

The developmental dimension of the model suggests that adjustment and cognitions change over the course of a stepfamily's life span. The life cycle presented consisted of the following stages: dating and courtship, cohabitation (if it occurs), early

remarriage (the first 2 years), middle remarriage (2-5 years), and late remarriage (more than 5 years).

### Consistency of Cognitions

A tenant of the MDCD that underlies the dimensions is consistency of cognitions. In the model by Fine and Kurdek (1994), the key issue in multi-person units is the extent to which the cognitions held by members of a subsystem are consistent with the others in that subsystem. Fine and Kurdek suggested that a balanced system is one in which the cognitions are relatively consistent among members. An unbalanced system is one in which the members' cognitions are not alike or incompatible with each other. This model is centered on the idea that *consistency* of cognitions is of "primary importance," and Fine and Kurdek hypothesized that adjustment should be positively related to the degree of consistency in the beliefs held by stepfamily members.

Other researchers have indicated that inconsistency of cognitions among remarried couples may be problematic, causing conflict (Leslie & Epstein, 1988) and remarital dissatisfaction (Kaplan & Hennon, 1992). Additionally, clinicians have suggested that compatible and consistent cognitions are important for a thriving remarriage (e.g., Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Despite this, little empirical research has been identified that supports this assumption for remarried couples. Due to the lack of research targeting consistency of cognitions in remarriage, this review will examine studies that have assessed cognitive consistencies or discrepancies among broader populations.

*Research on Consistency of Cognitions*

Using a sample of 286 newlywed couples, Kurdek (1993) examined how well marital dissolution was predicted by four different areas: demographic, interdependence, individual differences, and discrepancy between spouses. Individual differences were assessed through measuring traits like: neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and dysfunctional beliefs about relationships. Interdependence was assessed by measuring marital satisfaction, faith in the marriage, value of autonomy and attachment, and motives to be in the marriage. The discrepancy scores were calculated by taking the absolute value of the difference between spouses' individual-difference scores and of the difference between the spouses' interdependence scores. The results of the study showed that higher spousal discrepancy scores (inconsistencies) place a marriage at risk for dissolution.

In an attempt to identify marital strengths in stable marriages, Robinson and Blanton (1993) interviewed 15 couples who had been married for at least 30 years. Participants were asked to give their opinion on what qualities had sustained their marriage in times of closeness and relational strain. The key characteristics that were common among couples were: intimacy, commitment, communication, religious orientation, and congruence between spouses in perceptions of the relationship. Congruence was described as the ability of partners to perceive their spouse similarly to the spouse's self-perception in regards to marital adjustment or satisfaction. Congruent or consistent perceptions of the marriage as strong were indicators of adaptability. The authors noted that incongruent perceptions may hinder communication, putting strain on the relationship.

Acitelli, Kenny, and Weiner (2001) extended earlier work by studying the association between partner's similarity and understanding about marital ideals and relationship satisfaction. Similarity in marital ideals is similar to consistency in expectations. The contribution of similarity and understanding (or congruence) to relationship satisfaction was studied in 238 dating and married couples. Marital ideals were measured by asking both partners to rate the importance of their own and their partner's marriage values. Relationship satisfaction was measured by six items addressing happiness, stability, and satisfaction. Congruence and satisfaction in relationships were found to be related, and similarity was associated with longer involvement.

Pasley, Ihinger-Tallman, and Coleman (1984) conducted a study examining consensus styles among happy and unhappy remarried couples among 359 remarried couples. Couples were given three different labels: agree-they-agree, agree-they-disagree, and mixed, based on their responses to questions concerning the extent of agreement/disagreement about different familial topics. They also responded to 19 individual topics on a Likert scale demonstrating the frequency of perceived agreement or disagreement. A chi-square analysis revealed that happy and unhappy couples differed significantly on 16 of the 19 items. Happy couples shared similar perceptions about their agreement most of the time. The consensus patterns for unhappy couples were less clear. Most of the unhappy couples were labeled as "mixed" and many of them agreed that they disagreed. Therefore, it was shown that happy remarried couples tend to be consistent in their perceptions of conflict, regardless of whether they reported frequent agreement or disagreement.

### *Summary*

With the exception of Pasley et al. (1984), most of the empirical literature on consistency of cognitions was done on samples of couples in dating relationships or first marriages. The findings of Pasley et al. are similar to those of broader populations; however, this study is more than two decades old and is unique in representing remarried couples. Consistency of cognitions among remarried couples has been ignored as an area of research. In order to validate the assumption of consistency proposed by the MDCD model there is a need for current empirical studies that utilize remarried samples.

### Research Objectives

The first objective of this study was to identify the relationship between the personal endorsement of remarriage cognitions, as measured by the RMBI, and remarital cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction. Previous research suggests that an individual's assumptions and standards can influence marital outcomes (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Kurdek, 1992). Due to these findings, it was hypothesized that individual endorsement of the assumptions and standards assessed by the RMBI would predict remarital outcomes.

The second objective of this study was to test the tenet of consistency as proposed by the MDCD model. Research in other populations suggests that consistency between partners is important to relationship quality (Acitelli et al., 2001; Kurdek, 1993). It was hypothesized that this study would yield similar findings and that discrepancy scores between spouses would be more predictive of remarital outcomes than individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs.



## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

This chapter provides a description of the sample, procedure, and measures obtained and utilized for this study. A description of the objectives and proposed analyses and detailed hypotheses for the study are also included.

#### Sample and Procedure

The “Relationship Quality and Stability in Utah Newlywed Remarriages” study conducted by Dr. Brian Higginbotham was the source of data for this study (see Appendix A). Participants were recruited through marriage licenses from the Utah Office of Vital Statistics. This office maintains all marriage licenses from Salt Lake City and all 25 rural counties in the state of Utah, but does not have available the complete marriage licenses for Davis, Utah, and Weber counties. Marriage licenses provide information about which spouse has previously been married. These documents also provide contact information. Prospective participants were selected from marriage licenses that were issued during 2006 for which one or both partners reported being a remarriage.

#### *Procedure*

Approximately 4,800 survey packets were sent to participants between February and April of 2007 for Wave 1 of the study. These packets included a survey for both the husband and the wife. A pre-notice letter was sent informing the participants of their selection in the study. Then the survey packet was sent with a self-addressed and stamped return envelope. A \$2.00 bill was attached to the questionnaire as an incentive to

complete and return the survey. The enclosed letter instructed that husband and wife surveys should be completed and returned separately. A postcard was then sent as a thank you/reminder to complete the survey. For mailing surveys, this protocol followed best practices (Dillman, 2000).

For Wave 1, of the questionnaires sent out, 939 were returned by husbands, 1,101 were returned by wives and 879 of them were pairs. For Wave 2, a second set of questionnaires was sent out in 2008 to the 879 couples in which both the husband and the wife completed and returned the questionnaire for Wave 1. As discrepancy scores between couples were used for the current study, and the RMBI was not included in Wave 1 of the study, only data for couples in which both husband and wife returned surveys for Wave 2 were used. The final sample for this study consisted of the 447 couples from Wave 2.

### *Sample Characteristics*

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample used in this study. In this sample of 447 couples, the female participants had an average age of 42.3. The male participants had an average age of 46.0. About 43% of the couples reported cohabiting prior to marriage. Table 1 shows that the average length of time spent cohabiting was approximately 9 months. The majority of participants identified themselves as Latter-day Saints (60.6% of the females and 58.8% of the males), and the second most frequent religious preference listed was “No religious affiliation” (20.4% of the females and 24.1% of the males). The median number of years of education was 14, with a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 17 for both husbands and wives. As seen on Table 1, the median

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample - Women (W) and Men (M)*

	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Age- W	42.28	39.00	14.60	19	92
Age- M	46.00	43.00	15.48	18	96
Marriage number- W	2.03	2.00	.84	1	8
Marriage number- M	2.11	2.00	.74	1	5
Months cohabitated- W	8.98	.00	17.25	.00	156
Months cohabitated- M	8.72	.00	17.78	.00	156
Education- W	14.42	14.00	1.98	9	17
Education- M	14.37	14.00	1.99	9	17
Household income-W	7.24	7.00	2.88	1	12
Household income- M	7.37	7.00	2.89	1	12
Months married-W	22.28	22.00	3.43	15	33
Months married- M	22.46	22.00	3.67	13	34
Number of children-W	.93	0	1.42	0	9
Number of children-M	.93	0	1.46	0	10

household income as reported by both husbands and wives was option 7, which represented an income between \$70,000 and \$80,000.

One hundred five of the female participants reported being in their first marriage (23.5%), 248 reported being in their second marriage (55.5%), and 72 in their third (16.1%). Of the male participants, 71 reported being in their first marriage (15.9%), 282 in their second (63.1%), and 71 in their third (15.9%). The average length of participants' current marriage was 22 months. The mean number of children at home (under the age of 18) was about 1, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 10.

### Measures

The measures utilized for the current study were: a two-item satisfaction scale (Conger et al., 1990), the cohesion and consensus subscales from the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995), the Remarriage Belief

Inventory (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008), as well as several demographic questions. A description of each measure is provided below. See Appendix F for descriptives for outcome and predictor variables.

### *Demographics*

Demographic items addressing age, gender, educational attainment, household income, and ethnicity were included in the questionnaire. Relationship information regarding marital status (e.g., widowhood or divorce) and length of remarriage were also solicited through demographic questions.

### *Remarital Satisfaction*

The satisfaction measure by Conger asked participants to respond to two questions on a 7-point Likert scale regarding their current marriage (Conger et al., 1990). Scores on both questions were summed. For this sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .94 for husbands and .95 for wives. The questions asked how happy participants are with their marriage and how satisfied they are with their relationship with their spouses (See Appendix B). Response options ranged from "Extremely unhappy/dissatisfied" to "Extremely happy/satisfied."

### *Remarital Adjustment*

The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby et al., 1995) is made up of three subscales: cohesion, satisfaction, and consensus. For the current study, the cohesion and consensus subscales were utilized. For the consensus subscale, participants were asked to report the degree to which they agree or disagree on items such as: religious

matters, sex relations, major decisions, and demonstrations of affection (see Appendix C). Participants responded using 5-point Likert scales. For this sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .84 for husbands and .84 for wives.

For the cohesion subscale, participants were asked to report how often they engaged in certain events together. The events were: engaging in outside interests together, having stimulating exchanges of ideas, working together on a project, and calmly discussing something (see Appendix D). Response options ranged from "Never" to "Many times a day." For this sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .80 for husbands and .81 for wives.

### *Cognitions*

The Remarriage Belief Inventory (RMBI; Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008) was used to assess individuals' beliefs about remarriage. It contains 22 items comprising seven factors, which have been supported by a confirmatory factor analysis (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder). In developing the measure, Higginbotham and Adler-Baeder used a sample of 344 participants from an internet survey to test and confirm the factorial validity of the RMBI. All retained items had a  $\beta > .50$ . The measures of goodness-of-fit indicated a strong fit with a comparative-fit-index (CFI) of .97, a root-mean-square-error of approximation (RMSEA) of .04, and a goodness-of-fit index (GFI) of .93.

The factorial structure was cross-validated with an independent sample of 217 remarried individuals from Utah. Betas ranged from .46 to .85, all of the critical ratios were significant ( $p < .001$ ), and goodness-of-fit indicators again confirmed a good fit. On

the validated RMBI, participants are asked to report the extent they believe various statements about remarriage are true or false (see Appendix E). Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale. In regards to reliability, the majority of the subscale alphas were in the range of .70. The decision was made to use the questions anyway because (a) previous studies have confirmed the factorial validity of the RMBI subscales (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008), and (b) there are no other published measures of remarriage beliefs.

### Objectives and Corresponding Analyses

Below, the objectives of this study are reviewed. Included in the review of objectives is a description of the analyses that were used. The analyses described below were run separately for men and women using the independent variables as indicators of remarital adjustment. These analyses will be used for the identification of associations of remarriage beliefs and cohesion.

The first objective of this study was to assess whether cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction are significantly related to all seven content factors of the RMBI. Ordinary least squares multiple regression was used to determine the predictive ability of the RMBI in relation to these outcomes. This was an appropriate analytical strategy because it can be used to assess the relationship of multiple independent variables and one dependent variable.

The second objective was to assess the importance of consistency in cognitions between spouses for remarital outcomes. This was done by using hierarchical regression, in which the seven RMBI factors were entered in the first step after which the

discrepancy scores were added as the second step of the predictive model. Hierarchical regression is an appropriate analysis because it allows variance in the outcome variable to be analyzed at multiple levels. Paired sample *t* tests were also utilized in order to evaluate whether the average scores of men and women differ significantly. Significance was evaluated for each of the seven constructs of the RMBI.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The predictive ability of the RMBI and the consistency tenet of the MDCC model were tested using multiple regressions. Three separate regressions were conducted for women and men -- one each for cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction as the dependent variable. In each of the analyses, the first model (Model 1) was used to determine the association between individual scores (endorsement) of RMBI subscales and the dependent variable. The second model (Model 2) tested the consistency tenet of the MDCC model by including the seven additional variables that reflect the difference (absolute value) between partners on each of the seven RMBI subscales.

Table 2 shows the results of the regression estimates predicting cohesion. For women, three factors of the RMBI were found to be significantly predictive of cohesion in remarriage. The individual endorsement of the belief that “finances should be pooled” was associated with higher cohesion scores in Model 1 ( $\beta = .119, p = .021$ ) and in Model 2 ( $\beta = .105, p = .049$ ). The beliefs that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.109, p = .027$ ), and “success is slim” ( $\beta = -.115, p = .023$ ) were negatively related with cohesion scores in Model 1. The belief that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.116, p = .021$ ) was also negatively related with cohesion scores in Model 2, while “success is slim” ( $\beta = -.099, p = .053$ ) was only marginally predictive of cohesion scores in Model 2. Higher discrepancy scores in the belief that “adjustment should come quickly” ( $\beta = -.088, p = .097$ ) were marginally predictive of lower cohesion scores reported by women.

Overall, individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs significantly predicted cohesion scores for women, with an  $F$  value of 3.189 ( $p = .003$ ). There was change in  $R^2$



of .053, meaning that about 5.3% of the variance in cohesion scores was due to individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs. In addition to individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs, the discrepancy scores between husband and wife in Model 2 were also significantly predictive of women's cohesion scores with an  $F$  value of 2.666 ( $p = .001$ ). Discrepancy scores accounted for an additional 3.4% of the variance in cohesion scores among women.

Table 2

*Regression Estimates Predicting Cohesion*

Variable	Women ( $n = 447$ )		Men ( $n = 447$ )	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Individual endorsement				
Adjustment	.046	.014	-.008	.005
Finances	.119*	.105*	.039	.036
Partner	-.005	-.005	.078	.060
Priority	-.109*	-.116*	-.133**	-.136**
Success	-.115*	-.099†	-.154**	-.161**
Stepfamily	-.052	-.022	-.015	.007
Past	-.062	-.071	-.054	-.042
Differences				
Adjustment		-.088†		-.042
Finances		-.069		-.056
Partner		-.060		-.078
Priority		.031		.022
Success		.060		.001
Stepfamily		-.064		-.078
Past		-.066		.013
$Df$	7, 399	14, 392	7, 401	14, 394
$F$	3.189**	2.666***	3.146**	2.216**
$R^2$	.053	.087	.052	.073
$R^2$ change	.053**	.034*	.052**	.021

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

For men, the endorsement of the beliefs that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.133, p = .008$ ), and “success is slim” ( $\beta = -.154, p = .002$ ) were significantly predictive of cohesion at the .01 level in both Model 1. In Model 2, the beliefs that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.136, p = .007$ ), and ‘success is slim’ ( $\beta = -.161, p = .002$ ) were also predictive of lower cohesion at the .01 level. Unlike for women, the belief that “finances should be pooled” was not found to be significantly predictive of cohesion for men. Cohesion was not found to be significantly predicted by any of the seven discrepancy scores.

Individual endorsement of the seven constructs of the RMBI predicted cohesion scores for men, with an  $F$  value of 3.146 ( $p = .003$ ). Model 1 accounted for 5.2% of the variance in cohesion scores. The discrepancy scores between husband and wife in Model 2 were significantly predictive of cohesion scores for men with an  $F$  value of 2.216 ( $p = .007$ ); but the change in  $R^2$  (2.1%) was not significant ( $p = .264$ ).

Table 3 shows the results of the regression estimates predicting consensus. For women, three factors of the RMBI were found to be significantly predictive of consensus in remarriage. The individual endorsement of the belief that “adjustment should come quickly” was marginally predictive of higher consensus scores in both models. The beliefs that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.171, p = .001$ ), and “success is slim” ( $\beta = -.123, p = .013$ ) were negatively related to consensus scores in Model 1. These beliefs that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.148, p = .003$ ), and “success is slim” ( $\beta = -.114, p = .023$ ) were also negatively related to consensus scores in Model 2. The belief that “finances should be pooled” ( $\beta = .102, p = .047$ ) predicted higher consensus scores among women in Model 1 only.

Table 3

*Regression Estimates Predicting Consensus*

Variable	Women ( <i>n</i> = 447)		Men ( <i>n</i> = 447)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Individual endorsement				
Adjustment	.097†	.086†	.015	.013
Finances	.102*	.084	.115*	.109*
Partner	.034	.048	.028	.027
Priority	-.171***	-.148**	-.126**	-.136**
Success	-.123*	-.114*	-.174***	-.174***
Stepfamily	-.046	-.007	-.021	.023
Past	-.058	-.097†	-.043	-.034
Differences				
Adjustment		.046		.019
Finances		-.097†		.069
Partner		-.035		-.042
Priority		-.045		-.084†
Success		.054		.071
Stepfamily		-.046		-.128*
Past		-.172***		.005
<i>Df</i>	7, 401	14, 394	7, 403	14, 396
<i>F</i>	4.735***	3.931***	4.470***	3.345***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.076	.123	.072	.106
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> change	.076***	.046**	.072***	.034*

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Marginally lower consensus scores were linked to individual endorsement of the belief that “past feelings should end” ( $\beta = -.097$ ,  $p = .068$ ) for women in Model 2. Higher discrepancy scores in the belief that “finances should be pooled” ( $\beta = -.097$ ,  $p = .056$ ) were marginally associated with lower cohesion scores reported by women. Higher discrepancy scores in endorsement of the belief that “past feelings should end” ( $\beta = -.172$ ,  $p = .001$ ) predicted lower consensus scores for women and the .001 level.

Individual endorsement of the combined seven constructs of the RMBI significantly predicted consensus scores for women, with an  $F$  value of 4.735 ( $p = .000$ ) and an  $R^2$  of .076. The addition of discrepancy scores between husband and wife in Model 2 ( $F = 3.931$ ;  $p = .000$ ) accounted for an additional 4.6% of the variance in women's consensus scores.

For men, the endorsements of the beliefs that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.126$ ,  $p = .010$ ), and “success is slim” ( $\beta = -.174$ ,  $p = .001$ ) were significantly predictive of lower consensus scores in Model 1. In Model 2, these beliefs were also associated with outcomes with scores of ( $\beta = -.136$ ,  $p = .006$ ) for “children are priority” and ( $\beta = -.174$ ,  $p = .000$ ) for “success is slim.” The belief that “finances should be pooled” was positively associated with higher consensus scores in both Model 1 ( $\beta = .115$ ,  $p = .025$ ) and Model 2 ( $\beta = .109$ ,  $p = .037$ ). Discrepancy scores between husband and wife concerning the belief that “children are priority” ( $\beta = -.084$ ,  $p = .084$ ) were marginally predictive of lower consensus scores, and endorsement of the belief that “stepfamilies are second-class” ( $\beta = -.128$ ,  $p = .013$ ) was significantly related to lower consensus scores among men.

Overall, individual endorsement of the combined seven constructs of the RMBI significantly predicted consensus scores for men, with an  $F$  value of 4.470 ( $p = .000$ ). About 7.2% of the variance in consensus scores was a result of Model 1. Along with individual endorsement of beliefs about remarriage, the discrepancy scores between husband and wife in Model 2 were also significantly predictive of consensus scores with an  $F$  value of 3.345 ( $p = .000$ ). Discrepancy scores accounted for an additional 3.4% of the variance in cohesion scores among men.

Table 4

*Regression Estimates Predicting Satisfaction*

Variable	Women ( <i>n</i> = 447)		Men ( <i>n</i> = 447)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Individual endorsement				
Adjustment	.083†	.041	.089†	.089†
Finances	.025	.006	.168***	.173***
Partner	.031	.033	.070	.055
Priority	-.043	-.051	-.016	-.016
Success	-.189***	-.183***	-.257***	-.248***
Stepfamily	-.102*	-.084	.002	.028
Past	-.049	-.057	.068	-.069
Differences				
Adjustment		-.084		.030
Finances		-.085†		-.057
Partner		-.071		-.082†
Priority		.036		-.076
Success		.018		.069
Stepfamily		-.013		-.080
Past		-.082		-.105*
<i>Df</i>	7, 403	14, 396	7, 402	14, 395
<i>F</i>	4.030***	3.161***	7.825***	5.421***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.065	.101	.120	.161
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> change	.065***	.035*	.120***	.041**

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 4 presents the results of the regression estimates predicting satisfaction. The individual endorsement of the belief among women that “adjustment should come quickly” ( $\beta = .083$ ,  $p = .099$ ) was marginally significant in predicting higher satisfaction scores in Model 1. The belief that “stepfamilies are second-class” ( $\beta = -.102$ ,  $p = .045$ ) was associated with lower satisfaction scores in Model 1. Endorsement of the idea that “success is slim” significantly predicted lower satisfaction scores for women in both Model 1 ( $\beta = -.189$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and Model 2 ( $\beta = -.183$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Higher discrepancy

scores between husband and wife in the belief that “finances should be pooled” ( $\beta = -.085, p = .097$ ) were also marginally related to lower satisfaction for women in Model 2.

Overall, individual endorsement of the combined seven constructs of the RMBI was associated with satisfaction scores for women, with an  $F$  value of 4.030 ( $p = .000$ ). About 6.5% of the variance in satisfaction scores was a result of Model 1. The discrepancy scores between husband and wife in Model 2 were also significantly predictive of satisfaction scores with an  $F$  value of 3.161 ( $p = .000$ ). Discrepancy scores accounted for an additional 3.5% of the variance in cohesion scores among women.

In Model 1 ( $\beta = .089, p = .073$ ) and Model 2 ( $\beta = .089, p = .083$ ) the individual endorsement of the belief that “adjustment should come quickly” was marginally predictive of higher satisfaction scores among men. The belief that “finances should be pooled” was also associated with higher satisfaction at the .001 level in Model 1 ( $\beta = .168, p = .001$ ) and in Model 2 ( $\beta = .173, p = .001$ ). The belief among men that “success is slim” was significantly predictive of lower satisfaction scores in Model 1 ( $\beta = -.257, p = .000$ ) and Model 2 ( $\beta = -.248, p = .000$ ).

Discrepancy scores between husband and wife concerning the beliefs on “new partner perfectionism” ( $\beta = -.082, p = .090$ ) were marginally significant in predicting lower satisfaction, and discrepancies in the belief that “past feelings should end” ( $\beta = -.105, p = .034$ ) were also related to lower satisfaction scores among men.

For men, individual endorsement of the combined seven constructs of the RMBI significantly predicted satisfaction scores overall, with an  $F$  value of 7.825 ( $p = .000$ ). About 12% of the variance in satisfaction scores was a result of Model 1. Along with individual endorsement of beliefs about remarriage, the discrepancy scores between

husband and wife in Model 2 were also significantly predictive of satisfaction scores with an  $F$  value of 5.421 ( $p = .000$ ). Discrepancy scores accounted for an additional 4.1% of the variance in satisfaction scores among men.

Results of the paired sample  $t$  tests showed that the differences between the average scores of men and women were significant at the .001 level for the belief that “adjustment comes quickly” (see Table 5). The difference between men and women in the belief that “children are priority” was also significant at the .01 level. Finally, the average scores for men and women on the belief that “success is slim” were found to be significant at the .05 level.

Table 5

*Paired Sample t-Test Results*

RMBI Constructs	Mean	Std Dev	$t$	$df$	P
Adjustment comes quickly	.3153	.9574	6.73	416	.000
Finances should be pooled	.0549	.9773	1.16	424	.247
New partner perfectionism	-.0466	1.0444	-.91	421	.360
Children are priority	-.1290	.8791	-2.99	415	.003
Success is slim	.0992	.9950	2.04	419	.042
Stepfamilies are second-class	.0566	1.2605	.92	423	.356
Past feelings should end	.0786	1.4936	1.09	425	.278

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The discussion is presented in the order of the research questions that guided this study. First, trends in individual endorsements of remarriage beliefs and outcomes are discussed by gender. Consistency between spouses and resulting outcomes is covered next. A critique of the consistency tenet of the MDCD model is given as it relates to the results of this study. Implications and practical applications of the findings will then be addressed. Finally, the discussion concludes with the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

#### Resulting Trends

##### *Individual Endorsement of Remarriage Beliefs*

Individual endorsement of the belief that “success is slim” appears to have a negative influence on all outcomes measured for both women and men. Women and men who endorsed this idea scored lower on cohesion, consensus and satisfaction measures. Although the literature contains little about the effects of the belief that “success is slim” for remarriages, there are mentions of its converse, which is the belief that “remarriages are more likely to succeed than first marriages.” Coleman and Ganong (1985) suggested that believing remarriages will be easier because of experience may be dysfunctional because any sign of similarity to the old marriage may cause panic, restricting necessary, open communication. On the other hand, Higginbotham (2005) stated that this belief may not be inherently dysfunctional to the degree that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy



and suggests that whether endorsing this belief or the belief that “success is slim” is positively or negatively related to remarital outcomes remains an empirical question.

The results of this study offer initial answers to this question, in that holding the belief “success is slim” was negatively related to remarital outcomes. As Higginbotham (2005) suggested about the opposite of this belief, it is possible that it too may become a self-fulfilling prophecy in a remarriage. Spouses who, despite their efforts, experienced the failure of their first marriage and question the resilience of their new marriage may invest less of themselves in the relationship for fear that it is a lost cause.

Another belief that was associated with cohesion and consensus scores when endorsed by both women and men was the belief that “children are priority.” Endorsement of the belief that “children are priority” by women was negatively related to cohesion and consensus scores, but was not found to be associated with satisfaction scores for women. The same relationships existed among men, as well. Visher and Visher (1996) have suggested that during periods of single-parenthood resulting from death or divorce, a child may become a parent’s confidante and be given extra time and attention. When the parent is remarried, the new spouse may feel shortchanged in not being considered a priority (Coleman & Ganong, 1985).

Whereas cohesion is a measure of togetherness between spouses and consensus a measure of agreement and unity between spouses, it seems logical that making children priority in a stepfamily would result in lower scores on these measures. All relationships require time and effort, and if the emphasis is placed on always giving the children the love, attention and time they need before the needs of the spouse, what little is left may not be enough for the couple relationship, and it may suffer. This finding supports

literature on the topic suggesting that beliefs that place the wants and wishes of a spouse after those of children may have a negative impact on remarriages (Higginbotham, 2005).

Interestingly, no support was found for a relationship between individual endorsement of the belief that “children are priority” and satisfaction scores for men and women. This could be because remarried couples may be satisfied with their relationship for many reasons other than quality, such as; financial benefits, stability for children, and/or lack of better alternatives.

Finances can be a complex issue and source of conflict for remarried couples as they may have to deal with ex-spouses, child support, and so forth (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Previous research on this topic has indicated that the decision whether to pool their resources or keep them separate does not seem to make a difference in terms of remarriage satisfaction (Pasley, Sandras, & Edmondson, 1994). However, Coleman and Ganong (1985) theorized that there is a problem with assuming that finances should be kept separate. They claim that this problem is a lack of an “ours” orientation.

While results were slightly different between genders, the findings from this study support the view that individual endorsement of the belief that “finances should be pooled” predicts more positive outcomes for both women and men in remarriages. This could be because of the “ours” orientation that pooling finances is a part of. Higher consensus scores were predicted by beliefs in pooling finances for both genders. Perhaps the willingness among couples to pool their finances is a way for them to show their commitment to the relationship and willingness to compromise, making it easier for them to come to agreements.

The belief that “finances should be pooled” was also related to higher cohesion scores for women and higher satisfaction scores for men. It is possible that women stay at home with the children, or make less money at their jobs than their husbands, and they may feel disadvantaged if they are not entitled to use the finances of their husbands. This could mean that pooling finances helps women feel more like equal partners with their husbands, and may provide insight into why women reported higher cohesion scores when they endorsed pooled finances. For women, pooling finances may also provide an opportunity for them to work together with their spouse and discuss and exchange ideas. As Walsh (1992) explained, to some couples, the method used to handle finances may reflect the commitment expressed to their partners and to each other’s children, which may also be important to women.

Higher satisfaction scores for men were also associated with endorsement the belief that “finances should be pooled.” As mentioned previously, husbands may question the commitment of their wives less and feel closer to them if they are willing to share all of their financial resources. It may also promote a feeling of shared responsibility for financial obligations, which may increase satisfaction for men in remarriages and stepfamilies.

Until now, the direction of the relationships between beliefs and outcomes were assumed, hypothesized, or unknown (Higginbotham, 2005). The results involving individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs provided some clarity on the direction of the effects on outcomes. In addition to the direction of the relationships between each belief and outcomes, this study also provides evidence that individual endorsements of the seven constructs of the RMBI, collectively, are predictive of outcomes for both men

and women in remarriages. It also supports the assertion by clinicians that the distinct beliefs and assumptions that individuals in remarriages (especially those with children) endorse may have an influence on consensus, cohesion and satisfaction in their relationships (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Papernow, 1987; Visher, Visher, & Pasley, 2003).

*Consistency in Remarriage  
Beliefs Between Spouses*

Fine and Kurdek (1994) stated that consistency of cognitions held by members of a remarriage is of particular importance in predicting outcomes. They hypothesized that adjustment should have a positive relationship with the degree of consistency in cognitions between members of stepfamily subsystems.

Limited support was found in this study for the consistency tenet of the MDCD Model of Stepfamily Adjustment. With the exception of cohesion scores for men, the additional variation in outcome scores explained by differences between husband and wife was significant for both genders. However, whether or not the contribution of consistency in this study is of practical importance is questionable. For many of the cognitions, the degree of consistency was not significant, or of marginal significance.

One belief in which consistency did seem to be more predictive of outcomes than individual endorsement was that “past feelings should end.” Larger difference scores between husband and wife on this belief were associated with lower consensus scores for women and lower satisfaction scores for men. Baucom and Epstein (1990) suggested that if two spouses have differing or incompatible standards for their marriage, marital problems may arise. They also mention that if the standards they have are unreasonable,

their problems are likely to worsen. Some individuals in remarriages may feel that emotional ties to previous relationships (e.g., ex-spouses, ex-in-laws, ex-stepchildren) should be discontinued (Higginbotham, 2005). In support of this belief, researchers have suggested that emotionally divorcing and establishing appropriate boundaries with a former spouse are important components of remarriage quality (Weston & Macklin, 1990).

The results of the paired sample *t* test for the belief that “past feelings should end,” showed that men’s average endorsement of the belief was higher than women’s, but the difference was not statistically significant. If it is men who are endorsing this belief more than their wives, that may be the reason that they report less satisfaction. It could be difficult to cut ties with your own past relationships when your new spouse is unwilling or unable to do the same. Dealing with his spouse’s emotional ties with past relationships would be especially difficult for a stepfather living with his new wife and her biological children, because he may already feel like an outsider in the new arrangement.

Consistency between husband and wife in the belief that ‘stepfamilies are second-class’ was also found to be predictive of lower consensus scores for men. This could go back to the standards that individuals have for their families. If one spouse believes that stepfamilies are second-class more so than the other, they may have different standards which they expect the family to meet. This presents the possibility for one spouse’s standards to go unmet if the other is comfortable with what the stepfamily has already accomplished.

For example, some may believe that a stepfamily should be just like a nuclear family, leading them to expect the stepfamily to function in the same way (Ganong &

Coleman, 2004). Consequently, one spouse in a remarriage may feel that the stepparent should functionally and emotionally replace the nonresidential parent, while the other may not share this belief (Ganong & Coleman). Hetherington and Kelly (2002) stated that this assumption may be made by husbands who expect the stepmother to take over primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of a stepchild. If the wife disagrees, this may create a lack of unity and togetherness in the remarriage and may explain why men report lower consensus in this area. While the difference between the averages was not statistically significant, the average endorsement of the belief that 'stepfamilies are second-class' was higher for men than for women.

Interestingly, the average difference scores between men and women for the three beliefs which were found to be significant in the paired sample *t* tests were not found to be predictive of outcomes. This could mean that individual endorsement of these beliefs is of more importance than discrepancies between couples, or that couples find a way to cope with their different beliefs (Gottman, 1999). It could also be a result of assessing average scores, rather than the difference between each couple.

#### Critique of the MDCD Model

The MDCD model emphasizes that consistency of cognitions between individuals is key to marital adjustment (Fine & Kurdek, 1994). Therefore, discrepancy in cognitions may lead to maladjusted remarriages. Consistent with the MDCD hypothesis, this study indicates that discrepancy in certain remarriage beliefs is moderately predictive of women's and men's remarital outcomes. However, while the amount of variance in

outcomes explained by discrepancy scores from all seven constructs was statistically significant, it was consistently less than 5%, making practical significance questionable.

Therefore, overall, the results of this study do not provide strong support for the consistency tenet of the MDCD model. Individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs appears to have more impact on remarital outcomes than consistency in beliefs between spouses. However, in light of the developmental component of the model, this may only mean that consistency may be less important for couples in early remarriage (the first two years). Fine and Kurdek (1994) proposed that cognitions often become more consistent over time, as “new patterns of relating are developed and new traditions and routines are established” (p. 30). It is feasible that inasmuch as spouses may expect to have more disagreements in the early years of remarriage, their outcomes will be unaffected when there is a discrepancy in beliefs. Negative outcomes will possibly become more noticeable over time as remarried couples expect to become more consistent in beliefs.

Another possible explanation for the findings is that, rather than the degree of differences between spouses, the way that they deal with their differences may be more important in determining outcomes in their relationship. Gottman (1999) explained that even the best marriages have differences that become “perpetual issues,” which are problems that never get solved. After studying marital interactions over a four-year period he noticed that when discussing disagreements, 69% of the time couples were talking about a “perpetual problem” that had existed in their marriage for many, many years. These problems usually had to do with differences that were fundamental to their core definition of self.

Quite possibly, it is not the mending of differences between spouses that is of importance, but the affect that surrounds the discussion of these unsolvable problems (Gottman, 1999). As Coleman and Ganong (1985) suggested, if couples believe that remarriage will be easier, and any signs of similarity to the old marriage may cause panic or demoralization, restricting necessary, open communication. Establishing a dialogue about perpetual problems may help couples avoid becoming gridlocked, which eventually leads to emotional disengagement (Gottman).

In summary, while Fine and Kurdek (1994) recognized that failing to acknowledge cognitive inconsistencies is dysfunctional; they also stated that neglecting to resolve them constructively is harmful. In contrast, Gottman (1999) claimed that of the problems that couples have; less than a third of them will actually have real solutions. Therefore, Gottman suggested that couples need to think of their relationship differences as inevitable and learn to deal with them. Consistency in beliefs about remarriage may not be as significant to remarried couple who are able to accomplish this.

### Implications for Researchers and Practitioners

In addition to the support found for clinician's claims that cognitions are important in determining remarital outcomes, the results of this study also provide external validation for the RMBI as a measure of remarriage beliefs. The findings of this study may also be informative to a variety of social science professionals. Marriage therapists who work with remarried couples may benefit from knowing that the beliefs that spouses hold about their remarriages and stepfamilies may affect outcomes in their relationships. Discussing these beliefs with remarried individuals or couples, along with



examining why the beliefs are functional or dysfunctional may aid couples in identifying and establishing functional standards for their remarriages and stepfamilies.

Theories about remarried couples thus far have stressed the importance of consistency in cognitions. It is important that therapists recognize that this is not necessarily true for remarried newlyweds. Where little support for the consistency tenet was found, therapists may want to focus on establishing a dialogue about “perpetual issues” between spouses, rather than trying to eliminate differences between them.

As Gottman (1999) suggested, therapists may want to help remarried couples think of their differences as inevitable and learn to deal with them. Therapists could focus on helping couples make things a little better between them, a little bit at a time. Instead of solving differences between them, it might be more helpful for remarried couples to learn to minimize them, avoid doing things to provoke them, and learn what to do when situations occur in which they may need to be dealt with (Gottman). It remains a possibility that consistency of cognitions is important later in remarriage, and working to help the couple develop consistency in beliefs may prove helpful for their future. However, therapists may want to keep in mind that, as suggested by Hetherington (1989), “the early stages of remarriage are devoted to adapting to the stress of a new life situation” (p. 5).

Educators in this field may inform students that beliefs are important to remarital quality. Students and individuals in remarriages should be informed that certain beliefs about remarriage (e. g., “success is slim”), could be dysfunctional and are related to negative outcomes. They may also teach about Gottman’s (1999) idea of “perpetual problems” and that difference in opinion and beliefs is inherent in relationships.

Educators may instruct students and remarried couples to expect differences in relationships. Rather than try to solve these differences, people should be taught to develop a dialog with their spouses that is characterized by positive affect. Educators may benefit remarried couples and individuals that may enter a remarriage in the future, or work with remarried couples by helping them understand what is realistic in terms of beliefs and consistency in remarriage.

Extension agents, and other professionals responsible for programs related to remarried couples, could offer materials and/or workshops that encourage functional beliefs for stepfamilies. They may also consider applying programs that help newlywed remarried couples cope with differences in beliefs. By encouraging functional beliefs and helping couples cope with differences, these professionals may help couples achieve better consensus, cohesion and satisfaction in their remarriages.

### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be recognized. The first to be recognized is the issue of causality. This study is a cross-sectional analysis and therefore it is not possible to determine whether remarital beliefs actually drive remarital outcomes. It is possible that an individual's remarital cohesion, consensus, or satisfaction may influence the individual's endorsement of remarriage beliefs.

There is also the possibility of sample bias. Though efforts were made to include a fair representation of the population, the surveys that were returned were from individuals who were willing to write and answer questions about their remarriages, thus excluding those who were not willing to do so. Although they were encouraged to answer

honestly, independently, and accurately, it is also possible that the individuals who returned the surveys wanted to portray themselves and their remarriages in a positive light and did not give completely honest answers.

In addition, the majority of the sample reported high marital satisfaction and high levels of adjustment (see Appendix F). This is understandable as newlywed couples are presumably happy. Unfortunately these circumstances may have resulted in a limited range of variability and outcome predictability. Perhaps a more evenly distributed sample may have identified discrepancy as the better predictor for marital quality within remarriages.

Another limitation of the study was that the sample characteristics lacked diversity. This study used a Utah sample. Participants were predominately Caucasian and of the LDS faith. The majority of respondents also earned a high income. The lack of diversity of the sample may limit the generalizability of these findings to broader, more diverse, populations.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study suggest that some specific remarriage beliefs were more predictive of outcomes for one gender than the other. Future studies could further assess gender differences between couples and outcomes. Studying differences in couple data, rather than averages for men and women could possibly lead to better gender-focused guidance for remarried couples by educators and therapists.

Future studies on the direction of the relationship between remarriage beliefs and outcomes would also benefit the field. These studies could examine whether the

individual endorsement of remarriage-specific beliefs drive remarital outcomes, or if healthier remarried relationships promote more functional beliefs among individuals. Knowing the direction of this relationship would aid in developing interventions for remarried couples.

An additional path for future research could be to assess beliefs in relation to marriage number. For example, the belief that Success is slim was predictive of lower scores on outcome variables for both women and men in this study. It may be useful for practitioners to know if individuals endorse this belief increasingly with the number of their marriages that have ended in divorce.

Of the sample for this study, about 60% reported belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Religious and cultural influences may shape beliefs about remarriage and life in stepfamilies. Future studies on remarriage could assess religious and cultural influences on beliefs about stepfamilies, finances, parenting.

Assessing possible mediating and/or moderating variables between remarriage beliefs and outcomes provides another venue for future research. For example, researchers have suggested that cognitions and communication contribute jointly to adjustment in first marriages (Gordon et al., 1999). Research has also shown that dysfunctional beliefs are related to behaviors such as ineffective problem solving in marital interaction, which has been associated with lower marital satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992).

The results of this study provide weak support for the consistency tenet of the MDCD model. However, this study focused on couples in the early stages of remarriage. It is possible that couples become more consistent in beliefs over time. Results may differ

with the assessment of consistency in beliefs in later stages of remarriage. Therefore, it is suggested that future research include an examination of the consistency tenet of the MDCD model using samples of couples who have been remarried for 3 years or longer. Another way to further understand the concept of consistency this field would be to perform longitudinal studies with remarried couples.

There are also other types of cognitions included in the MDCD model that were not assessed in this study. Future studies could evaluate the relationships of these cognitions with remarital outcomes. These cognitions include: perceptions, attributions, and expectancies.

Future research examining the consistency tenet of the MDCD model and individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs would be benefited by obtaining a broader sample, as this study was limited to residents of Utah. A broader sample would allow results to be generalized to the greater population. As remarried couples are becoming more prominent in our culture, it is important that theories and interventions be developed to meet their unique circumstances and situations. Therefore, it is important that research in this field be expanded.

### Conclusion

In an effort to provide support for the MDCD model, this study tested a central tenet of the model, which is of consistency of cognitions in stepfamilies. The results indicate that individual endorsements of remarriage beliefs are more predictive of remarital outcomes than is consistency of cognitions between spouses. However, there is

a need for further research testing the MDCD model as it is the only known framework that addresses the unique circumstances of remarriages and stepfamilies.

The findings of this study suggest that individual endorsement of remarriage beliefs are important in remarriages and should be addressed in order to improve remarital outcomes. Individual endorsement of some beliefs, such as the belief that ‘finances should be pooled,’ seemed to be functional for remarriages, as they were related with more positive outcomes. Others, such as the belief that *Success is slim*, were associated with negative outcomes, suggesting that they may be dysfunctional for remarriages. As the responses to questions about remarriage beliefs were found to be predictive of remarital outcomes, this study also provides external validation for the RMBI as a valuable measure with the potential to be used in future studies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

# Utah State UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD OFFICE  
9530 Old Main Hill, Suite 214a  
Logan, UT 84322-9530  
Telephone: (435) 797-1821  
FAX: (435) 797-3769

USU Assurance: FWA#00003308  
Protocol # 2299

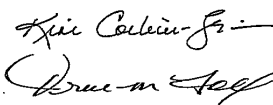
SPO #:  
AES #: UTA00

3/17/2009

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Brian Higginbotham  
Lyndy Agee

FROM: Kim Corbin-Lewis, IRB Chair  
True M. Fox, IRB Administrator



SUBJECT: Remarriage in Utah: An Evaluation of Factors Influencing Marital Quality

Your proposal has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board and is approved under exemption #4.

- 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. **Any change in the methods/objectives of the research affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.** Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the IRB Office (797-1821).

The research activities listed below are exempt 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, June 18, 1991.

4. Research, involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Appendix B

Two-item Satisfaction Index

<b>6. Regarding your current marriage...</b>	<b>Extremely Unhappy/ Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very Unhappy/ Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat Unhappy/ Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Somewhat Happy/ Satisfied</b>	<b>Very Happy/ Satisfied</b>	<b>Extremely Happy/ Satisfied</b>
41 How happy are you with your <i>marriage</i> ?	□	▣	◀	▶	▲	▼	◀◀
14 How satisfied are you with your <i>relationship</i> with your spouse?	□	▣	◀	▶	▲	▼	◀◀



## Appendix C

### Consensus Subscale from the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

<b>10. Do you and your spouse disagree or agree on:</b>		<b>Almost Always disagree</b>	<b>Frequently Disagree</b>	<b>Equally Agree/Disagree</b>	<b>Frequently Agree</b>	<b>Almost Always Agree</b>
a <sub>1</sub>	Religious matters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b <sub>1</sub>	Demonstrations of affection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c <sub>1</sub>	Making major decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d <sub>1</sub>	Sex relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e <sub>1</sub>	Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f <sub>1</sub>	Career decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g <sub>1</sub>	Parenting duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix D

### Cohesion Subscale from the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

<b>21. How often would you say the following events occur between you and your spouse:</b>		<b>Never</b>	<b>Less than once a month</b>	<b>Once or twice a month</b>	<b>Once or twice a week</b>	<b>Once a day</b>	<b>Many times a day</b>
a	You and your spouse engage in outside interests together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	◀	▶	▲	▼
b	Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	◀	▶	▲	▼
c	Work together on a project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	◀	▶	▲	▼
d	Calmly discuss something	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	◀	▶	▲	▼

Appendix E  
The Remarriage Belief Inventory

**15. Thinking about remarriages and stepfamilies *in general*, please indicate the extent to which you believe each of the following statements to be true.**

	1	2	3	4	5
	Definitely believe this is NOT true	Somewhat believe this is NOT true	Neither true nor false	Somewhat believe this is true	Definitely believe this is true
1	Emotional connection/feelings to an ex-spouse/partner should end with a new marriage.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
2	Financial resources in a remarriage should be combined.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
3	A stepfamily cannot offer children everything that a biological family can.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
4	A new spouse should be a better marriage partner than the one he/she replaces.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
5	Love should develop quickly between the child and the stepparent.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
6	People who have divorced are likely to divorce again.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
7	Fulfilling the desires of a new spouse should come before fulfilling the desires of biological children.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
8	Emotional ties to the previous marriages/relationships should be severed prior to a remarriage.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
9	In remarriages, incomes and paychecks should be “pooled” together.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
10	All things considered, a stepfamily is a poor substitute for a biological family.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
11	In comparison to ex-spouses, a new spouse should be more “in-tune” to the quality of the spousal relationship.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
12	Adjustment to living in a stepfamily should occur quickly.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
13	People in remarriages are likely to repeat the same patterns/behaviors as those in their previous marriage(s).			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
14	Wishes of the children should take priority over the wishes of the new spouse.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
15	In a remarriage, there should be a distinction between “mine” and “your” financial resources.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
16	A new spouse should be everything the problematic old spouse was not.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
17	Stepfamily members should feel close to one another soon after the stepfamily forms.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
18	When a person gets remarried, it is likely that their new spouse will have some of the same flaws they saw in their previous spouse/partner.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
19	Giving attention to the children is more important than giving attention to the new spouse in a remarriage.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
20	A new spouse should be more understanding than a previous spouse/partner.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
21	Stepparents should assume intimacy and authority with the children soon after the stepfamily forms.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	
22	People in remarriages are likely to make the same mistakes they made in previous marriages.			<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ◀ ▶ ▲	

## Appendix F

### Descriptive Statistics for Outcome and Predictor Variables

*Descriptive Statistics for Outcome and Predictor Variables*

Variables	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Outcome variables</i>						
h08_Consensus	442	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.17	.72
w08_Consensus	443	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.20	.73
h08_Satisfaction	443	12.00	2.00	14.00	12.47	1.95
w08_Satisfaction	446	12.00	2.00	14.00	12.18	2.37
h08_Cohesion	440	4.50	1.50	6.00	4.50	.85
w08_Cohesion	440	5.00	1.00	6.00	4.50	.91
<i>Predictor variables</i>						
h08_Adjustment	426	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.68	.78
w08_Adjustment	435	3.50	1.00	4.50	2.36	.79
h08_Finances	431	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.85	.97
w08_Finances	439	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.81	1.00
h08_Partner	429	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.15	.86
w08_Partner	438	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.21	.88
h08_Priority	427	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.48	.77
w08_Priority	433	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.59	.81
h08_Success	427	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.98	.80
w08_Success	438	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.89	.82
h08_Stepfamily	432	4.00	1.00	5.00	1.95	1.02
w08_Stepfamily	437	4.00	1.00	5.00	1.90	.99
h08_Past	433	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.56	1.25
w08_Past	438	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.50	1.24