

Reinvestigating Remarriage: Another Decade of Progress.

By: Marilyn Coleman, Lawrence Ganong and Mark Fine

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Abstract:

The article presents an overview of research and theory on remarriages and stepfamilies published in the 1990s. Remarriage is a term that encompasses several different types of relationships--both partners may be in a second marriage or a higher-order marriage. About 75 percent of divorced people remarry and serial remarriages are increasingly common. As people age, however, the divorce rates of first marriages and remarriages converge. The mean length of time between divorce and remarriage is less than four years. Men remarry at higher rates than do women and blacks and Hispanics remarry at lower rates than whites. A substantial proportion of U.S. births occurs in remarriages. Some first marriages create stepfamilies and stepparent-stepchild relationships. In 1992, 15 percent of all children in the U.S. lived with a mother and a stepfather. Although the presence of stepchildren is thought to lower marital quality for remarried adults, the effects are not always strong. A number of intrapersonal, interpersonal and societal-level explanations have been proposed for the greater instability of remarriages. Adolescent stepchildren also generally showed more externalizing behavioral problems than children living with both parents such as using drugs and alcohol, engaging in sexual intercourse, nonmarital childbearing and being arrested.

Keywords: parent-child relationships | parenting | family | stepfamilies | remarriage | marriage | divorce

Article:

The body of stepfamily research published this decade exceeded the entire output of the previous 90 years of the century. The complexity and quality of the scholarly work in this decade improved as well-better samples were obtained, methods were more sensitive to stepfamily complexity, longitudinal designs were more frequently employed, and other important methodological gains were made. Unfortunately, many unknowns regarding remarriages and stepfamilies remain. We present an overview of trends regarding topics, research methods, and

theories; we critique research methods that have not been productive; and we identify scholarly advances. Finally, new conceptual, methodological and theoretical directions for future scholarship on remarriages and stepfamilies are proposed.

Remarriages and stepfamilies have always represented a substantial proportion of marriages and families in the United States and other Western countries (Phillips, 1997). However, researchers paid little attention to stepfamilies until the 1970s, when divorce replaced bereavement as the leading precursor to remarriage (Cherlin, 1992). Postdivorce stepfamilies were hard to ignore because unlike postbereavement stepfamilies, remarriage no longer reconstituted the nuclear family, and stepparents often were added "parent figures" rather than substitutes for deceased parents. The complications and new interaction patterns of postdivorce stepfamilies created an explosion of scholarly interest in remarriage, stepparenting, and stepfamilies in the 1980s (Coleman & Ganong, 1990).

Although the 1980s were a productive period for research on remarriage and stepfamilies and although the quality of investigations improved throughout the decade (Coleman & Ganong, 1990), the scholarship left ample room for conceptual and methodological improvement. For example, inadequate attention was given to the structural complexity and diversity of stepfamilies, relationship problems were studied to the near exclusion of positive interactions, and households and stepfamilies were treated as if they were equivalent. The reactivity of measures and methods and the difficulty in obtaining representative samples of remarried families also were problems characteristic of 1980s research. Consequently, in the last decade review article, Coleman and Ganong made a number of recommendations for research on stepfamilies, calling for more complexity in designs and in how researchers thought about remarriages and stepfamilies.

One purpose of this review is to present and summarize research and theory on remarriages and stepfamilies published in the 1990s. This decade was a period of enormous productivity in the study of remarriages and stepfamilies. The body of published work was three times larger than the number of publications on stepfamilies before 1990. We examined more than 850 publications. Given the volume of studies, we decided to emphasize topics that received relatively greater attention by scholars: (a) demographic trends, (b) remarriage relationships, (c) the effects on children of living with a stepparent, (d) stepfamily processes, (e) societal views of stepfamilies, and (f) legal issues. Most (92%) of the decade's research fits into one of these categories. Many excellent reviews of research were written in this decade; interested readers should consult them (e.g., Amato, 1994; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1994b; Hetherington & Henderson, 1997; Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1997; Nielsen, 1999). A second purpose of this review is to identify conceptual and methodological trends in stepfamily research in the past decade. We critique research methods that have not been productive, and we identify scholarly advances. A third purpose of this review is to propose conceptual, methodological, and theoretical directions for future scholarship on remarriages and stepfamilies.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Remarriages

Approximately half of the marriages in the United States represent a remarriage for one or both partners (Bumpass, Sweet, & Castro Martin, 1990). Although remarriage rates are lower than in the United States, similar trends were reported in Canada (e.g., Wu, 1994) and Europe (e.g., Kiernan, 1992). Remarriage is a term that encompasses several different types of relationships--both partners may be in a second marriage or a higherorder remarriage (e.g., a third or fourth marriage) or the marriage may be a remarriage for only one of the partners. Historically, remarriages generally have been treated as a uniform group by researchers, although in this decade, researchers began to think about remarriages and stepfamilies in more complex ways (e.g., Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995). About 75% of divorced people remarry (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991), and serial remarriages are increasingly common (National Center for Health Statistics, 1993). Remarriages that end in divorce do so more quickly than first marriages. As people age, however, the divorce rates of first marriages and remarriages converge (Clarke & Wilson, 1994). Remarriages contracted by older adults (i.e., older than 40) may be more stable than first marriages (Wu & Penning, 1997).

Remarriages tend to take place rapidly after prior marriages end; the mean length of time between divorce and remarriage is less than 4 years (Wilson & Clarke, 1992). Thirty percent remarry within a year after the divorce, and the distribution of time between marriages is skewed, peaking for both men and women at 1 month after divorce and 13 months after bereavement. The interval to remarriage lengthens with age for both men and women (Wilson & Clarke).

Men remarry at higher rates than do women (South, 1991), and Blacks and Hispanics remarry at lower rates than Whites (South). For divorced women, the probability of remarriage is lower when they are older (Buckle, Gallup, & Rodd, 1996), have more education, and are employed (Montalto & Gerner, 1998). For men, education increases the likelihood of remarriage (Montalto & Gerner). Divorced men who marry divorced women generally marry someone at least a few years younger than themselves, and it is likely that her children are younger than his (Wilson & Clarke, 1992). Children lower the likelihood of remarriage for both men and women, but the impact of children is greater on women's probability of remarriage (Buckle et al.). High occupational status delays remarriage among women separating at relatively younger ages and hastens it among women separating at relatively older ages. For older women, those least able to support themselves are also least likely to remarry. Thus, among older women, patterns of remarriage tend to increase the concentration of poverty among divorced women.

Fertility in Remarriage

A substantial proportion of all U.S. births occurs in remarriages. For both Blacks and Whites, about half of women in remarriages give birth to at least one child, most within 24 months of remarriage (Wineberg, 1990).

Cohabitation

Remarriage rates have been dropping in the United States except among older adults, but this does not mean that people are recoupling less often. Instead of remarrying after divorce, increasing numbers of divorced individuals are cohabiting, not as a precursor but as an alternative to remarriage (Bumpass et al., 1991, 1995). Moreover, most couples cohabit prior to legally forming a union (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994).

Older Adults and New Partners

The marital histories of older Americans are becoming increasingly complex (Cornman & Kingson, 1996). More divorced older adults, increased longevity, and better health throughout life are factors related to increases in remarriage among older adults (Holden & Kuo, 1996). An estimated half million people over the age of 65 in the United States remarry each year (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). Over 4% of older people do not remarry but cohabit with a new partner (Chevan, 1996).

The numbers of later-life cohabiting relationships, remarriages, and stepfamilies are likely to increase in the next few years as the baby boom generation begins reaching retirement age. About half of the marriages of this cohort will end in divorce, and about 75% of those who have divorced will remarry at least once (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Among this cohort will be unprecedented numbers of individuals who are stepparents (Comman & Kingson, 1996).

Stepfamilies

Not all remarriages include children from prior relationships, nor do all stepfamilies incorporate a remarriage. Approximately 25% of the 3.7 million cohabiting couples in the United States are households in which at least one adult brings children from prior relationships, thereby creating cohabiting stepfamily households (Bumpass et al., 1991). In fact, cohabiting couples are more likely (48% versus 37%) to enter a new union with children from previous relationships than are remarried couples (Wineberg & McCarthy, 1998). Some first marriages create stepfamilies and stepparentstepchild relationships (i.e., when never-married mothers marry a man who is not the child's father).

In 1992, 15% of all children in the United States lived with a mother and a stepfather (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). About one-third of U.S. children will live in a remarried or cohabiting stepfamily household before they reach adulthood (Bumpass et al., 1995; Seltzer, 1994). In fact, children in stepfamilies may have lived in several types of families before they reach adulthood, although fewer than 5% of all remarried couples incorporate three sets of

children (i.e., yours, mine, and ours). Complex marital and cohabiting histories over the life course result in complex family histories for children (O'Connor, Pickering, Dunn, Golding, & the ALSAC Study Team, 1999; Wojtkiewicz, 1994) and for adults. For example, about 40% of adult women will likely reside in a remarried or cohabiting stepfamily household as a parent or stepparent at some time (Bumpass et al.), and 40% of all families include stepgrandparents (Szinovacz, 1998).

The work of demographers in this decade yielded a more complex understanding of stepfamily structures. The importance of knowing about relationship histories in order to more fully comprehend stepfamily dynamics was underscored, and these more elaborated demographic views influenced how other researchers conceptualized stepfamily structure.

REMARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Remarriage research generally focused on marital dynamics, quality, and stability. Samples were often small, and many employed qualitative designs.

Marital Dynamics

Remarriage or cohabitation typically occurs within months after beginning the relationship (Montgomery, Anderson, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1992), and we know little about how decisions to cohabit are made or the effects that cohabiting has on the stepfamily system. A common courtship pattern is as follows: (a) male partner spends a few nights per week in the mother's household, followed by (b) a brief period of full-time living together, followed by (c) remarriage (Montgomery et al.).

Studies of the process of building satisfying remarriages were limited, and the effectiveness of strategies used was not determined. Evidence exists that decision making in remarriage is perceived to be equally shared (Crosbie-Bumett & Giles-Sims, 1991; Pyke), primarily because women seek more power in remarriages than in first marriages (Pyke & Coltrane, 1996). Reasons offered for why distribution of power in remarriage is more equitable included the following: (a) personal experiences in prior unions and as divorced single persons cause women to seek more power (Burgoyne & Morison, 1997; Pyke, 1994), (b) the greater resources women often bring to remarriage give them more bargaining power (Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims; Pyke & Coltrane), (c) previously married men and women think differently about marital roles (Burgoyne & Morison; IshiiKuntz & Coltrane, 1992), (d) women who are reluctant to remarry gain power (Pyke), and (e) men concede more during marital conflicts than they did in their first marriages (Hobart, 1991).

Women perceived that they have more power regarding financial decisions in their remarriages than in their prior marriages (Burgoyne & Morison, 1997; Pasley, Sandras, & Edmondson, 1994), but it is difficult to determine whether financial decision-making is equitable because finances in remarried families are complex (Burgoyne & Morison; Jacobson, 1993). For

example, remarried couples are more likely than first marriages to maintain some economic resources under the individual control of each partner, in part because of financial responsibilities for children from multiple unions, and in part because of individuals' desires to retain financial independence.

Shared decision making does not mean that household tasks are shared equitably, however. Household duties appear to be based on traditional gender roles, and most studies find that remarried women do most of the housework (Demo & Acock, 1993; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996), although remarried husbands do more housework than husbands in first marriages (Deal, Stanley-Hagan, & Anderson, 1992; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992).

Remarriage Quality

Findings are mixed regarding differences in marital quality between individuals in first marriages and in remarriages; some find no differences (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Deal et al., 1992), and others report lower relationship quality for remarried individuals (Brown & Booth, 1996). It has been suggested that different processes may be involved in determining the quality of remarriages and first marriages (Jacobson, 1993; Rogers, 1996b). For example, Kurdek (1991) found that marital satisfaction declined more rapidly over time in stepfather households than in first marriages.

Findings based on behavioral observations and self-reports were that remarried spouses more openly express criticisms, anger, and irritation than do spouses in first marriages (Bray & Kelly, 1998; Hetherington, 1993). Remarried participants also generally report higher levels of tension and disagreement than their counterparts in first marriages (Hobart, 1991). These disagreements generally center on issues related to stepchildren, such as discipline, rules for children, and the distribution of resources to children (Hobart; Pasley, Koch, & Ihinger-Tallman, 1993). Disputes between adults may also result from arguments between stepparents and stepchildren (Clingempeel, Colyar, & Hetherington, 1994). Although the presence of stepchildren is thought to lower marital quality for remarried adults (Brown & Booth, 1996), the effects are not always strong. In fact, Kurdek (1999) found that children born to first marriages lowered marital quality more than stepchildren lowered remarital quality. Nonetheless, marital quality is poorer when both adults have children from prior relationships than when only one adult is a stepparent, presumably because of added complexity and more opportunities for conflict (Hobart).

Remarriage Stability

Remarriages dissolve at higher rates than first marriages (Bumpass et al., 1990), especially for remarried couples with stepchildren (Booth & Edwards, 1992). A number of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal-level explanations have been proposed for the greater instability of remarriages. For example, compared with first marriages, remarriages include more people who have personality characteristics (e.g., impulsivity, neuroticism) that predispose them to end relationships more frequently and make them poorer marriage material (Booth & Edwards;

Capaldi & Patterson, 1991). Booth and Edwards concluded that remarriages are more fragile because (a) they lack social support and clear norms to follow, (b) a larger proportion of people who remarry than people in first marriages see divorce as a solution to marital problems, and (c) the smaller pool of partners for remarriages results in unions between people with dissimilar interests and values.

Some researchers pointed to greater conflict in remarriages as a reason for higher redivorce rates (Hobart, 1991), but others argued that it is not the amount of conflict that predicts redivorce but the manner in which remarried couples resolve their disagreements (Pasley et al., 1993). Conflict is not inherently negative; some women in the powersharing couples that Pyke (1994) interviewed reported more conflicts than those in husband-dominant remarriages because the women actively sought power. In such marriages, conflict may represent active problem solving, which may decrease the probability of redivorce.

Effects of Remarriage on Remarried Adults

A few researchers investigated health status, depression, happiness, and psychological distress of remarried adults. The findings were mixed: remarriage was associated with higher levels of depression (e.g., Neff & Schluter, 1993), but other researchers reported less distress for remarried than for divorced individuals (e.g., Shapiro, 1996) and that remarriage was not related to well-being (e.g., Richards, Hardy, & Wadsworth, 1997). Moreover, it is not clear whether men or women benefit more from remarriage (Marks, 1995; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1990). These mixed findings suggest that factors other than marital status explain adults' well-being. For example, differential selection into remarriage may potentially explain differences between remarried and divorced adults in that people with better mental and physical health are more likely to find new partners than are those with health problems (Booth & Amato, 1991; Murphy, Glaser, & Grundy, 1997).

EFFECTS OF STEPFAMILY LIVING ON CHILDREN

Over a third of the studies published--the most on any topic--dealt with the effects on children of living with a remarried or cohabiting stepparent. Many were national studies (e.g., National Study of Families and Households [NSFH]) or large representative samples (e.g., Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children in the U.K.) conducted in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Israel, and New Zealand.

Research on young and adolescent stepchildren focused primarily on academic achievement (e.g., grades, school completion, achievement test scores), psychological adjustment and well being, and behavior problems. Typically, stepchildren and children living with one parent were compared on the outcome measures with children living with both parents. Demographic characteristics of children and families were usually included, as were various mediating variables related to such constructs as family relationships and peer characteristics.

Stepchildren and children with single parents did not achieve as well on average as children living with both parents in grades earned in school (e.g., Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bogenscheider, 1997), grades completed (e.g., Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996), and scores on achievement tests (e.g., Dronkers, 1994; Pong, 1997). However, the largest differences were in dropout rates, school attendance, and whether the student graduated or received a GED (regression coefficients of $-.36$, $-.38$, and $-.33$, respectively, for the differences between children in stepfamilies and first-marriage families) (Astone & McLanahan). The finding pertaining to dropout rates may be related to the fact that stepchildren tend to leave home to establish independent households at younger ages than do children living with both parents (e.g., Aquilino, 1991b; Kieman, 1992). For example, stepdaughters were more likely to cohabit (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998) or to marry than were women from first-marriage families (Aquilino) or from other family forms (Thornton, 1991), which may be related to leaving home and school early.

Compared with children in first-marriage families, stepchildren on average showed more internalizing behavior problems, such as depression (e.g., Zill et al., 1993), and were more at risk for having emotional problems (e.g., Dawson, 1991; Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1996). Some studies found that boys have more problems than girls (e.g., Coley, 1998; Dunn et al., 1998); others found that girls had more problems than boys (Needle, Su, & Doherty, 1990) or that girls had more adjustment problems than boys only when living with stepfathers (e.g., Lee, Burkam, Zimiles, & Ladewski, 1994). Still others found more problems for girls living with stepmothers (e.g., Suh, Schutz, & Johanson, 1996).

Adolescent stepchildren also generally showed more externalizing behavioral problems than children living with both parents, such as using drugs and alcohol (e.g., Hoffman & Johnson, 1998; Needle et al., 1990), engaging in sexual intercourse (Day, 1992), nonmarital childbearing (e.g., Astone & Washington, 1994), and being arrested (Coughlin & Vuchinich, 1996). African American children may benefit from, or are at least not harmed by, the involvement of stepfathers (e.g., Salem, Zimmerman, & Notaro, 1998; Wojtkiewicz, 1993).

Although the findings ranged widely, most researchers reported that stepchildren were similar to children living with single mothers on the preponderance of outcome measures and that stepchildren generally were at greater risk for problems than were children living with both of their parents. However, most researchers also found that the differences between stepchildren and children in first-marriage families were small, with effect sizes from Amato's (1994) meta-analysis ranging from $-.07$ for academic achievement to $-.32$ for problems in either or both conduct or behavior and $-.37$ for psychological adjustment (according to Cohen's (1969) commonly used convention, effect sizes of $.20$, $.50$, and $.80$ are considered small, moderate, and large, respectively). Most stepchildren do well in school (e.g., Pong, 1997) and do not have emotional or behavioral problems (e.g., Dorius, Heaton, & Steffen, 1993; Lissau & Sorenson, 1994).

Long-Term Effects on Stepchildren

In addition to the plethora of studies focusing on children and adolescents, a substantial number ($n = 39$) of investigations examined the long-term effects of having a stepparent. The availability of several large, longitudinal data sets that extended data collection from birth or early childhood into adulthood or that followed adolescents into adulthood contributed to the number of studies on long-term effects.

Although the negative effects of having a stepparent were often reported to be long lasting (e.g., Biblarz, Raftery, & Bucur, 1997; Kiernan, 1992), parental remarriage during childhood was found not to be related to emotional problems during early (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995; Rodgers, Power, & Hope, 1997) and middle adulthood (Rodgers, 1994) in a British longitudinal study. Studies of local samples also reported no relation between parental remarriage and adjustment in early adulthood (e.g., Lissau & Sorenson, 1994). Long-term effects may be related to age at parental remarriage (Zill et al., 1993).

Theoretical Explanations for Stepparent Effects on Stepchildren

Although views vary widely in the scholarly community regarding the effects of stepfamily living (e.g., see Booth & Dunn, 1994), the prevailing perspective was that living with a stepparent was harmful to children and adolescents. Parental remarriage and cohabitation generally were viewed as family disruptions that negatively affected children, similarly to parental divorce or residing with a never-married mother (see Amato, 2000, for a discussion of the explanatory models used in divorce research). Although many explanations were proposed, based on systems theory (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss, 1999), role theory (Skopin, Newman, & McKenry, 1993; Whitsett & Land, 1992), gender theory (MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996), exchange theory (Marsiglio, 1992), Bronfenbrenner's social ecology model (Bogenscheider, 1997; Fine & Kurdek, 1992), and the life course perspective (Aquilino, 1994), among others, most explanations for stepparent effects on stepchildren could be categorized as variants of stress models, (step)parent involvement rationales, (step)parent style models, and selection.

Stress models. Many explanations centered on the idea that parental repartnering was stressful for children and adults (e.g., Henry & Lovelace, 1995). Parental remarriage and cohabitation involve many changes for adults and children, such as moving to a new residence, adapting to new household members, and learning new household routines and activities. These changes are thought to increase stress for children, which in turn leads to poorer performances in school and more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Menaghan, Kowaleski-Jones, & Mott, 1997).

A related stress model, the cumulative effects hypothesis, proposed that the more marital disruptions experienced by a parent, the more internalizing and externalizing problems children exhibit as a result of having to cope with these multiple transitions (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991).

Support for this hypothesis was found; children whose parents had several partners over time had more problems than children who lived with a parent who had repartnered only once (e.g., Capaldi & Patterson; Kurdek & Fine, 1993a).

Another stress model proposed that parental competencies are compromised when beginning stepfamily relationships (e.g., Hoffman & Johnson, 1998). Stepchildren's problems are thus attributed to the diminished or poor-quality parenting they receive from stressed parents who do not have the personal resources to monitor children's behavior, participate in school activities, or interact with their children at the same levels that they did prior to remarriage or cohabiting (Dawson, 1991). A variation of this explanation proposed that the stepparent, as an added adult, would reduce familial stress related to economic burdens and the monitoring of children (e.g., Bulcroft et al., 1998; Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991).

Conflicts between divorced parents and within stepparent households also were hypothesized as stress-related explanations for stepchildren generally fating worse on behavioral and psychological outcomes than children living with both parents (e.g., Downey, 1995; Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1996). Researchers attributed higher rates of early home leaving (e.g., Kiernan, 1992) and lower rates of coresidence of adult children in remarried families (e.g., Aquilino, 1991 a) to the stressful atmosphere in step-households. Stepchildren may withdraw as a way to keep peace in the family and to try to maintain their own well-being (Hanson et al.). Although not all researchers reported more conflict in stepfamilies than in nuclear families (Barber, 1994; Salem et al., 1998) and studies did not always find that intra- and interhousehold conflicts were related to stepchildren's outcomes (e.g., Hanson et al.), stepfamily conflict was a viable explanation for poorer children's outcomes in many investigations (Kurdek & Fine, 1993a).

The amount of conflict in stepfamilies may be related to the ages and sexes of the stepchildren. Adolescent stepchildren often reported more conflict with stepparents than did adolescents from first-marriage families (Barber & Lyons, 1994; Kurdek & Fine, 1993b). Adolescents may be more resistant to accepting authority from a stepparent than younger stepchildren. Sex also may be relevant in predicting how stepparents relate to stepchildren. For example, Vuchinich, Hetherington, Vuchinich, and Clingempeel (1991) found that adolescent girls had more difficulty than boys interacting with stepfathers and had more extended conflicts with and were more likely to withdraw from stepfathers and treat them like outsiders.

Another explanation for the greater risk of problems for stepchildren was the economic deprivation hypothesis, which postulated that stepchildren and children living with a single parent were at a disadvantage compared with children living with both parents because of economic hardships and the associated deficit conditions that accompany poverty, such as inadequate schools, dangerous neighborhoods, and adults working long hours (e.g., Pong). Evidence to support this hypothesis was mixed; when researchers controlled for differences in

household income or socioeconomic status, effects were sometimes attenuated (e.g., Pong, 1997) but not always (e.g., Hoffman & Johnson, 1998).

The final explanatory model related to stress was the incomplete institutionalization hypothesis. Over two decades ago, Cherlin (1978) proposed that the absence of societal norms for remarried families regarding role performances; the dearth of established, socially acceptable methods of resolving problems; and the lack of institutionalized social support contributed to greater stress for remarried families. In this view, stepchildren fare worse than children in first-marriage families because, lacking culturally institutionalized support, stepparents are unsure about how to relate to stepchildren, and remarried adults lack appropriate solutions to family problems. Critics have argued that Chedin's views overstate the degree to which remarried families lack institutional support (Jacobson, 1995), and some researchers have not found support for all of his contentions (e.g., Coleman, Ganong, & Cable, 1997). However, there is support for the claim that expectations for stepparents are less clear than expectations for parents (e.g., Bulcroft et al., 1998; Fine, Coleman, & Ganong, 1998). There needs to be more research on this popular hypothesis.

(Step)parent involvement models. Many researchers sought to explain stepchildren's behaviors as the result of reduced involvement in their lives by either parents or stepparents. For example, stepparent households were hypothesized to lack social capital, defined as time and energy engaged in positive interactions with children. That is, remarriage disrupts parents' abilities to competently raise their children because they are investing time and energy in new partners rather than in childrearing (e.g., Downey, 1995; Pong, 1997). Similarly, stepparents do not invest as much social capital in stepchildren because they are expending resources on the adult relationship or on their children from prior unions (e.g., Bogenscheider, 1997; Teachman et al., 1996). Consequently, children in stepparent households have more problems than other children do because they are thought to be receiving inadequate parenting and adult support. Researchers often employed the social capital model to investigate stepparent effects on stepchildren's academic achievement; generally, stepparents and remarried parents were reported to spend less time working with stepchildren on schoolwork and being involved with school-related activities than were parents in nuclear families (e.g., Leung, 1995; Pong). Also, support for the social capital model was found in studies of behavior problems (e.g., Kim, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999). However, cooperation between the parent and stepparent in raising children from prior relationships may be nearly as important as the level of stepparents' involvement with the stepchildren (Bronstein, Stoll, Clauson, Abrams, & Briones, 1994).

In general, stepparents interacted less with stepchildren than parents did. In addition to the social capital explanation, a number of other explanations for their lower involvement have been investigated. For instance, stepfathers may find it hard to break into tightly knit mother-child systems because of efforts by both mothers and children to keep them at a distance (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Social cognitive factors also may play a role--several studies showed that people generally expect stepparents to be less supportive and less close to stepchildren than

parents (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1995). Moreover, the stepparent role has low salience for the identities of many stepparents, so they may find more satisfaction in work, marriage, or raising their own children than they do in relating to their stepchildren (Thoits, 1992).

Evolutionary scholars postulated that stepparents invest little of themselves in their stepchildren because they are not genetically related to them (Daly & Wilson, 1996). This theory proposes that stepparents who also are parents discriminate in favor of their genetic children and that stepfathers interact with stepchildren to impress their new partners rather than to foster stepchildren's growth and well-being. The parental investment-parental discrimination proposition was supported in some studies (e.g., Flinn, 1999; Mekos, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1996) but not in all (e.g., Bulcroft et al., 1998; Menaghan et al., 1997). For example, stepfathers who lived with their children spent more time with stepchildren than did stepfathers who just had stepchildren (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996).

Not only was the evolutionary theory used to explain relative emotional distances and disengaged parenting practices for stepparents, it was also the theory receiving the most attention in research on child abuse, although several other theories also were proposed to explain child abuse in stepfamilies (Giles-Sims, 1997). The more than two dozen studies on child abuse in stepfamilies were evenly divided between investigations of physical and sexual abuse. Most researchers reported that children in households with nonnatal adults, particularly stepfathers, mothers' boyfriends, and other nonnatal males, were at much greater risk for sexual abuse (Margolin, 1992) and physical abuse (Daly & Wilson, 1996). However, others argued that stepchildren were not more likely to be abused by stepparents (Gelles & Harrop, 1991; Malkin & Lamb, 1994). Unfortunately, given how abuse data are recorded, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the perpetrator of child abuse is a stepparent or another adult. For example, mothers' boyfriends and legally remarried stepfathers are often categorized as one group. Children are more at risk for abuse if they live in a household with an adult who is not their genetic parent, but the extent to which stepchildren are at greater risk for being abused by a stepparent continues to be debated (Giles-Sims).

(Step)parental style. Some researchers examined differences between parenting styles of stepparents and parents that may have placed children at risk for problems (e.g., Fine & Kurdek, 1992; Salem et al., 1998). Most compared parenting styles in stepparent households with other types of households, but a few compared stepparents in various types of stepfamilies (e.g., Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1994). Unfortunately, most researchers developed their own measures of stepparenting styles, which makes comparisons across studies difficult.

Consistent with the research on stepparents' involvement with stepchildren, the parenting styles of stepparents were more disengaged than were those of parents. On average, stepfathers showed less affection toward stepchildren and engaged in less supervision of them (e.g., Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Kurdek & Fine, 1995). Similar findings were reported for stepmothers (Kurdek & Fine, 1993b).

However, not all investigators found differences in parenting style between stepparent households and first-married-parent households. For example, stepfather households containing adolescents did not differ from nuclear families in permissiveness and in democratic decision making (Barber & Lyons, 1994); in support and monitoring of adolescents (Salem et al., 1998); or in permissive, authoritarian, or authoritative parenting styles (Shucksmith, Hendry, & Glendinning, 1995). Also, no major differences were found in adolescent independence-giving (i.e., staying home alone, household rules, and weekend curfews) between nuclear, single-parent, and stepparent households (Bulcroft et al., 1998).

Researchers generally found that authoritative parenting (high warmth and high control) was positively related and that authoritarian parenting (low warmth and high control) was negatively related to adolescent well-being, suggesting that the same family processes that influence adolescent well-being in first-marriage families are also associated with well-being in stepfamilies (e.g., Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Fine & Kurdek, 1992). Stepparent support was a better predictor of stepchild adjustment than stepparents' monitoring behaviors (Crosbie-Burnett & GilesSims, 1994).

Although several studies identified sex differences in stepchildren's perceptions of stepparents' warmth and control, consistent patterns are difficult to discern (e.g., Kurdek & Fine, 1993a, 1993b). There are indications that stepmothers have a harder time raising stepchildren than stepfathers do (MacDonald & DeMafis, 1996). Additionally, Thomson, McLanahan, and Curtin (1992) found that parenting was less gendered in father-stepmother families than in mother-stepfather or first-marriage families, although the differences were considered to be "relatively small" (p. 376).

Selection. A few researchers examined the selection argument that differences between stepchildren and children living with both parents were due to factors that predated parental remarriage or cohabitation (see Amato, 2000). Because correlational data do not allow causal inferences, some researchers questioned whether differences between stepchildren and other children were due to pre-existing factors, such as parental psychopathology or poverty, that influenced both family transitions and child problems (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991). Findings regarding selection factors have been mixed, with some reporting that children's behavior problems predated parental remarriage (e.g., Capaldi & Patterson; Cherlin et al., 1991) and others finding that girls showed negative effects before parental separation but that boys showed more negative effects after separation (Doherty & Needle, 1991).

STEPFAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND PROCESSES

Nearly one fourth of the studies in this decade dealt with stepfamily relationships or dynamics. Stepfathers' and fathers' relationships with children were studied much more often than stepmothers' and mothers' relationships with children, as was true during the 1980s.

Relationships between siblings and stepsiblings and between children and grandparents or stepgrandparents were rarely studied.

Development of Stepparent-Stepchild Relationships

Few researchers considered the development of step-relationships, and findings were mixed among those who did. In three in-depth longitudinal studies of stepfathers, relationships with stepchildren generally became more negative over time (Bray & Kelly, 1998; Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). However, in another study, some relationships among stepparents and adolescent stepchildren became closer, some grew more distant, and some changed little over a 5-year period (Ganong & Coleman, 1994a). Research is needed to determine why some relationships become closer and others grow more hostile or distant.

Some evidence suggests that stepchildren reject stepparents who engage in discipline and control early in the relationship (Bray & Kelly; Ganong, Coleman, Fine, & Martin, 1999). In contrast, affection more often characterized stepparent-stepchild relationships when stepfathers initially engaged in supportive behaviors with stepchildren than when no such efforts were made (Bray & Kelly, 1998; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Moreover, stepparents who intentionally tried to get their stepchildren to like them and who continued their affinity-seeking and-maintaining efforts had warmer, closer bonds with their stepchildren than did those who gradually reduced affinity-seeking efforts (Ganong et al., 1999). The most effective relationship-building strategies for stepparents were dyadic activities chosen by the stepchild.

However, stepchildren are not passive observers in the developing stepparent-stepchild relationship (Hetherington, 1993). How they treat stepparents also affects the relationship. For example, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found that stepfathers withdrew from stepchildren who ignored their overtures early in the remarriage. We found that when stepchildren recognized that their stepparents were trying to do things with them that the stepchildren liked, they generally responded with their own affinity-seeking efforts (Ganong et al., 1999). Similarly, O'Connor, Hetherington, and Clingempeel (1997) found that the observed responses of adolescents to (step)parents was as strong a predictor of adolescent adjustment as was (step)parent-to-adolescent behavior. Nonetheless, even when positive stepparent-stepchild relationships are established when the child is a preadolescent, conflict may still arise when the child gets older (Hetherington, 1993). Additionally, adolescent stepchildren tend to see parents as more accepting of them than stepparents. Using vignettes as stimuli, Russell and Searcy (1997) found that adolescents responded to parents in a friendlier way than they did to stepparents in the same situations. This study suggests that adolescent stepchildren are primed to respond to stepparents in ways that create emotional distance and to attribute motives to stepparents that discourage warm feelings toward them.

Stepparents' Roles

Stepfamily members often do not agree on what role the stepparent should play (Fine et al., 1998). Beyond a general consensus that parents are expected to exhibit more warmth toward children and to more carefully monitor their behavior than are stepparents (Fine & Kurdek, 1994), there is little consistency in perceptions of the content of the stepparent role (Fine et al.). Stepparents are less certain about their role than are other family members. Some stepfathers deal with the issue of role confusion and stepparent identity by assuming a parent role (Berger, 1995; Erera-Weatherly, 1996), a role that contributes to their family life satisfaction (Marsiglio, 1992), although mothers and stepchildren may have different reactions. Stepmothers are much less likely to assume a parental role (Church, 1999). Instead, most stepmothers, and many stepfathers, especially nonresidential ones, see themselves as a friend to their stepchildren (Church) or in some role between a friend and a parent (Erera-Weatherly). A number of studies showed that role clarity and role agreement are related to adjustment in stepfamilies (e.g., Fine, Ganong, & Coleman, 1997; Fine et al.). For example, stepfathers' and adolescents' perceptions of stepfather-stepchild relationship quality were predicted best by the degree to which stepfathers and mothers agreed on how adolescents should be raised (Skopin et al., 1993).

Mothers and Children

Generally, mother-child relationships in stepfamilies received little attention from researchers. In a longitudinal study, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found that mother-preadolescent child relationships deteriorated after remarriage but that after 2 years, they were similar to mother-child relationships in first-marriage families. In fact, children in all family types showed increasingly negative behavior as they entered adolescence, but they eventually behaved more positively toward their mothers as they were granted greater autonomy.

Fathers and Children

Most studies of fathers in stepfamilies were of nonresidential fathers. Results were mixed regarding whether remarriage affects nonresidential parental involvement. For example, the remarriage of either parent was not related to the frequency of contacts with nonresidential parents (Stephen, Freedman, & Hess, 1993) or the amount of time children spent in nonresidential fathers' households (Stephen et al.). Other researchers, however, found that contact diminished after either parent began residing with a new partner (McKenry, McKelvey, Leigh, & Wark, 1996).

Older Parents and Adult Children

In examinations of coresidence, emotional closeness, and intergenerational exchanges of resources and support, researchers found that adult children were less likely to live in a remarried parent's home than with a parent in a first marriage (Aquilino, 1991a). Adult children who grew up with a remarried father also were less likely to take older parents into their homes than were adults from first-marriage families, although adults with remarried mothers were as likely as adults from first-marriage families to share their residences (Szinovacz, 1998). Findings have

been mixed on whether adult stepchildren help their stepparents and parents as much as adult children in nuclear families--some researchers found no differences (Aquilino, 1994; Spitze & Logan, 1992), and some found that stepchildren provide less support to parents (White, 1992) and stepparents (Amato, Rezac, & Booth, 1995). However, when help given to or received from the households of both parents was combined for adult children of divorced and remarried parents, there were no significant family structure differences in exchanges between parents and adult children (Amato et al., 1995).

Remarried parents (White, 1992) and stepparents (Spitze & Logan, 1992) in general provided less support to adult (step)children than did parents in first marriages, but remarried mothers gave some types of support as much as first-married mothers did (Marks, 1995; Spitze & Logan). Differences between remarried adults and those in first marriages in attitudes about their financial obligations to assist children (Marks), normative beliefs about intergenerational responsibilities after remarriage (Ganong & Coleman, 1999), and differences in family solidarity were offered to explain these findings (White).

Stepfamily Processes

There has been relatively little work examining family-level processes beyond parenting styles in stepfamilies. However, some investigators assessed the extent to which stepfamily processes are similar to those of first-marriage families.

Several investigators reported similar processes among stepfamilies and first-marriage families (Bogenscheider, 1997; O'Connor, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1998; Waldren, Bell, Peek, & Sorell, 1990). In fact, a substantial proportion of stable, longterm stepfamilies appear to function similarly to nuclear families (O'Connor et al.; Vuchinich et al., 1991). For example, stepfathers' involvement in supporting and monitoring stepchildren is related to better outcomes and more satisfaction with family life for stepchildren (Henry & Lovelace, 1995), a finding that suggests that the more a stepfather acts like a parent, the better it is for children. It may be that stepfamilies come to function more similarly to first-marriage families over time. For example, over a 2-year period, Vuchinich, Vuchinich, and Wood (1993) found that mother-stepfather-preadolescent stepson triads became similar to first-marriage family triads in problem-solving effectiveness. In both types of families, parental agreement facilitated problem solving, but parental coalitions did not. Marital conflict also was not related to problem-solving effectiveness in either type of family.

A few researchers reported differences in perceived family functioning between stepfamilies and first-marriage families, with remarried individuals viewing their families as more stressful and as less cohesive and adaptable and reporting less positive affect toward children than individuals in first marriages (e.g., Waldren et al., 1990). Moreover, remarried couples used different coping styles and were more likely to seek counseling than those in first marriages, and parents generally were perceived to be closer to children than were stepparents (Brown, Green, &

Druckman, 1990; Waldren et al., 1990). Additionally, O'Connor et al. (1997) found that the patterns of relations among newly formed stepfamilies were less "coherent" than the pattern of relationships in first-marriage families. For example, mothers' marital positivity and positivity toward their adolescent children were closely related in first-marriage families but were unrelated in stepfamilies. Similarly, Fine and Kurdek (1995) found that the association between stepparents' marital quality and the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship was stronger than the relation between parents' marital quality and parent-child relationship quality, suggesting that the boundary between marital and stepparent-stepchild dyads is more permeable than the boundary between marital and parent-child dyads. These findings suggest that perhaps unlike the case in first-marriage families, boundaries among subsystems in stepfamilies may be differentially permeable for different stepfamily members. In contrast, Rogers (1996a) found that marriage was less influential on mothers' parenting and children's outcomes in remarried families than in first-marriage families. Clearly, more research is needed on how stepfamily processes differ from those of first-marriage families.

Some researchers examined variations within stepfamilies. For example, legally remarried stepfather families did not differ from first-marriage families in cognitive stimulation for children, maternal warmth and responsiveness, and active structuring of the child's environment (e.g., monitoring behaviors, parental involvement in school activities), but cohabiting stepfather households differed from first-marriage families in these areas (Menaghan et al., 1997). Relationship problems of mothers and their partners were related to children's behavior problems, particularly when the partner and mother were not married.

In a comparison of family dynamics among stepfamilies and between different family structures, Banker and Gaertner (1998) found that college students who were members of first-marriage families or stepfamilies did not differ in perceived family harmony or in perceptions of being treated equally to other children in the family by adults, although stepchildren rated their families as less cooperative. The degree to which stepchildren perceived their stepfamily as one inclusive group was related to stepfamily harmony. Factors that facilitated perceiving stepfamilies as one unit instead of two included perceived cooperation, fair treatment of children by adults, and positive relationships among stepkin.

Differences in processes generally were found between clinical and nonclinical samples of stepfamilies. For example, compared with nonclinical stepfamilies, clinical stepfamilies were characterized by less involvement between stepfathers and their stepchildren, stronger tendencies toward relationship coalitions, more conflict, less emotional expressiveness, poorer problem solving, less spousal individuation, lower marital quality, and more negative and less positive parent-child interactions (Bray & Kelly, 1998). These characteristics were related to more behavior problems and less prosocial behavior for stepchildren. In another study, stepfamilies in therapy did not differ from other stepfamilies in the amount of stepparents' authority-related or nurturing behaviors and couples' ability to communicate and resolve conflicts. However, they differed in that stepchildren in nonclinical stepfamilies reciprocated appropriately rather than not

reciprocating to stepparents' behaviors, as in clinical stepfamilies (Brown et al., 1990). Also, clinical stepfamilies reported more conflict and less expressiveness, and adults were less satisfied with stepparents' role performances than in nonclinical stepfamilies.

Stepfamilies develop as family units in several different ways (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999). They also configure themselves in disparate ways--as reconstituted nuclear families, as integrated but distinct cultures, as binuclear systems, and as separate units (Berger, 1995; EreraWeatherly, 1996).

SOCIETAL VIEWS OF REMARRIAGE AND STEPFAMILIES

During the past decade, a body of work has emerged on societal views about stepfamilies. The prevailing perspective on stepfamilies, shared cross-culturally, is that they are deviant and harmful environments for children and adolescents (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1997; Levin, 1993). Stepfamilies are stigmatized through labels (Ganong, Coleman, & Kennedy, 1990), stereotypes (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1995) and cultural myths (Coleman & Ganong, 1995; Dainton, 1993). Also, the behaviors and attitudes of helping professionals are affected by negative stereotypes about stepparents (Ganong & Coleman, 1997).

When stepfamilies are not stigmatized, they are often invisible to social systems--the policies and practices of schools (Crosbie-Burnett, 1994) and youth organizations (Ganong, 1993) create barriers to participation by stepfamily members because they are based on models of first-marriage families. There is less consensus on the responsibilities that stepkin have to each other than there is about family obligations between genetic kin (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1999), indicating fewer norms about step-relationships. Given these findings, it is not surprising that outsiders have more favorable impressions of stepfamilies who present themselves to others as first-marriage families (Ganong et al., 1990), which could reduce stress for stepfamily members (Dainton, 1993). It has been hypothesized that stepfamilies are adversely affected by being viewed as inherently less functional than nuclear families (Ganong & Coleman, 1997), but there have been few investigations of the effects of negative societal views on stepfamilies and stepfamily members.

Legal Issues

Both social scientists and attorneys wrote prodigiously about the absence of legal relationships between stepparents and stepchildren (e.g., Fine & Fine, 1992; Mason & Mauldon, 1996). Because the legal system in the United States has not codified stepfamily members' rights and responsibilities to each other, various solutions have been proposed, such as allowing a stepparent or a nonmarital partner who has lived with a child and the custodial parent for at least 3 years to obtain a residence order that gives him or her almost the same authority as the parent (Fine, 1997; Mason, 1998). The granting of a residence order to a stepparent does not remove parents' rights or responsibilities; rather, it means that children have legal relations with three

adults. Whether such a law would work is unclear; changes in laws related to marital dissolution and reconstitution are seldom informed by research on the effects of such changes.

An Overview of Conceptual and Methodological Trends

There has been an exponential increase over the course of the 20th century in stepfamily research. The empirical knowledge base is broader, researchers from more disciplines and more countries are making contributions, investigations are more theoretically grounded and methodologically sophisticated, and more is known about stepfamilies apart from how they compare to other types of families.

In several large research projects, remarriages and stepfamilies are either the primary or among the main foci (e.g., the NEAD project, Kurdek's longitudinal project on marriages and remarriages, the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage, Hetherington and Clingempeel's longitudinal study of stepfather households, Booth's longitudinal study of marriages, the ALSPAC study). Other longitudinal projects (e.g., the Oregon Social Learning Center study of at-risk youths) and national panel studies (e.g., NSFH) have allowed researchers to look at changes in stepfamilies and in stepfamily members over time. Both the large-scale national and regional data sets and the small-scale, intensive studies of whole households or families have enabled researchers to examine more variables and to use more sophisticated analytic strategies. In many of these studies, data have been gathered from multiple family members. There were a few more observational studies (e.g., Vuchinich et al., 1991) this decade, multiple methods of data collection were used more frequently than before, and there were more qualitative studies (e.g., Erera-Weatherly, 1996; Pyke, 1994) using a variety of approaches (e.g., ethnography, dialectics, grounded theory). The research on stepfamilies also was characterized by more frequent use of grand and midrange theories to explain phenomena and to test theoretical propositions (e.g., Banker & Gaertner, 1998; O'Connor et al., 1997). These developments in research and theory were facilitated by the increased number of researchers interested in remarriage and stepfamilies and by the maturing of several programs of research.

In contrast to earlier decades, more researchers attempted to reflect the complexity of stepfamilies in their work. Sex of the stepparent and stepchild, whether the household configuration is simple (one stepparent) or complex (both adults are stepparents), years residing together, socioeconomic status, and race were often included as control variables. Also, a few researchers distinguished between remarried stepparents and cohabiting, de facto stepparents (e.g., Bulcroft et al., 1998; Menaghan et al., 1997). However, despite the heightened sensitivity to the structural diversity of stepfamilies, researchers continued to be challenged to adequately describe the complicated dynamics and complex configurations of remarriages and stepfamilies. For instance, only a few researchers took note of the multiple pathways to creating stepfamilies, and samples did not always adequately reflect the diversity of step-relationships, either because some types of stepfamilies were excluded or because potentially important distinctions between types of stepfamilies were ignored. In addition, the interactions of stepfamily household

members with nonresidential parents or former spouses and other nonresidential family members were usually ignored. Treating stepfamily households as if they were unaffected by family members not sharing a residence full time leads to distorted conclusions about stepfamily dynamics. Moreover, factors related to the larger social environments in which families reside were not included. This was true for small-scale, local samples and for many large-scale secondary data sets.

Some of the reasons why researchers disregarded stepfamily complexity are pragmatic. It is prohibitively expensive to recruit as many stepfamilies as are needed to examine or control for all relevant structural variables. Certain types of stepfamilies are hard to identify (i.e., members of father-stepmother households may share a last name; some stepfamilies are reluctant to identify themselves to researchers), so they end up being underinvestigated. Consequently, stepfather households were often the only stepfamilies studied.

The extraordinary emphasis (i.e., more than 200 studies) placed on the effects on children of living with a stepparent is probably only partially due to the importance of the issue. These studies were possible because of the availability of large data sets and the ease with which family structure and a variety of outcomes can be measured. Since at least the middle of the decade, it has been safe to conclude that stepchildren are at somewhat greater risk for educational difficulties and internalizing and for externalizing behavior problems than children living with two parents, although the vast majority of stepchildren do not exhibit these problems. Nonetheless, researchers continue to spend enormous efforts studying a similar set of child outcomes using between-group designs that compare stepchildren to children in other family structures. A typical approach is to examine the distribution of selected outcome variables by family structure, control for various demographic characteristics, and sometimes family process variables and then to see whether the relations between family structure and the outcome variables persist. Although a useful way to determine group differences, this design enlightens our understanding of family processes only incrementally. If data sets contain variables that fit with investigators' explanatory models, it can potentially be determined why one group of children differs from another based on certain predictor variables, but too often researchers are left trying to infer causal relations from correlational data. Even longitudinal data sets, which can help researchers make inferences about causality, may fall short because measures do not adequately assess constructs in researchers' explanatory models.

The emphasis of too many studies has been on identifying problems within stepfamilies; researchers focused heavily on only part of the findings (e.g., stepchildren were more likely than those living with both parents to be depressed), while barely mentioning the rest (e.g., three fourths of stepchildren were not clinically depressed). When small, but statistically significant, effects are treated by many researchers as if they were large and generalizable to all stepfamily members (Amato, 1994) or when extremist positions are taken (Cherlin, 1999), scholarship is not well served. We want to note that many researchers were careful in their reporting and interpreting of complicated findings, but to paraphrase Kuller's (1999) critique of circular

epidemiology, family journals are filled with well-conducted studies that primarily repeat known findings or are variations on a theme. It is time for research on stepchildren to move on in ways we suggest in the final section of this paper.

The use of the deficit comparison approach (Coleman & Ganong, 1990) continued into this decade. Additionally, cultural values that depict the first-marriage family as the best or only acceptable family structure in which to raise children no doubt influenced social scientists (Clingempeel, Flescher, & Brand, 1987). Epistemic values that shape stepfamily research are as heavily influenced by cultural and personal beliefs as they are by the guidelines and rules for sound social science. For example, a between-group bias and deficit comparison approach taken by many researchers has been popular in part because it is congruent with a socially approved way of thinking about nonnuclear families as deficient and harmful to children. The functionalist framework is not dead; it just has gone underground. There are many examples--Popenoe (1994) recommends that the United States should discourage remarriage because stepchildren are at risk, researchers compare stepfamilies to "intact" families, and sociobiologists devote an issue of a major journal (Flinn, 1999) on studies of why stepfathers invest less in their stepchildren than parents invest in children (adoptive fathers apparently escape such scrutiny, despite lacking genetic connections to children).

Many areas of research suggested in the previous decade review remain relatively unexplored. For example, too few studies focused on stepfamily processes, we continue to be limited in our understanding of variables that contribute to positive stepfamily functioning, and we know little about factors that facilitate the formation of positive stepparent-stepchild bonds, stepsibling bonds, or remarried couple relationships. Knowledge of African American, Latino, and other ethnic stepfamilies remains woefully inadequate as well. Perhaps even more surprising is the small number of studies investigating mothers in stepfamilies. We know more about nonresidential fathers than we do about residential mothers in stepfamily households.

On a more encouraging note is the increased attention to the legal aspects of stepfamily living, although many questions about this have yet to be examined. Also encouraging is the increase in information being derived from well-designed longitudinal studies, the interest shown by researchers from communication (e.g., Baxter et al., 1999), and the application of theories and methods not previously associated with stepfamily research (e.g., Bogenscheider, 1997; O'Connor et al., 1997; Pyke, 1994).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH IN THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

In this final section, we offer suggestions to build upon the advances made in the past decade. First, the clinical, empirical, and conceptual literatures on remarriage and stepfamilies have all suggested that change over time is both critical and constant in the life course of stepfamilies. Thus, we believe that longitudinal work is needed that assesses how stepfamily members'

experiences, perceptions, interactions, and adjustment change over time, both long term (years) and shortterm (i.e., daily, weekly).

Second, we suggest that new insights on stepfamily dynamics will be gained by focusing more attention on nontraditional stepfamilies, particularly cohabiting couples and gay or lesbian couples with children. Because remarriage is the traditional gateway into a stepfamily, cohabiting couples with children generally have been overlooked in studies on stepfamilies. However, cohabiting couples with children are likely to have both similarities to (e.g., the presence of a nongenetically related adult) and differences from (e.g., marriage has legal rights and responsibilities that cohabiting arrangements do not) married couples. By investigating similarities and differences, we can add greatly to our understanding of stepfamily dynamics.

Third, although progress was made in this domain, there remains a need for within-group designs. We continue to need more studies of factors that contribute to healthy and adaptive functioning in stepfamilies. To design more effective interventions and educational programs, we need greater insights into the characteristics of well-functioning stepfamilies. Therefore, we encourage researchers to use a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and to more frequently study a variety of processes in stepfamilies (e.g., parenting practices, marital conflict) and how they relate to the adjustment of individuals.

Fourth, research would be enhanced by studying bidirectional effects (i.e., how stepchildren are affected by their parents and stepparents and how parents and stepparents are affected by stepchildren) (e.g., see Hetherington et al., 1999). Researchers generally have narrowly conceptualized stepchildren as passive recipients of effects from parents and stepparents, but there is evidence that stepchildren's responses to stepparents may be critical in developing stepfamily relationships.

Fifth, because families are too often conceptualized as households, we call for more studies that include nonresidential parents and other nonresidential family members. Researchers cannot continue to assume that where a child lives is static rather than changing; there is ample evidence that many children who do not share a household with both parents nonetheless live at various times with both parents.

Sixth, we recommend more studies of how stepfamilies interface with other societal institutions. Stepfamily members are clearly affected by social policies and by cultural attitudes, and they affect change in social policies and cultural attitudes as well. Stepfamily members adopt roles from cultural norms, and they also create their own roles that influence cultural attitudes and, eventually, social policy.

Seventh, we strongly support theory-based research. Research increasingly has been grounded in conceptual frameworks, but there is room for improvement. Advances in knowledge will occur more rapidly if researchers both use and explicitly identify the theoretical considerations underlying their work. Theoretical grounding yields numerous benefits, including clearer

definitions of key constructs, the potential for greater consensus in which measures might be used to assess particular constructs, and greater acknowledgment of how different methods can yield complimentary contributions to our understanding.

Finally, we encourage more qualitative work that examines the experiences, perceptions, and reflections of stepfamily members. Quantitative studies have yielded tremendous benefits, but we also need research that explores the mechanisms underlying some of the trends, patterns, and relations found in quantitative work. We need studies of the meanings of experiences for people. We could gain considerable insight from such qualitative approaches as in-depth interviewing and grounded theory approaches to data analysis. In addition, the triangulation of methods (qualitative and quantitative) can be used to better capture stepfamily processes. Future work should combine biological, psychological, interpersonal, and cultural influences on individuals and families. The increase in the volume of studies in the past decade has been phenomenal, the increase in quality has been steady, and yet there is much to know to enhance our understanding of stepfamilies.

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