

FAMILY ADAPTABILITY AND COHESION IN REMARRIED FAMILIES

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(ABSTRACT)

Adaptability and cohesion were studied in a sample of thirty-nine remarried families, using the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III). The purpose of the study was to add to the growing body of empirical research dealing with the remarried family as a unique family form. Comparisons were made between family members and between the remarried and norm group families.

The results both support and fail to support existing literature. Age of children was a factor in levels of both family adaptability and cohesion with levels being lowest during adolescent years. When pre-adolescent children were involved, remarried family adaptability was higher than in the intact norm families. This was not true when adolescents were present. Also, stepparents with no natural children scored higher in adaptability than parents with natural born children.

Remarried family satisfaction was positively correlated with adaptability but negatively correlated with cohesion. Also, family adaptability varied according to the complexity of the family.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		
I.	INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	1
	Purpose	4
	Definition of Terms	5
	Theoretical Framework	7
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	10
	Stepfamilies and Adaptability	16
	Rules	17
	Roles	19
	Power	23
	Summary of Stepfamilies and Adaptability	25
	Stepfamilies and Cohesion	26
	Boundaries	29
	Coalitions	34
III.	RATIONAL AND HYPOTHESES	38
IV.	PROCEDURE	43
	Instrument	45
	Analysis of Data	46
V.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	48
	Demographic Data	48
	FACES III Norms	57
	Test of Hypotheses	63
	Discussion	75
	Theoretical Implications	81
	Methodological Implications	83
VI.	SUMMARY	86
	REFERENCES	89
	APPENDICES	98
	Appendix A Cover Letter	98
	Appendix B Consent Forms	100
	Appendix C REM Family Questionnaires	103
	Appendix D Demographic Questionnaires	106
	Appendix E Follow-up Letter	111
	VITA	113

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
1. Remarried Couples Demographic Data	50
2. Remarried Family Demographic Data	52
3. Demographic Summary of Children in Remarried Families	54
4. Remarried Family Demographic Data	56
5. Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III Cohesion Scores for Families and Norm Group With Adolescents	59
6. Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III Cohesion Scores for Families and Norm Group Without Adolescents	60
7. Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III Adaptability Scores for Families and Norm Group With Adolescents	61
8. Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III Adaptability Scores for Families and Norm Group Without Adolescents	62
9. Means and Standard Deviations of Family Adaptability Scores According to the Presence or Absence of Adolescents in the Home	64
10. Means and Standard Deviations of Family Cohesion Scores According to the Presence or Absence of Adolescents in the Home	66
11. Means and Standard Deviations of Individual and Family Cohesion Scores	67
12. Means and Standard Deviations of Individual and Family Adaptability Scores	68
13. Means and Standard Deviations of Individual and Family Satisfaction Scores	69
14. Cohesion and Adaptability Means of Remarried Families by Age of Pre-Adolescents at Time of Remarriage	71

Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Remarriage (REM) following death of a spouse or a divorce has become an increasingly common phenomenon in the United States. In 1981, nearly one-half of all marriages included at least one spouse who had been previously married (White & Booth, 1985). In 1980, 1 out of every 5 households were REM households involving approximately 15 million children under the age of 18 (Kent, 1980).

During the past 15 years there have been an increasing number of studies focusing on the REM family. Until recent years most of the literature has compared the REM family in therapy to the normative standards of the intact, nuclear family with little or no recognition of the unique nature and needs of the REM family (Esses & Campbell, 1984). This early work was often the result of non-empirical studies and/or case studies from clinical practices. The amount of empirical research focusing on the REM family, relationships, coping behaviors, and strengths has been very limited (Anderson & White, 1986; Clingempeel, 1981; Esses & Campbell, 1984). According to Espinoza and Newman (1979) empirical studies of REM families prior to 1979 contained a total number of subjects of only 550 families with the majority of this research focusing on the dysfunctional

family. Shortcomings of previous studies of REM families include: small sample size, lack of heterogeneous population samples, limitation of appropriate research instruments, lack of longitudinal studies, the tendency by researchers to view the stepfamily as a deviant family form, and the large number of variables inherent in a REM family which should be controlled for (Esses & Campbell, 1984).

A number of authors in recent years have conceptualized the REM family as a distinct family form with fundamental structural differences that differentiate it from intact families (Crohn, Sager, Brown, Rodstein & Walker, 1982; Keshet, 1980; Sager, Walker, Brown, Crohn & Rodstein, 1981; Visher & Visher, 1979). Sager et al. emphasize the need to apply a unique theoretical framework when researching the roles, rules, boundaries, and other deminisions of the REM. McGoldrick and Carter (1980) addressed the developmental process of the REM family involving their roles, boundaries, and tasks, while contrasting it with the intact family.

During the past 7 years there has been an increase in the number of studies which have focused on the REM as a unique family structure rather than as a deviant form of the intact family (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980; Crosbie, 1984; Furstenburg & Spanier, 1984; Knaub, Hanna, & Stinnett, 1984; Visher & Visher, 1985). In addition, there has been an increasing body of smaller research projects which have contributed to the increased knowledge of the REM family.

Among those areas of concentration have been studies dealing with the children of the REM (Brand & Clingempeel, 1987; Kennedy, 1983; Moore, 1987; Speigel, 1986); custody and nuclear/extended family integration (Zimmerman, 1984); former spouse relationships (Roberts, 1984); communications (Gruneich, 1986); marital couples satisfaction (Major, 1984); cohesiveness (Smith, 1985); and, adaptability with simple REM families (Steck, 1986).

Cohesion and adaptability have been identified as two of the dimensions that are primary in the researching of family behavior. The third dimension is communication which facilitates movement on the other two previously mentioned dimensions (Olson et al., 1980).

The need to maintain a high degree of flexibility and adaptability in roles, rules, and positions of authority in the REM family has been addressed by most researchers of REM families (Crohn, et al., 1982). However, little empirical research has specifically addressed the area of adaptability in the REM family and how it is different, if at all, from adaptability in intact families.

Olson et al. (1980, 1983) conceptualize adaptability as "the ability of a marital or family system to change it's power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress" (p. 131). Most research on the dimension of adaptability has been with intact families and has concentrated, not on

adaptability, but rather on a variety of variables which are measurable indicators of adaptability. Such variables have included; power (Bahr & Rollins, 1971; Sprenkle & Olson, 1978); role change (Kierman & Tallman, 1972); and, flexibility (Angell, 1936; Jackson & Weakland, 1961).

Although most studies on adaptability have involved intact families, much of the material on REM families has recognized that the REM family faces a great deal of stress and role strain and therefore have the need for a high degree of flexibility or adaptability. Cherlin (1978) attributed the instability in REM families to the absence of institutionalized patterns of behavior or accepted role definitions which results in role strain within the REM family. Clingempeel (1981) maintains that stepparent/step-child difficulties may place multiple role ambiguities and role strain on the family with resulting husband-wife difficulties.

Purpose

The purpose of the present research was to examine family adaptability and cohesion in non-clinical REM families. The research design included comparisons of adaptability and cohesion in REM families with norms developed using intact families, as well as the effects of other demographic variables on the REM family. REM adaptability and cohesion were investigated as a function of the following variables: family composition; number of years in

the REM; presence of adolescents in the family; age of the children at the time of the remarriage; and family satisfaction.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will apply to this study:

- (1) Cohesion - For this study, the definition of cohesion is taken from Olson et al.'s FACES III instrument and is defined as "the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another" (p. 4). This dimension will be measured by the FACES III.
- (2) Adaptability - Also taken from the FACES III instrument, adaptability is defined as "the ability of a marital or family system to change its power structure, role relationship, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress" (p.4). This will also be measured by the FACES III.
- (3) Remarried family (REM) - A family in which at least one of the couple has been previously married. For this study, the present marriage must be of at least three years duration. At least one child from a previous partner must reside in the family. The minimum duration of marriage reflects a general consensus of the literature that it takes at least two to three years for a REM to stabilize (Anderson & White, 1986; Dahl, et al., 1987).

- (4) A Set of Children - As defined by Smith (1985). One or more children from the current or a previous marriage of one of the couple. The mother's children from a previous marriage constitutes a single set as does a father's children from a previous marriage. The children of the present marriage constitute a separate set. A set split by primary residences constitute separate sets.
- (5) Children Residing in the Home - Children residing in the home at least 6 months of the year (Smith, 1985).
- (6) Visiting Child - A child who visits in the home for at least 1 overnight weekly or who resides in the home for extended vacations not exceeding a total of 6 continuous months per year.
- (7) Adolescent - A child between (and including) the ages of 12 and 18 at the time of testing. This age group coincides with the normative sample of the FACES III.
- (8) Simple REM Family - A family in which only one set of children reside (Smith, 1985).
- (9) Complex REM Family - A family in which at least two sets of children reside (Smith, 1985).
- (10) Simple/Complex REM Family - A family in which at least one set of children reside in the REM home and one or more sets visit (Smith, 1985).

- (11) Intact Family - A couple in their first marriage with children adopted or born of that relationship.

Theoretical Framework

The two primary theoretical frameworks from which the Circumplex model was developed are general systems theory and family developmental theory. General systems theory assumes there is a predictable relationship between family members and that needs of the system dictate the actions of the individual (Vincent, 1981). The developmental theory recognizes that the family progresses through somewhat predictable stages of development. When a REM family is formed, members will probably be at different developmental stages. When children are present from the beginning of the couple relationship, the couple is not able to experience the early stages of childlessness available to first marrieds during which time the marital system is grounded and the foundation for family is established. This can impede the otherwise normal developmental process of the family system. Another complication that occurs in REM families is the establishment of a parent-child relationship that predates the spousal relationship. This can result in boundary difficulties that are manifested in overt and covert coalitions which are often destructive to the family.

The circumplex model as developed by Olson and his colleagues was developed with the idea of bridging the gap

between theory, research, and practice (Olson, 1986). By integrating various concepts found in general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) with those found in developmental theory (Duvall, 1970; Hill & Rogers, 1969) it uses the dimensions of adaptability and cohesion to examine the degree of interaction and affect various family members have on each other at various stages of their family life. Using these dimensions, the overall health of the family can be evaluated at any given point in their development. Olson, et al. (1979) see the developmental theory as highly compatible with the general systems theory and especially important when examining the concepts associated with adaptability to change, restructuring and the need to redefine family relationships and rules as families age and composition changes.

Various researchers and writers have applied systems and developmental theories to REM families (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980; Papernow, 1984; Sager, et al., 1983; Visher & Visher, 1979). The importance of different stages of development coming together in a REM and how these differences can set the stage for conflict are addressed in practically every writing on the REM. Adaptability, or the ability of the family members to shift roles, and develop rules unique to the REM has been a major focus of current writings (Carter & McGolderick, 1980; Maddox, 1975; Visher & Visher, 1982a; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Likewise, considerable attention

has been focused on the element of cohesion in terms of previously established subsystems and coalitions between the child and the custodial and noncustodial parent and how this effects the nature of new REM family boundaries. It is the general consensus that the REM would ideally be more adaptable and less cohesive than the intact family in order to achieve the highest level of family functioning (Smith, 1985; Steck, 1986; Visher & Visher, 1985). The circumplex model recognizes the developmental nature of the family and further hypothesizes that families will change their adaptability and cohesion levels in response to situational stresses placed on them.

Most of the REM literature recognizes that REM's are a unique family form different from an intact family. Therefore they experience a wider variety of stresses, especially in the early years of their marriage. Because there do appear to be significant differences between intact and REM families and because most REM data is non-empirical research based on clinical families, an increasing number of researchers are encouraging or conducting research to establish normative data for the nonclinical REM family (Esses & Campbell, 1984; Furstenburg, 1979; Smith, 1985; Steck, 1986; Visher & Visher, 1985). The focus of this study therefore was to contribute additional data on the REM family as a healthy, viable alternate family form.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

The REM Family has, until recent years, been thought of as an alternate or deviant form of the nuclear, intact family. Yet, it has been estimated that almost 40% of the children born in 1970 will have lived in a one-parent or REM family (Messinger, 1982). In 1980, 44% of all marriages taking place that year were remarriages (Dahl, et al., 1987). Cherlin (1981) stated that "divorce and remarriage increasingly have become a normal event in the course of a person's life" (p.72).

Although the amount of literature dealing with the REM family has increased significantly since the late 1970's, there remains relatively little empirical research considering the large number of REM's in the United States today. Much of what has been written has been either theoretical or of a popular type geared to easy reading by the "lay" public. Adaptability and Cohesion are two variables identified either directly or indirectly by many family researchers and theorists as being important when examining the degree of functionality of families.

The literature on cohesion and adaptability has been extensively reviewed elsewhere (Olson, Mccubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983; Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1980; Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979). This early research and literature focused almost exclusively on intact families

(Steck, 1986). Where research was done with the stepfamily or REM family, most of these earlier studies were either nonempirical, poorly designed, or clinical reports (Esses & Campbell, 1984). This review, therefore, will be confined to that material considered most relevant to adaptability and cohesion as it applies to remarriage and stepfamily functioning.

Angell (1936), in his study of families during the depression, identified integration and adaptability as significant variables in the family's ability to function effectively under stressful situations. Hill (1949) also identified integration (cohesion) as an important characteristic in coping with the stresses of separation during war time. He saw the role of adaptability as the ability of the family to be flexible in their shifting of established roles or accepting different responsibilities during periods of transition or change. Nye and Rushing (1969) saw integration in families as the ability to function as a unit with common goals and shared activities while Nye and Bernardo (1973) addressed the importance of flexibility in family roles. They stated that "substitution in familial roles has always occurred in emergencies" (p. 262). Hess and Handel (1959) in their studies of 33 families, described cohesion as an important dimension of the family and conceptualized cohesion as a continuum with separateness at one extreme and connectedness at the other, with each family developing

their own balance of cohesion based on their developmental needs.

Much of the research done in the area of cohesion has been conducted with clinical populations. Wynne and his associates (1958) worked with families of a schizophrenic member and identified cohesion as ranging from high (pseudo mutual) to low (pseudo hostile) cohesion. This concept was later applied to the stepfamily by Goldstein (1974) in his study of reconstituted families. Another psychiatrist working with a schizophrenic population, Murray Bowen (1960) saw the range of cohesion as extending from low cohesion (emotional divorce) to high cohesion (undifferentiated family ego mass). Bowen described the balanced or more moderate levels of cohesion as "differentiated self" while Wynne et al. (1958) used the term "mutuality"

Minuchin (1974) in his development of a structural family theory addressed the concept of boundaries. Based largely on his work with families with delinquent children in therapy, Minuchin theorized that the extreme positions (rigid and diffuse) of a continuum of boundaries, which allow varying degrees of closeness (cohesion) within families and between family and environment were more dysfunctional than more moderate degrees along the continuum. Minuchin further emphasized the importance of labels (roles), coalitions (subgroup alliances), and power in working with families. Minuchin addressed other issues which

impact on the stepfamily. On marriages in general, he stated that "the investment in the marriage is made at the expense of other relationships" (p.39), including the parent-child relationship. When it is considered that a REM begins with previous alliances with existing boundaries, it is easy to see how difficulties can arise.

Lewis, Beavers, Gasset, and Phillips (1976), in their study of healthy families stated that "structure and flexibility are found in viable systems" (p. 47). They found that healthy families had well established generational boundaries where the power structure was clear and cross generational coalitions were virtually nonexistent. They also found that a blend of separateness and closeness were present in healthy families. From this, they developed a linear model of family functioning whereby a family could not experience too much flexibility. They felt that flexibility was more functional than rigidity which in turn was more functional than chaos.

Early systems theory proponents addressed the rigidity of the family and its tendency to maintain the status quo. Although the family possessed the ability to change (morphogenesis) the family system was inclined toward resisting change (morphostasis). More recent theorists have recognized the ability of the functional family to change when it is required to do so (Speer, 1970; Wertheim, 1973, 1975). It has been further asserted that families must

change and adapt to normal transitions in the family if they are to remain functional (Rappoport, 1962).

Boss and Greenberg (1984) addressed boundary and role ambiguity in the family and the consequences of such ambiguity. Boundary ambiguity can result when one family member is psychologically present but physically absent (i.e. in prison) or psychologically absent but physically present (i.e., chronic illness). When family members are uncertain as to who is filling what roles and tasks in the family system, ambiguity results. This concept can be especially important when viewing the absent parent and present stepparent in the REM.

In an effort to formally combine the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability into a single workable concept, Olson and his colleagues (1979) conceptualized a curvilinear model of adaptability and cohesion. Each dimension was divided into four levels along a continuum with the mid-levels of each variable considered to be more functional than either extreme. Specifically, they theorized that the two mid-ranges of cohesion, i.e. connectedness and separateness, were more functional than the two extremes of disengagement and enmeshment while the two mid-ranges of adaptability, i.e. flexibility and structure, were more functional than the extremes of chaos and rigidity. A circumplex model of family functioning was then developed whereby couples and families could be represented by one of sixteen

types using the adaptability and cohesion scales as the variables. They hypothesized that the four moderate systems (flexibly separated, flexibly connected, structurally separated, and structurally connected) would be the most functional and the four extreme types (chaotically disengaged, chaotically enmeshed, rigidly enmeshed and rigidly disengaged) would be the least functional. The two variables were based on a review of research of normal families as well as special interest families (i.e., families in therapy, families of delinquent children, and families of alcoholics).

From this review of literature was constructed an instrument to measure adaptability and cohesion in family and marital systems. In the original instrument, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES) Olson and his colleagues identified nine components of cohesion (emotional bonding, independence, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making, interests, and recreation) and seven components of adaptability (assertiveness, control, discipline, negotiation, roles, rules, and system feedback). In the revised instruments (FACES II and FACES III) independence and feedback were deleted while group assertiveness, control, and discipline were grouped under the heading of power.

The above review attempts to provide an overview of the concepts of cohesion and adaptability as they were developed

primarily with nuclear and/or dysfunctional families. The following review shall extract from the above and additional sources those concepts which apply most directly to step-families.

Stepfamilies and Adaptability: This review will further explore the area of family adaptability and three of its elements: rules, roles, and power as they relate to step-families. One of the few consistent themes in stepfamily literature deals with adaptability. While Dodson (1977) emphasized the importance of structure in rules, living space and visitation, Visher and Visher (1979) stressed the need of increased flexibility in roles and the "acceptance of a somewhat loosely functioning family unit" (p.209). Visher and Visher are supported by McGolderick and Carter (1980) who addressed the need for stepfamilies to remain flexible while forming the new family unit. McCubbin & Figley (1983) stated that "family adaptation becomes the central concept... used to describe the outcome of family efforts to achieve a new level of balance after a family crisis" (p.13). When roles are not negotiated and expectations are not clarified, conflict can result, especially when persons enter the REM with pre-set role expectations (Jacobson, 1979). Capaldi and McRae (1979) recognized that "in a blended family, the possibility for conflict can be enormous due to one important oversight: the members didn't sit down together to define and clarify roles" (p.51).

When individuals come together in a REM there are many areas of potential conflict. While the couple are attempting to adjust to their own marital comfort level, the children must try to find their place both in the REM as well as clarify their position with both with natural parents and with stepparents (Palermo, 1980). Both adults and children must learn to cope with out-of-sequence life-cycles as well as with unresolved issues from the prior marriage (McGolderick & Carter (1980). Often the parties coming together in a REM are at different stages in the life-cycle which require tolerance and negotiation if they are to be successfully blended into a compatible family unit. Fast and Cain (1966) note that "organizational disturbance in step-families is inevitable" (p.485). Berman (1980) supported Fast & Cain's ideas and further noted that "recognition of stepfamilies...must be followed by a redefinition of roles and by new vocabulary to describe new relationships" (p.7).

Rules: Rules are an important element in any family functioning. In a nuclear family, the couple usually have an opportunity to develop family rules with the children being slowly introduced to the rules as they grow. In the REM however, rules must be formed after the family has been formed. This is difficult enough when children from only one family live in the REM. When children from two former marriages live in the REM, the potential for conflict over the blending of rules is greatly intensified.

While some experts believe the rules should be tailored to each child without an emphasis on one set of rules for everyone (Mills, 1984; Schulman, 1972), others advocate a common rule structure for all children but with an awareness for individual needs (Roosevelt & Lofas, 1976; Visher & Visher, 1982a) or being firm about certain rules (i.e., money matters or visitation) and flexible about others (i.e., dress habits or what to call stepparents) (Berman, 1980; Capaldi & McRae, 1979) .

Of equal concern with the nature of rules is who sets the rules. Berman (1980) believes the rules must be blended and conceived, just as the stepfamily is. Berman goes on to say:

The rules are not clear in combined families. Power struggles are likely to emerge over seemingly insignificant matters, often because the partners are afraid to raise (or even recognize) the larger issues. Stepfamilies are families at risk (p.53).

There is not agreement among the experts as to who should set the rules. Ahrons and Perlmutter (1982) believe that the biological parents should set the rules while Visher and Visher (1982a) believe the parent and stepparent should be perceived as a unified couple in setting rules. Mills (1984) supports this view but states that when there is a conflict in the blending of rules involving the

children, by default the decision should rest with the parent of the children. Dodson (1977) believes, however, that children should be included in the establishment of rules by means of a family council. The establishment of rules is complicated by the fact that when the children move back and forth between the homes of the biological parents, the rules are likely to be different in each home.

In summary, a REM must undertake the difficult task of establishing a blend of rules for their blended family. This process is closely interwoven with the definition and assumption of REM roles.

Roles: The dimension of roles is probable the one most often mentioned when considering the areas of potential conflict and need for flexibility in forming the REM. Practically every author acknowledges the stress associated in negotiating individual roles in the step family. Although society has developed identities for the roles within the nuclear family, it has not done so for the REM. Kent (1980) acknowledges that "family members who experience divorce and remarriage must work through a series of role changes" (p.148). This leaves the area open for negotiation with the formation of each new REM. Roles are confused not only by persons within the immediate family but by the extended family and society at large. Fast and Cain (1966) refer to this as the "parent/stepparent/nonparent" confusion (p. 486). others have pointed to the stress associated to the

ambiguity, conflict, and overload of the role of stepparent (Capaldi & McRae, 1979; Dodson, 1977; Kalter, 1979; Messinger, 1976; Rallings, 1976; Westoff, 1975). Espinoza and Newman (1979) felt the confusion was increased by the number of persons attempting to define the stepparents role.

Nye and Bernardo (1973) stated that "the family in any society is always an institution and it always has a set of positions (wife, child, husband, etc.) whose duties, privileges, and responsibilities are defined" (p. 298). Most researchers who work with the REM recognize however, that our society has not established the role definitions and expectations associated with the REM role structure. Nye and Bernardo address this confusion when they pointed out that "although one in four American marriages are remarriages, it is generally unclear how the behavior of the REM parent should differ from that of the original parent" (p. 524).

Maddox (1975) also addressed the issue by noting that stepfamilies must create their relationships without guidelines and that "stepparents have acquired a status ridden with powerful myths and contradictory expectations with no clear obligations at all" (p. 20).

Fast and Cain (1966) stated that "in a marriage in which at least one partner has children from the very beginning, a number of role-learning opportunities ordinarily offered the natural parent are not available" (p. 490). Noble and Noble (1977) pointed up the paradox of role expect-

tations when they noted that the general expectation was that any adult in the family would act like a parent but that a stepparent who attempted that role would fail, especially in the early years of the marriage. Stepparents are often anxious and uncertain about the family expectations, rejection and comparison, and frequently rush into the parental role, increasing the potential for conflict and rejection (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This was especially true of the stepfathers in Wallerstein and Kelly's study. Kosinski (1983) notes however that stepmothers tend to create unrealistic expectations for themselves and their new family, often resulting in frustration and conflict when the stepchildren reject her attempts to unite the family. He further observes that stepmothers with no natural children usually experience a more difficult time than those who bring children into the marriage. In fact, women in general tend to be less happy in second marriages while men are more content (Duberman, 1973; Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984; Glenn & Weaver, 1977; White, 1979). Other researchers support the concept that REM which begin with children have a greater chance for failure than childless REM's (Becker, Landes, & Michael, 1977; Cherlin, 1978; Furstenburg & Spanier, 1984).

Walker and Messinger (1979) point out that intact families have many roles ascribed by society and with these roles come certain clear expectations. When REM's attempt to duplicate these roles, they can be faced with frustration

and failure. They advocate that stepfamily roles are best achieved rather than ascribed and that time and a tolerance of the lack of clarity will help resolve the roles.

Visher and Visher (1979) see the primary problem as more individuals having to be fit into a family system. There are at least two adults who share similar functions (biological parent and stepparent) yet must maintain separate roles. They are supported in their recommendations that stepparents attempt to integrate themselves slowly into the family while trying to identify specific and supportive roles for themselves that are distinctive from those of the biological parent (Atkin & Rubin, 1976; Berman, 1980; Maddox, 1975; Papernow, 1984; Whiteside, 1982). Mills (1984) has gone even further by suggesting a design for stepparent role adaptation. The author recommends a developmental process whereby acceptance would take as long as the age of the child at the time the REM was formed. During this time, the biological parent in the REM assumes the responsibility for all limit-setting with any differences between stepparent and stepchild being referred back to the biological parent. Mills saw this as lasting a minimum of one year or until the parent was convinced that the stepparent had the best interest of the child at heart. Finally comes the blending of the family rules. With this structured, goal oriented approach, the potential for conflict and role confusion is decreased.

Power: Olson, et al. (1983) included under the concept of power such qualities as assertiveness, control, and discipline. Kanter and Lehr (1975) view power as the way "a family demands, rewards, protects, punishes, and tries generally to shape the social traffic of it's members" (p.50). Their theory that a family traffic pattern marked by either extreme restraint or extreme freedom can give rise to potential problems adds support to Olson, et al. (1984) concept that a balanced cohesion/adaptability scale is more functional than an extreme one. These are of major concern in the stepfamily when considering such areas as limit setting, discipline and rules. Although in the intact nuclear family the parents are the recognized head of the power hierarchy, this is not necessarily true of the married couple in the REM. Minuchin (1974) recognized that an inverted power hierarchy in the family can be a major source of family dysfunction. In the REM, there are often parent-child coalitions that exclude the stepparent in the early months or years of the marriage. This can result in an unbalanced heirarchy and stand in the way of successful adjustment for all parties involved. One of the goals of the REM therefore would be to neogtiate the power and role maze in order to reach a balance between all family members. As with other areas concerning the REM, there is a diversity of thought on ways to attain such a balance.

Although the literature generally agrees the stepparent

should have some power, there is not agreement on the timing or degree (Steck, 1986). One camp advocates the early incorporation of the stepparent into the discipline role (Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 1977; Westoff, 1975). The majority of researchers believe, however, that the role of disciplinarian should be acquired by the stepparent over a period of time (Berman, 1980; Fast & Cain, 1966; Keshet, 1980; McGoldrick & Carter, 1980; Mills, 1984; Visher & Visher, 1979).

Virtually all writers emphasize the importance of the stepparent and parent's mutual support. While Stuart and Jacobson (1985) advocate the position of unequal responsibilities, with the biological parent having primary responsibility for the child. They also stress that with authority goes responsibility and that no parent should have responsibility where they are not given authority. Visher and Visher (1979) also support the idea that the parent should be primarily responsible for discipline with the support of the stepparent. In none of the literature reviewed however was the stepparent assigned the primary responsibility of discipline.

Flexibility is the key word in the stepparent assuming certain parental responsibilities and authority. This was perhaps best stated by Roosevelt and Lofas (1976) when they stated, "being a good stepparent requires a combination of knowing when to be active, when to take a moving, guiding

role, when to sit back,...restraining the natural instincts and yet meeting the extraordinary obligations of step" (p.29). This is supported by Noble and Noble (1977) who said (the wise stepparent learns when to confront and when not to and how much parenting the stepchild will tolerate" (p.51). To facilitate this process, Mills (1984) suggests the parents work together setting short and long range goals whereby they explore the desired roles the stepparent is to play.

The area of discipline, especially with adolescents, in the REM bears the potential for considerable conflict. Lutz (1983) found discipline to be one of the two most stressful areas for adolescents in the REM. Crosbie-Burnett (1984) saw the conflict between stepparent and stepchild as a major factor in marital satisfaction. Stern (1978) encouraged the stepparent to move slowly and establish a friendship with the adolescent prior to assuming the disciplinary role.

Summary of Stepfamilies and adaptability: Although there are as many theories about the degree of flexibility necessary in REM's as there are authors on the subject, there are some general themes of agreement. Most all authors stress the importance of flexibility in blending two families. In order to achieve a functional stable family unit the adults need to be sensitive and responsive to the potential areas of stress (i.e., rules, roles, authority and discipline) while remaining structured. The general impress-

ion is that REM's need a higher degree of adaptability than do intact families to achieve the most satisfactory results (i.e., a functional, unified family system).

Stepfamilies and Cohesion: Cohesion is a term referred to by many writers and generally refers to the sense of closeness or togetherness experienced by the family as a unit apart from the environment and by the members of the family between each other. Olson et al. (1974) have divided this concept into several related concepts including three which have special importance to the REM. These three areas are: emotional bonding, family boundaries, and coalitions. These will be reviewed in more detail further in this section.

As in the area of adaptability, there are differing opinions concerning the degree of cohesion that is considered ideal among REM's. Although some writers advocate a strong cohesion and view it as a primary objective of the REM (Bitterman, 1968; Duberman, 1973; Goldstein, 1974; Schulman, 1972) others believe the REM should not expect to be as cohesive as an intact family by virtue of the necessity of the children to maintain connections with several families (Bowerman & Irish, 1962; Cherlin, 1978; Rosenthal & Keshet, 1978; Visher & Visher, 1982). Generally, when REM's attempt to achieve the same degree of cohesion as the intact family, the opportunity for problems as well as marital failure is increased (Fast & Cain, 1966; McGoldrick & Carter, 1980; Messinger & Walker, 1981; Ransom, et al.,

1979). The recognition of the need for decreased cohesiveness in the REM has even led to new terminology to reflect the difference between the intact and REM. Such terms as "integrated family" (Visher & Visher, 1979) and "blended family" (Satir, 1972) help underscore the fact that this is a family made up of those persons who have come together as a family rather than one that was created from a biological union of a couple. Visher and Visher see the goal of the integrated family as the formation of a set of norms, expectations, and attachments with a clear understanding of what their family unit is and what it is not. While they agree there needs to be a definite sense of "wholeness" to the family, they acknowledge that "in many stepfamilies there needs to be less cohesiveness between the adult couple and the children, and between the children themselves, than seems optimum in intact families (p. 209). This lowered cohesiveness allows the children freer movement between families following divorce. Other authors support the claim that lower cohesiveness in the REM than is found in the first marriage is preferable (Berman, 1980; Sager, et.al., 1983; Einstein, 1982; Keshet, 1980; Kosinski, 1983). Like the Visher writings, these writers opinions are based on clinical and group experiences rather than empirical research.

There are several areas of common difficulties which typically interfere with the development of a good balance

of REM cohesiveness. McGolderick and Carter (1980) address the differences of the life cycles of the various REM family members and how these differences create problems. Sager, et.al. (1983) supported McGoldrick and Carter noting that the REM family has to deal with individual, marital, and family life cycles in the former as well as the present marriage and that a stabilization of these life cycles is necessary. Sager and his colleagues further note some of the factors which make emotional bonding difficult including; prior losses and chronic grief, lack of common rituals and rules, and the lack of external supports. To these factors, Baptiste (1983) added: fear of conflict; confusion of personal, relationship and cultural differences; unacknowledged biases, especially in children; and peer, ex-spouse, and family pressures.

Most writers agree that the REM needs to resolve certain aspects involving the former marriage (i.e. incomplete mourning, and dealing with the anger issues with a sometimes present ex-spouse) while working towards an evolving family unit with strengthened marital, sibling and parent/child relationships (Kleinman, 1979; McGolderick & Carter, 1980; Whiteside, 1982). Papernow (1984) has developed a theory of stages of cohesion in stepfamily development which extends over a period of years. Papernow recommends the use of counseling, self-help groups, and bibliotherapy in making the transition from a fragile group

to a cohesive family unit. Stages involve loosening old structure, building a strong marital coalition, and creating permeable boundaries around the family. Final stages include letting go of fantasies about the biological family while accepting the uniqueness of the REM.

Boundaries: The concept of family boundaries has been addressed by a number of therapists and theorists. Nichols (1984) describes Minuchin's concept of boundaries "as invisible barriers which surround individuals and sub-systems, regulating the amount of contact with others" (p. 474). Rigid boundaries allow little contact with those not included, resulting in disengagement. Disengaged persons or systems tend to be isolated, autonomous, and independent while sacrificing warmth, affection and nurturance. Diffuse boundaries offer more contact with those within and outside of the subsystem. Warmth and mutual support are heightened at the expense of independence and autonomy. When taken to the extreme, systems with diffuse boundaries become enmeshed.

A clear boundary is the mid-point between the rigid and diffuse boundaries and is considered by Minuchin (1974) to be the normal range. Examples of boundaried subsystems within the family (which is itself a subsystem of their environment) are the spouse subsystem and the sibling subsystem. A clear boundary around the spouse/parental subsystem allow them to interact with their own families of

origin, their children, and those outside of the family while supporting each other and maintaining their own privacy.

The newly formed REM must negotiate boundaries which allow the spouses to develop the marital subsystem, the stepparent and children to develop a satisfactory relationship, and allow the children contact and continued growth with the absent biological parent. Until the members of the REM reach a new and complementary series of family relationships, boundaries can become too loose or too rigid for optimal family functioning (Kent, 1980).

Walker and Messinger (1979) stress the importance of maintaining open boundaries between households to help facilitate family functioning. They defined the successful stepfamily as;

one that fully acknowledges the prior allegiance and affection that may exist between parents and children, whether living together or not, but also expects some sense of membership in the remarriage household. The two memberships overlap and need not conflict if neither "family" demands exclusive loyalty from it's members. (p. 191)

Sager, and associates (1981) emphasize the need to work toward a consolidated REM family, but not as a replacement for the biological family. Visher and Visher (1984a) stated that "Stepfamily bounds need to be less distinct than when

only one household exists" (p. 105). The Vishers are supported by others in their belief that the REM is best not to attempt to duplicate the original biological family (Clingempeel et al., 1984b; McGoldrick & Carter, 1980; Walker & Messinger, 1979). Walker & Messinger worked with 22 couples in a remarriage family group. From their work with this group they concluded that lower levels of cohesion and more permeable boundaries were essential to family functioning.

There have been a limited number of empirical studies conducted directly relating to the stepfamily adjustment. In a study by Bowerman and Irish (1962) involving 2,145 stepchildren in grades 7-9, it was found that stepchildren perceived their stepparents less positively than biological children perceived their natural parents and that REM family cohesion was lower than in natural parent families.

Perkins and Kahan (1979) in a study involving 20 stepfather families and 20 natural father families with children in the 12-15 year age group found cohesion to be lower in the stepfamily and that REM families tended to be less satisfied with their families than were intact families. They suggested that the lowered cohesion in the REM's resulted in lowered emotional bonding, and communication and more rigid boundaries between subsystems.

In Smith's (1985) study involving 68 REM families with adolescent children, it was reported that while stepparents

and natural parents perceived family cohesion scores were not significantly different, those REM families with adolescent children did report significantly lower cohesion scores than the REM families without adolescents.

In Steck's (1986) study of 22 REM families, factors which affected family cohesion included age of children (the older the child, the lower the cohesion), contact with former spouse (frequent contact was positively correlated with cohesion), and amount of contact of the child with the absent parent (the more frequent the contact, the higher the cohesion). This supported Messinger et al. (1978) statement that allowing the child to keep the relationship with the absent parent would facilitate the acceptance of the remarriage and the stepparent.

Whiteside (1982) emphasized the importance of permeable boundaries within the REM to allow the children to hold dual family membership and to move freely between families. Messinger (1976) and Rhodes and Wilson (1981) both published clinical articles supporting Whiteside's contention that permeable boundaries were a primary factor in stepfamily adaptation.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) also found that children could handle loyalty issues if their parents were not competing for their loyalty. Lutz (1983) found that adolescent stepchildren identified loyalty conflicts as the most stressful part of stepfamily life. Other authors (Ahrons &

Perlmutter, 1982; Cherlin, 1978; Clingempeel, 1981; Noble & noble, 1977; Ransom et al., 1979; Satir, 1982; Visher & Visher, 1979) also felt that a close relationship with the absent parent facilitated adjustment in the REM and was correlated with the child's emotional health.

In his study of 40 REM families, Clingempeel (1981) findings supported earlier writings that permeable boundaries involving the entire kinship network (both biological parents, grandparents, etc) were optimal for stepfamily adjustment.

It is generally agreed that while the REM benefits from more permeable boundaries, there is also a need to build a sense of family unity. Kleinman et. al. (1979) stated that

Strong marital, sibling, and parental relationships must be formed; firm generational boundaries set; the strong tendency to split into original family subunits and to escape from dissent and its threat of family split and loss must be resisted if the new family is to function successfully.

(p. 86)

Closley tied with the concept of permeable boundaries which allow the children access to both families is that of bonding. This is found repeatedly in the literature and is the concept that all family members will form an "instant love" (Roosevelt & Lofas, 1976; Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 1977;

Visher & Visher, 1978). This "myth of instant love" is also the "myth of instant cohesion". The expectation that a stepparent and stepchild will bond instantly out of love for the natural parent creates pressure for all involved. (Steck, 1986). As Steck describes it, "The parent sees family interactions as tests of a partner's love, the stepparent feels obliged to prove his or her love, and the children hold back from demonstrating attachment to a comparative stranger" (p. 31). Based on the clinical experience of a number of writers, it is not reasonable for this instant love to occur (Capaldi & McRae, 1979; Einstein, 1982; Issacs, 1982; Visher & Visher, 1982b).

In Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) longitudinal work with REM families, they concluded that efforts to bond too early in the formation of the REM were counterproductive to family functioning and actually interfered with later bonding. Fast and Cain (1966) make their position even stronger by suggesting that it is unrealistic to think that the REM will ever achieve the degree of emotional bonding achieved by the biological family.

Coalitions: Of primary concern in the formation of the stepfamily are the preexisting coalitions between parent and child that predate the marriage. In a first marriage, the couple has the advantage of being able to establish a bond or relationship which predates the arrival of the child. In the stepfamily however, there has been an established bond

between the parent and child which can greatly interfere with the building of the marital bond. Although there is general consensus that the length of time between marriages can determine the strength of this parent/child coalition, there is not agreement on the ideal length of time one should be separated before entering into a new marriage (Bumpass, 1984). Several authors (Bitterman, 1968; Goldstein, 1974; Podolsky, 1955) acknowledge this concern and basically state that although the parent is usually ready for remarriage earlier than the child, both will fight weakening their tie.

McGolderick and Carter (1980) named a short interval between relationships as one of the predictors of problems in a stepfamily. Conversely, Visher and Visher (1982b) cautioned that it may be difficult to loosen the parent child coalition if the parent has been divorced more than two to three years. Sager et al. (1983) found that a period of three to five years between marriages best increased the chances of success in a second marriage.

Regardless of when the new marriage takes place, the stepparent will be the outsider entering into the family system. To the child, this may represent the beginning of a period of mourning whereby the hope for the reconciliation of the original marriage is destroyed and the tight coalition of the parent/child relationship must be weakened to allow a new marital coalition (Bohannon & Erickson, 1978;

Messinger, 1976). Often, the parent, while seeking a strong marital bond is also unwilling to relinquish the strong tie with the child (Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 1977; Satir, 1972). Messinger and Walker (1981) saw the primary problem as one of introducing a new adult into the closed group.

However, there is almost unanimous agreement that for the new family system to work, there must be a firm marital union established. Sager et al. (1983) stated that "the stronger the marital pair, the more likely the success of the REM family subsystem" (p. 59). This opinion enjoys wide support (Berman, 1980; Duberman, 1973; Kleinman et al., 1979; Mills, 1984; Noble & Noble, 1977; Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 1977; Visher & Visher, 1982b; Whiteside, 1982). Most literature however, recognizes the child's resistance to the remarriage and establishment of the couples coalition. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) described it best as "the newlyweds' need for privacy colliding head-on with the children's preoccupation with being excluded or rejected" (p. 291).

Roosevelt and Lofas (1976) stress how the children will work to regain their favored status with their parent, while attempting to expell the new intruder. If they are successful, however, they will experience increased stress (Maddox, 1975) and the result can mean incomplete bonding as a marital couple (Goldner, 1982). Although most authors agree with Lewis et al. (1976) that the marital bond is the

primary predictor of a healthy REM, Crosbie-Burnett (1984) in her research with 87 upper-middle-class REM families did not find the marital relationship to be a significant contributor to family happiness.

There is general but not total agreement that step-family satisfaction depends primarily on the strength of the marriage and that the stepparent/stepchild relationship is secondary. Duberman (1973) in her study with 88 families, however, found the stepparent/stepchild relationship to be of major importance in new family cohesion. Likewise, Crosbie-Burnett (1984) found that the stepparent/stepchild relationship was a better predictor of REM happiness than was the marital relationship, accounting for 59% of the overall family happiness, with marital happiness accounting for only 10 %.

In her "six stages of remarriage", Goetting (1982) saw the couple working toward the development of a new couple coalition. These stages include the development of love and trust, the development of new friends and social identity, an economic and legal unity, and the empowering of the stepparent in the relationship with the stepchildren.

Chapter III

Rational and Hypotheses

The literature, though not conclusive, suggests that REM satisfaction is greatest when the family tends to be more adaptable than the intact family (Baptiste, 1983; Dahl, et al., 1987; Sager et al., 1983; Visher & Visher, 1982). The largest portion of the literature identifies a large number of stressors relative to roles and rules experienced by the REM family that are not indigenous to the intact family (Goldner, 1982; Mills, 1984; Sager et al., 1983). Given this, it is reasonable to suspect that the nonclinical REM family would display a higher level of adaptability than the intact family in order to cope effectively with the increased stressors. Therefore it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Stepfamilies will report greater levels of family adaptability than intact families.

Because families develop at different rates based on the family structure, it is reasonable to believe that the formation of a REM family will bring together persons at different developmental stages (Sager et al., 1983; Visher & Visher, 1982). If both parents have children from a previous marriage, they will more likely be at similar stages of development than if one of the couple had been married with children and the other had never been married. It is also

reasonable to suspect that a person who has been married, divorced, and a single parent has developed a higher degree of adaptability than a person who has not experienced this diversity of roles and rules. It is therefore hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Stepparents with no natural children will report lower levels of individual adaptability than natural parents.

Several authors have addressed the affect the age of the child at time of divorce and remarriage has on the adjustment period of the REM (Collins & Ingoldsby, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1982). It is generally accepted that the younger child or older adolescent will adjust more readily than will the latency age or young adolescent child (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). It has also been suggested by Mills (1984) that the stepparent should not assume a parental role until they have been in the family a length of time equal to the age of the child at the time of remarriage. Mills further suggests that the younger the child at the time of remarriage, the less the attachment to the absent biological parent and the greater the possibility to form a strong attachment to the stepparent. Crohn et al. (1982) suggest that the younger child will also have less time to form an attachment to the parent between marriages which could otherwise interfere with the forming of the couple relationship between parent and stepparent.

It is therefore hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: The younger the nonadolescent child at the time of remarriage, the more the family will fall into the balanced ranges of cohesion.

Hypothesis 4: The younger the nonadolescent child at the time of remarriage, the more likely the family is to fall into the balanced ranges of adaptability.

Adolescence is recognized as a time of increased conflict in many families as the child struggles for independence. When this time frame coincides with the efforts of the REM to form a new family system and establish appropriate system boundaries, the conflicts can increase in intensity and number thereby lowering the degree of family satisfaction. By the same token, the adolescent is more capable of understanding what is happening in the family of origin and the REM family than is the younger child thereby depending on the parental units less for support than does the younger child. It is therefore hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 5: When the child is an adolescent at the time the REM is formed, there will be a higher degree of adaptability in the REM than in the intact family with adolescent children.

Hypothesis 6: When the child is an adolescent at the time the REM is formed, there will be a lower degree of cohesion in the REM than in the intact family with adolescent children.

This research considers three levels of REM complexity; simple, simple/complex, and complex. Most of the REM research has tended to ignore the complexity of the REM or at best, made passing mention of it (Brand & Clingempeel, 1987; Moore, 1987; Roberts, 1984; Speigel, 1986; Steck, 1986; Zimmerman, 1984). Clingempeel (1981) however addressed the various levels of complexity in REM families and indicated that the more complex the stepfamily structure, the lower the marital satisfaction would be. However, even Clingempeel's work divided the REM family into either simple (one set of children) or complex (two or more sets of children). Smith (1985) expanded the complexity to include simple/complex (one set of children living in the home and one set visiting) REM family. With the increasing number of REM families, this appears to be more realistic than lumping all REM families together or considering the 18 possible REM family structures that can exist. The degree of complexity of the REM family would likely affect the adaptability of the family but the direction is not certain. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 7: REM family adaptability will vary according to the family complexity.

Earlier authors have suggested that the well functioning REM family will have more permeable boundaries and therefore will be less cohesiveness than the intact family (Dahl, et al., 1987; Smith, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1982). Likewise, they would be more adaptable in adjusting to new role structures and new rules (Kent, 1980). Olson et al. (1983) however suggested that families in the balanced ranges would have higher levels of satisfaction than those in the middle or extreme ranges.

It is therefore hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 8: Those REM families expressing high levels of satisfaction, will have significantly higher adaptability and lower cohesion scores than intact families.

Chapter IV

Procedure

Procedure

Subjects were obtained from the public marriage records of Chesterfield County, Virginia. Chesterfield County is a county neighboring Richmond, Virginia. This county was chosen because of the wide cross section of families living there, including those involved in farming, industry, services, government, and retail/wholesale trades. The 1982 statistics for marriages, divorces, income, racial-ethnic mix and per capita income closely match the national average (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987). All records for the period of January 1, 1983 thru December 31, 1984 were reviewed and those indicating remarriage (819) were recorded. Each name was checked against the most current phone book for a listing, yielding a potential beginning population of 420 couples. Public records have been identified as a reasonable means of providing a cross section of the population (Kitson, et al., 1982).

An attempt was made to contact each couple by telephone. Up to three attempts were made for each couple. Of the starting 420 couples, 201 (47.9%) were not reached either because of disconnected phones, changed numbers which were recently unlisted, or no answer on three attempts.

Once the couple had been reached, the study was ex-

plained, a determination of their eligibility established, and a request made to participate. Of this group of 219 couples, 24 (11.0%) refused to participate, 27 (12.3%) were divorced or separated, and 81 (37.0%) were not qualified because of the child residency requirement. This left a qualified agreeable sample of 87 (39.7%) couples. A packet of applicable materials was mailed to these 87 couples with a request that the material be completed within 3 days and returned to the study coordinator.

The following materials were included in the packet:

- 1.) An instruction sheet on VPI letterhead.
- 2.) A consent form for each participant to sign allowing the information they provide to be used in the study.
- 3.) Two copies of the FACES III instrument for each participating person.
- 4.) A demographic questionnaire to be completed by each participant.
- 5.) A stamped, addressed envelope for the return of the completed materials.

The following eligibility requirements pertained:

- 1.) The couple must have been married for no less than 3 years.
- 2.) There must be at least one child, born of a former marriage of one of the couple members, living in the home.

3.) The couple must be living together in the same house.

4.) One or both partners must have been previously married.

If the questionnaire packets had not been returned within 2 weeks, a follow-up letter was mailed. This was followed 2 weeks later with a phone call. Sixty-two follow-up letters and 51 phone calls were made. A total of 42 (48.3%) packets were returned of which 39 (44.8% of the 87 couples to whom packets were mailed) were usable.

Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale III (FACES III). This instrument was developed by Olson, Portner, and Lavee in 1985 and is the third version of the original FACES scale developed in 1978 by Joyce Portner and Richard Bell. FACES III is designed to assess family adaptability and cohesion, the two major dimensions of the Circumplex Model developed by David Olson and his colleagues (1985). The Circumplex model allows the researcher to divide families into 16 types based on their adaptability and cohesion scores.

The instrument is a 20 item questionnaire designed to be taken by persons over 12 years of age. Of the 20 items, 10 measure the following 5 factors of adaptability: leadership, control, dimension, roles and rules. There are 10 questions measuring the following 5 factors of cohesion:

emotional bonding, family boundaries, supportiveness, time and friends, and recreational interests.

By administering the questionnaire twice, first by asking how the family is perceived and secondly by asking how the family ideally would be, a satisfaction measure can be determined. The questionnaires are filled out individually by each participant. The test is easily hand scored and the score is compared to the cutting edge points of the four levels each of adaptability and cohesion. The cutting edge points are taken from the research done by Olson et al. using a national sample of 1,140 couples and families.

Construct validity was measured by factor analysis of the total number of items with the ten adaptability items on one factor and the ten cohesion items loaded on the second factor. The correlation between adaptability and cohesion was very low ($r=.03$). Correlations of the adaptability items with the total adaptability score ranged from .42 to .56 while correlations on the cohesion items to the total cohesion score ranged from .53 to .74. Internal reliability was determined using a "nonproblem" family population with two independent and random halves of that sample. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .75 to .77 for cohesion, .58 to .63 for adaptability, and .67 to .68 for the total scale.

Analysis of Data

Perceived and ideal cohesion and adaptability scores as well as satisfaction scores were figured for each

individual member. These were then averaged to produce a family cohesion, adaptability and satisfaction score. Although there are some problems using average scores for a family (i.e. extreme scores can be lost in the averaging) it is still recommended by family researchers as the best method for combining the various aspects of the family scores (Esses & Campbell, 1984; Olson et al., 1985).

All hypotheses were tested in the null form with the individual and family mean scores as the dependent variables. The appropriate statistical analysis for each hypothesis is reflected in the results section. The significance level for each statistical test was established at .10.

Chapter V

Results and Discussion

Demographic Data

The final sample consisted of 39 couples who had been married at least 3 years and were presently living together. There was in each case at least 1 child, from a previous marriage of one of the parents, living in the home at least 6 months of the year. The second adult in the family may or may not have children from a previous marriage who may or may not be living in the home. All subjects were presently living within local calling distance of Chesterfield County, Virginia. The mean age of the male adults was 42.8 years; the mean age of the female adults was 39.1 years; the mean age of the children was 12.0 years. The mean length of marriage was 4.08 years. Education for the adult male ranged from 9 years to 20+ years with a mean of 14.7 years. For the adult women, the mean was 14.4 years. The mean annual income for the men was \$41,970 and for the women, \$21,300. Of the 39 women in the study, 10 (26.3%) listed housewife/mother as their primary occupation with an annual income of less than \$10,000. Of those adult women who were professionally employed, the mean annual income was \$27,140. Education, income and age breakdowns are found in table 1.

Of the 78 adult respondents, 63 (80.8%) had been

divorced, 6 (7.7%) had been widowed, and 9 (11.5%) had not been previously married (Table 1). Of the stepparents, 34 (68.0%) had at least one child prior to the present marriage. Eleven (28.2%) of the couples had a child born to the present marriage (Table 3). A summary of family types, length of courtship and marriage data are found in Table 2.

Of the 39 families responding, 29 (74.4%) had an adolescent (age 12-19) or adult child living in the home. Of those parents indicating there was at least one adolescent living in the home, 20 (69.0%) had an adolescent return a questionnaire. The mean age of the adolescent at the time the data was collected was 15.9 years. The mean age of the children at the time of remarriage was 7.91 years. The mean number of children living in the home was 2.00. Forty-two (65.6%) of the children lived with their natural mother and a stepfather while 22 (34.3%) lived with their natural father and a stepmother (Table 3). Of those children responding whose parents had divorced, 33.3% saw their non-custodial parent not more than once a year. Of these, 62.5% indicated their noncustodial parent was deceased. Forty-one percent of the children responding saw their non-custodial parent 3 - 12 times per year with only 25% indicating they visited with their non-custodial parent more than twice a month.

Table 1
Remarried Couples Demographic Data

Variable	Husband		Wife	
	F	%	F	%
<u>Age</u>				
Under 30 years	0	0.0	2	5.3
30 years - 40 years	14	36.8	19	47.4
40 years - 50 years	18	44.8	16	42.1
50 years - 50 years	4	10.5	1	2.6
Over 60 years	3	7.9	1	2.6
<u>Education</u>				
less than 12 years	3	7.9	0	0.0
Completed High School	11	28.9	13	34.2
Some College	5	13.2	11	28.9
Completed College	8	21.1	9	21.1
Some Graduate Study	12	28.9	6	15.8
<u>Income</u>				
0 - 9,999	0	0.0	10	26.3
10,000 - 19,999	4	10.5	8	21.1
20,000 - 29,999	5	13.2	13	34.2
30,000 - 39,999	10	26.3	3	7.9
40,000 - 49,999	6	15.8	4	7.9
50,000 - 59,999	9	23.7	0	0.0
60,000 - 69,999	1	2.6	0	0.0
70,000 - 79,999	2	2.6	0	0.0
80,000 or more	2	5.3	1	2.6

Table 1 (Continued)
Remarried Couples Demographic Data

Variable	Husband		Wife	
	F	%	F	%
<u>Role in Family</u>				
Parent/Stepparent	9	23.1	9	23.1
Stepparent	22	56.4	8	20.5
Parent	8	20.5	22	56.4
<u>How Previous Marriage Ended</u>				
Divorce	29	74.4	34	87.2
Death	4	10.3	2	5.1
Never Married	6	15.3	3	7.7
<u>How Well Present Marriage is Going</u>				
Very Well	27	68.5	25	65.8
Well Enough	7	18.4	10	23.7
So, So	4	10.5	3	7.9
Poorly	1	2.6	1	2.6
Very Poorly	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 2
Remarried Family Demographic Data

Variable	F	%
<hr/>		
<u>Family Type</u>		
Simple	19	48.7
Simple/Complex	11	28.2
Complex	9	23.1
<u>Length of Marriage</u>		
3 years - 4 years	15	38.5
4 years - 5 years	19	48.7
5 or more years	5	12.8
<u>Length of Courtship</u>		
0 - 6 months	5	12.8
6 months - 1 year	6	15.4
1 year - 2 years	17	43.6
2 years - 3 years	8	20.5
3 or more years	3	7.7
<u>Number of years couple knew each other prior to marriage</u>		
0 - 1 year	4	10.3
1 year - 2 years	10	25.6
2 years - 3 years	7	18.0
3 or more years	18	46.1

Table 2 (Continued)

Remarried Family Demographic Data

Variable	F	%
<hr/>		
<u>Length of time from final separation in previous marriage to start of present marriage</u>		
Never Married	8	10.5
0 - 1 year	14	17.1
1 year - 2 years	17	22.4
2 years - 3 years	9	11.8
3 or more years	29	38.2
<u>Place Home was established</u>		
New joint home	20	51.0
Wifes former home	6	15.4
Husbands former home	13	33.3

Table 3

Demographic Summary of Children in Remarried Families

Variable	F	% of REM Families	Mean Age at Time of Remarriage
Families With Natural sons from previous marriage			
One	13	31.6	10.9
Two	12	31.6	13.3
Three or more	9	23.7	15.7
Total	34	86.8	13.1
Families With Natural Daughters from previous marriage			
One	12	31.6	8.3
Two	13	34.2	13.2
Three or more	4	10.5	16.5
Total	29	76.3	11.8
Families With Natural sons from previous marriages living in REM family			
One	22	55.3	11.7
Two	6	15.3	9.2
Three or more	2	5.3	10.0
Total	30	76.3	11.0

Table 3 (Continued)

Demographic Summary of Children in Remarried Families

Variable	F	% of REM Families	Mean Age at Time of Remarriage
<u>Families With Natural Daughters from previous marriages living in REM family</u>			
One	15	39.5	9.4
Two	5	13.2	9.4
Three or more	0	0.0	
<u>Families With Sons born to REM Family</u>			
One	6	15.4	
Two	0	0.0	
Three or more	0	0.0	
<u>Families With Daughters born to REM Family</u>			
One	4	10.5	
Two	1	3.6	
Three or more	0	0.0	

Table 4
Remarried Family Demographic Data

Variable	Husband	Wife
<u>Age</u>		
Mean	42.79	39.11
Range	31-66	26-67
<u>Salary</u>		
Mean	41.97	21.30
Range	15-80+	0-80+
<u>Education</u>		
Mean	14.68	14.42
Range	8-21	12-21
<u>Years Married</u>		
Mean	4.08	4.08
Range	3-5.25	3-5.25
<u>Time Between Marriages</u>		
Mean	3.12	3.05
Range	3 months-12 years	3 months-11 years
<u>Length of Courtship</u>		
Mean	1.52	1.52
Range	3 months-6 years	3 months-6 years

In summary, the average respondent family consisted of 4.00 persons. The average family income was \$61,600 and the average length of marriage was 4.08 years. The mean age of the men was 42.8 years; for women, 39.1 years; and for the children, 12.0 years. Thirty-three (84.6%) of the families were formed following divorce.

FACES III Norms

The FACES III normative sample consisted of a non-clinical random sample of 2453 adults and 412 adolescents. The average age of the adult males was 46.0, slightly older than the sample of this study. The average age of the adult women was 43, also older than this study's sample. The mean age of the adolescent of the normative sample was 16, four years older than those in the current study. Of the adult males, 54% were engaged in "white collar" professions (sales, teaching, managerial, clerical, professional, etc). This compares with 76% of the study sample in similar occupations. Forty-two percent of the adult women in the normative sample were employed in similar occupations as compared to 66.67% of the current sample. Of the current sample, 26.3% of the adult women listed their primary occupation as housewife/mother. This compares to 42% of the normative sample. The average annual family income for the normative sample was between 20,00 and 30,000 dollars. This was substantially less than the 61,600 dollars of the current sample and may attributed in part to the higher

percentage of women in the current sample who list occupations other than homemaker. In the area of education, 62% of the normative sample adult males and 52% of the adult women had at least some college. This compares with 63% of the adult males and 66% the adult females in the current study. Of the normative sample, 77% of the couples were highly satisfied with their marriage compared to 67% of the study sample.

In summary, the current sample compared favorably with the normative sample in the area of couple satisfaction with marriage and mean education level for men. The normative sample male, female and adolescent populations were older than the study sample. In the study sample, family income was substantially higher than the normative sample. This may be attributed in part to inflation that took place over the five years since the normative sample data were collected. Also, there were more males and females from the study sample than from the normative sample who listed "white collar" jobs as their primary occupation. Overall, the study sample and the normative sample were basically similar except in the area of mean family income. The cutting points and distributions of the FACES III scores are found in Tables 5 , 6, 7 and 8.

Table 5

Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III Cohesion Scores for Families and Norm Group with Adolescents

Group	Cohesion Levels and Ranges				N
	Disengaged (10-31)	Separated (32-37)	Connected (38-43)	Enmeshed (44-50)	
	%	%	%	%	
Families with Adolescents in the FACES III Norms	18.6	30.3	36.4	14.7	1315
REM Families with Adolescents in Study Sample	27.6	41.4	27.6	3.4	29

Table 6

Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III
Cohesion Scores for REM Families and
Norm Group Families Without Adolescents

Group	Cohesion Levels and Ranges				N
	Disengaged (10-34)	Separated (35-40)	Connected (41-45)	Enmeshed (46-50)	
	%	%	%	%	
General Adult FACES III Norms	16.3	33.8	36.3	13.6	2453
REM Families Without Adolescents in Study Sample	20.0	70.0	10.0	0.0	10

Table 7

Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III Adaptability
Scores for Families and Norm Group with Adolescents

Group	Adaptability Levels and Ranges				N
	Rigid (10-19)	Structured (20-24)	Flexible (25-29)	Chaotic (30-50)	
	%	%	%	%	
Families with Adolescents in the FACES III Norms	15.9	37.3	32.9	13.9	1315
REM Families with Adolescents in Study Sample	17.2	34.5	37.9	10.4	29

Table 8
Cutting Points and Distributions of FACES III
Adaptability for REM Families and
Norm Group Families Without Adolescents

Group	Adaptability Levels and Ranges				N
	Rigid (10-19)	Structured (20-24)	Flexible (25-28)	Chaotic (29-50)	
	%	%	%	%	
General Adult FACES III Norms	16.3	38.3	29.4	16.0	2453
REM Families Without Adolescents in Study Sample	10.0	40.0	40.0	10.0	10

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis I: Stepfamilies will report greater levels of family adaptability than intact families.

Two independent single sample t-tests were used to analyze this hypothesis in the null form. In the first analysis, the scores of those families involving only non-adolescent children were compared to the norm scores for adults across all life stages. The sample mean of 26.4 (SD = 4.1) was compared to the norm mean of 24.1 (SD = 4.7) in a one-sample t-test. REM families including only pre-adolescent children at the time of the study were significantly more adaptable than the norm, intact families ($t=1.44$, $df=9$, $p < .10$) in the variable of adaptability. The families which included one or more adolescent children at the time of the study had a mean score of 23.4 (SD = 4.4). This group was compared to the norm cutting edge scores for families with adolescent children which had a mean score of 24.3 (SD = 4.8). Those families which included an adolescent were not significantly different from the norm families ($t= -1.04$, $df=28$, $p > .10$) and in fact had a lower mean than intact families (Table 9). An additional t-test was run for only those families which included an adolescent questionnaire. With a mean of 22.9 (SD = 4.44) this group also had a lower adaptability mean than the group in which all adolescent families were included and produced a non-significant value ($t= -1.44$, $df = 20$, $p > .10$).

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations of Family
Adaptability Scores According to the
Presence or Absence of Adolescents in the Home

Variable	Mean	SD	Frequency	Percentage
<u>Adolescent in Home</u>				
Norm Sample	24.3	4.80	1315	
Study Sample	23.4	4.37	29	74.4
<u>No Adolescent in Home</u>				
Norm Sample	24.1	4.70	2453	
Study Sample	24.7	3.99	10	25.6

Hypothesis 2: Stepparents with no natural children will report lower levels of adaptability than natural parents.

This hypothesis was tested in the null form with a dependent t-test. The means and standard deviations for the stepparents with no natural born children and parents with natural children were 25.4 (SD = 4.2) and 23.9 (SD = 4.6) respectively (Table 12). In this analysis, the stepparents actually scored higher in adaptability than did the natural parents with a finding of ($t = 1.39$, $df = 15$, $p > .10$) which failed to reject the null hypothesis. These results will be included and placed into context with the other hypotheses results in the discussion section.

Hypothesis 3: The younger the pre-adolescent child at the time of remarriage, the more the family will fall into the balanced ranges of cohesion.

Hypothesis 3 was examined in the null form with Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation using the differences between the raw family cohesion scores and the scale mid-point as the measurable unit. This method was chosen since the further away from the mid-point a score is found, the less balanced it is. Olson et al. identify the mid-point between separated and connected, the 2 balanced groups, as 40.5. These scores can be reviewed in Table 5. Sample means used in the analysis of Hypotheses 3 and 4 are presented in Table 14.

Table 10
Means and Standard Deviations of Family
Cohesion Scores According to the
Presence or Absence of Adolescents in the Home

Variable	Mean	SD	F	%
Adolescent in Home				
Norm Sample	37.1	6.10	1315	
Study Sample	33.7	6.02	29	74.4
No Adolescent in Home				
Norm Sample	39.8	5.40	2453	
Study Sample	36.9	3.97	10	25.6

Table 11
Means and Standard Deviations of
Individual and Family Cohesion Scores

Variable	Mean	SD	F	%
<u>Cohesion</u>				
Parent	35.9	5.98	30	38.5
Parent/Stepparent	31.3	8.74	18	23.7
Stepparent without Natural Children	36.1	5.04	14	18.0
Stepparent with Natural Children	38.1	5.87	16	21.1 (a)
Adolescent	30.3	7.31	25	53.4 (b)
REM Family With Adolescent in Home	33.7	6.02	29	74.4 (c)
REM Family without Adolescent in Home	36.9	3.97	10	26.3

(a) Includes only those stepparents with natural children not living in the REM at least six months of the year.

(b) Percent of families that included at least one adolescent Questionnaire.

(c) Nine families indicating an adolescent lived in the home did not return an adolescent questionnaire.

Table 12
Means and Standard Deviations of
Individual and Family Adaptability Scores

Variable	Mean	SD	F	%
<u>Adaptability</u>				
Parent	25.1	5.66	30	38.5
Parent/Stepparent	22.5	6.50	18	23.4
Stepparent without Natural Children	26.6	3.64	14	18.0 (a)
Stepparent with Natural Children	24.2	5.66	16	21.1
Adolescent	19.9	6.22	25	53.4 (b)
REM Family With Adolescent in Home	23.4	4.36	29	74.4 (c)
REM Family without Adolescent in Home	24.7	3.99	10	23.7

(a) Includes only those stepparents with natural children not living in the REM at least six months of the year.

(b) Percent of families that included at least one adolescent Questionnaire.

(c) Nine families indicating an adolescent lived in the home did not return an adolescent questionnaire.

Table 13
Means and Standard Deviations of
Individual and Family Satisfaction Scores

Variable	Mean (a)	SD	F	%
<u>Satisfaction</u>				
Parent	.14	.12	30	38.5
Parent/Stepparent	.08	.05	17	23.4 (b)
Stepparent without Natural Children	.11	.07	14	18.0
Stepparent with Natural Children	.09	.06	16	21.1 (c)
Adolescent	.09	.08	25	53.4 (d)
REM Family With an Adolescent in the Home	.09	.05	29	34.4 (e)
REM Family without an Adolescent in the Home	.08	.03	10	23.7

(a) The larger the mean, the greater the satisfaction.

(b) One parent/stepparent did not complete the "ideal" page of the questionnaire.

(c) Includes only those stepparents with natural children not living in the REM at least six months of the year.

(d) Percent of families that included at least one adolescent Questionnaire.

(e) Nine families indicating an adolescent lived in the home did not return an adolescent questionnaire.

The results of this correlation were statistically significant ($r = .63$, $t = 3.25$, $df = 17$, $p < .05$), indicating that the older the pre-adolescent child at the time of remarriage, the more the cohesion scores tend toward the extremes. A review of the means by age group further supports the results with the scores getting lower with increasing age rather than going toward both extremes. This generally supports the REM literature which says in part that the REM family will have a lower degree of cohesiveness than the intact family. A review of the mean scores by age indicate that the younger the pre-adolescent child at the time of remarriage, the higher the family cohesion scores. Further, all age groups fell at or below the 40.5 dividing score between the the balanced ranges of "connected" and "separated" adding support to the literature that the REM family will be less cohesive than the intact family.

Hypothesis 4: The younger the pre-adolescent child at the time of remarriage, the more likely the family is to fall into the balanced ranges of adaptability.

Like Hypothesis 3, this hypothesis was examined in the null form using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation. The raw family adaptability scores were subtracted from the mid-score between the two balanced ranges on the FACES III scale. Although the results failed to reject the null hypothesis ($r = .22$, $t = 1.21$, $df = 17$, $p > .10$), the means by age group indicate that as the age of the pre-adolescent

Table 14

Cohesion and Adaptability Means of REM Families by
Age of Pre-adolescents at Time of Remarriage

Variable	Age 5 and under	Age 6-8	Age 9-11	Norm Mid-point of Balanced Ranges
<u>Family Cohesion</u>				
Mean	38.25	37.40	27.58	40.5
SD	2.26	4.12	9.16	5.4
n	4	10	10	2453
 <u>Family Adaptability</u>				
Mean	26.33	24.31	21.03	24.5
SD	3.49	4.39	4.60	4.7
n	4	10	4	2453

child at the time of marriage decreases, the family adaptability scores tend to increase. A separate correlation was run on the straight adaptability scores and age. It was found that there is a correlation between the age of the child and family adaptability ($r = -.51$, $t = 2.37$, $df = 17$, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis 5: When the child is an adolescent at the time the REM is formed, there will be a higher degree of adaptability in the REM than in the intact family with adolescent children.

Hypothesis 6: When the child is an adolescent at the time the REM is formed, there will be a lower degree of cohesion in the REM than in the intact family with adolescent children.

Both of these hypotheses were examined using a single sample t-test. The analysis of hypothesis 5 yielded a non-significant value ($t = -.66$, $df = 21$, $p > .10$) thereby failing to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the adaptability levels of REM and intact families which include one or more adolescents (Table 9).

The test on Hypothesis 6, however, was statistically significant ($t = 3.53$, $df = 21$, $p < .05$). This supports the literature which suggests that cohesion in the REM is lower than cohesion in the intact family (Table 10).

Hypothesis 7: REM family adaptability will vary according to the family complexity.

A one factor analysis of variance was used to examine the data for this hypothesis. The adaptability means of the three types of family complexity were: simple (25.1), simple/complex (23.5), and complex (21.3). The resulting statistic was significant ($F = 2.67$, $df = 2/36$, $p < .10$), thereby rejecting the null hypothesis that there were no differences.

A Scheffe' multiple comparison test of the means was calculated. This post hoc test was chosen because of the differences in the group sizes. This test resulted in a significant difference between the simple and complex family types ($F = 5.31$, $df = 2,36$, $p < .10$).

Hypothesis 8: Those REM families expressing high levels of satisfaction will have significantly higher adaptability and lower cohesion scores than intact families.

This hypothesis was examined using two single-sample t-tests. Adaptability was found to be higher than the norm group (Tables 12 & 13) when satisfaction was above the mean satisfaction of the group ($F = 2.63$, $df = 16$, $p < .05$). Cohesion was found to be lower than the norm group (Tables 11 & 13) when the sample group's satisfaction was above the mean of the total sample ($F = 2.00$, $df = 16$, $p < .05$). In

both cases, the means of the samples were compared to the norm for adults across all life stages. When those persons who scored below the mean in satisfaction were compared to the norm group, the results were mixed. There was not a significant difference in the area of adaptability although the trend indicated a lower adaptability score for the sample group as satisfaction decreased. In the area of cohesion however, there was a difference between the sample group and the norm group (Table 11 & 13) with the norm group mean being significantly higher than the sample group ($F = 5.29$, $df = 21$, $p < .05$).

An additional set of statistical procedures were used to examine the correlation between satisfaction and both cohesion and adaptability in the sample group. Two Pearson Product-Moment Correlations were used to examine these correlations. On the variable of adaptability, the correlation was positive ($r = .57$, $t = 4.18$, $df = 36$, $p < .05$). This supports the literature which suggests that the more adaptable the REM family, the greater the family satisfaction. On the second variable of cohesion there was a positive and significant correlation but not in the direction hypothesized. A positive correlation between REM family satisfaction and REM family cohesion does not necessarily support the literature which repeatedly points to lower REM cohesion correlated with higher REM satisfaction.

Discussion

The present study yielded data that both supports and fails to support the current literature. Because most of the current empirical research dealing with the REM has focused on cohesion, the results from this study have, with few exceptions substantiated earlier findings on REM cohesiveness. In the area of adaptability, however, much of the current study was one of the few empirical tests of adaptability in the REM. As a result, the findings and support of the literature are more mixed than those of the cohesion variable.

Adaptability: Hypotheses 1,2,4,5,and 7 dealt with the variable of adaptability. Hypothesis 8 dealt with the three variables of adaptability, cohesion, and family satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1 examined the adaptability of REM families as compared to intact norm families. When those families with pre-adolescent children were tested against the appropriate norm group, they were significantly more adaptable. This finding supports current REM theory which indicates that the REM family, because of it's need to juggle a variety of roles not present in the intact family and it's experience at changing it's rule and role structure has developed a higher level of adaptability. When the REM families with adolescent children are compared with their norm group however, they actually functioned at a

lower level of adaptability than did the intact families. Although this at first appears to be contrary to the literature (Rappoport, 1962; Wertheim, 1975), it actually lends support to the concept that with the older child, there may have been more opportunity for a stronger bond to have been formed between the natural parent and the child(ren) and perhaps more of a tendency for the parent to protect the system from additional pain which could be caused by the addition of the new roles and rules of a stepparent. A look at hypothesis 5 supports this finding.

In the second hypothesis it was anticipated that because the natural parent would have had more family life experiences than would a stepparent who had no natural born children of their own, the natural parent would have developed a higher level of adaptability. The data did not support this position. With only 15 couples examined, the stepparents with no natural children actually scored higher mean adaptability levels than did the parents. This result may lend support to the idea expressed earlier in the discussion of the results of Hypothesis 1. That is, if the natural parent and his/her child have established a firm coalition, the parent may be reluctant to let the new marriage partner in. In addition, knowing that the first marriage failed, there may be less willingness on the part of the natural parent to change those rules acquired during the single-parent "survival process" and more of a tendency

to protect the existing parent/child system at the expense of the new marital system.

While most of the REM literature addresses the need of the stepparent to be adaptable (Kosinski, 1983; Stern, 1978; Visher & Visher, 1985; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) perhaps researchers are overlooking the need of the natural parent to be equally or even more flexible.

Hypothesis 4 yielded an interesting result. It was hypothesized that the younger the pre-adolescent child, the more the family would fall into the balanced ranges of adaptability. The thinking here was that the younger the child at the time of remarriage, the less the degree of stress associated with incorporating a new member (the stepparent) into the family system and the better the family would be at adapting to external stresses as a family unit. This hypothesis was not supported. However, when considering the full range of adaptability, there was a negative correlation between age of the pre-adolescent at the time of remarriage and family adaptability. That is, the younger the child at the time of remarriage, the greater the level of family adaptability. So while there is not a correlation between the age of the child and the balanced ranges of adaptability, there is a correlation between age of the child and the full range of adaptability. It should be noted however, that in the area of adaptability, 80% of the adaptability scores of the families without adolescents fall into

the balanced ranges.

In the fifth hypothesis, it was anticipated that REM families with adolescents would score higher in adaptability than the intact norm family. The data failed to reject the null hypothesis and in fact indicated a non-significant lower mean for the REM group than for the norm group. This could be a function of the adolescents growing away from the family which may have been accelerated by the divorce process. Another explanation may be that the adolescent child assumed more adult roles and responsibilities in the single-parent family and may be reluctant to step back into the role of the child. Yet another explanation might support the role ambiguity concept as explained by Boss and Greenberg (1984). Here the adolescent REM family is probably struggling with what roles the stepparent and the adolescent stepchild are to fill and which adult has responsibility for establishing and enforcing the REM family rules.

Hypothesis 7 examined the relationship between REM family complexity and adaptability. It was found that there was a significant difference between simple and complex families, with simple families having a higher degree of adaptability than complex families. There were also differences between simple/complex and both simple and complex but these were not statistically significant. These results would indicate that the less complicated the family structure, the greater the degree of adaptability.

Cohesion: Hypothesis 3 deals with the age of the pre-adolescent child at the time of remarriage and the level of cohesion. It was hypothesized that the younger the pre-adolescent child at the time of the remarriage, the more the REM family would tend to fall into the balanced ranges of cohesion. The data did support the hypothesis and the existing literature which generally states that the younger the child at the time of remarriage, the more the family would approach the functioning levels of the intact family. By forming the REM when the child is younger, there is more opportunity for bonding between the stepparent and step-child, less confusion over boundaries, and less time available to establish coalitions between natural parent and child which might exclude the stepparent. When combined with hypothesis 4, it is seen that the younger the age of the pre-adolescent child at the time the remarriage occurred, the higher the adaptability scores were and the more the family fell into the balanced ranges of cohesion.

Hypothesis 6 lends further support to the above discussion on the age of the child and family cohesion. In hypothesis 6, it was seen that the adolescent REM family had lower cohesion levels than did the intact norm family. This fits with the explanation that the younger the child, the more the family approaches the balanced levels of cohesion. This also fit with Hypothesis 1 which suggested that the adolescent REM family had lower adaptability scores than the

intact family. It appears therefore that those families formed when the adolescent is an adolescent or is approaching adolescence, tend to have lower cohesion and adaptability scores than the intact family. This could be the result of the natural growing independence of the child, the probable adult roles he/she has had to acquire during the separation and single parent stages prior to remarriage, and the loyalty conflicts between accepting a stepparent and maintaining close contact with the absent biological parent. The lower cohesion allows the child to move between the two families of his natural parents without total disruption.

Hypothesis 8, the final one to be tested, dealt with family satisfaction. The results indicate that the greater the adaptability, the greater the family satisfaction. This was as predicted and supported the previous literature. A major surprise however was the cohesion component. REM family literature strongly supports the concept that REM family satisfaction is higher when the cohesion is lower. Although this was supported, it was also found that there was an even greater difference between sample and norm cohesion means when the satisfaction scores fell below the mean. Further, there was a positive (rather than a negative) correlation of .63 between REM family satisfaction and REM cohesion. At first glance, these results seem to be at odds with the existing literature which suggests that lower cohesion in

REM families should yield higher satisfaction scores. However, of the 39 families in the study, only 5 (12.8%) scored in the higher of the two balanced ranges of cohesion, and 1 (2.5%) scored in the high extreme range. Of the remaining 33 families, 14 (35.9%) scored in the lower balanced range and 19 (48.7%) scored in the low extreme range. This would therefore still tend to support the literature because while the literature indicates that lower cohesion scores in REM families than in intact families would correlate with higher family satisfaction (which this study supports) this does not mean that cohesion scores MUST be low in order to enhance family satisfaction. Following the circumplex model, it would follow that the REM and intact families with low extreme scores would tend to be more problematic and therefore less satisfied. If this is the case, Hypothesis 8 supports the circumplex model as well as the existing literature.

Theoretical Implications

There are several theoretical implications which are suggested from the results of this study. For the most part, earlier research and theory regarding REM families and cohesion were supported with the exception of cohesion and family satisfaction. This may be due in part to the fact that all families had been married at least three years, thereby allowing a unit to be formed which more closely resembled the intact family. Secondly, these are non-

clinical families. Since most of the REM research is being conducted with clinical populations, there may be a greater need for lower cohesiveness in troubled families than in non-clinical families.

The area of REM adaptability has seen less empirical research than cohesion. Therefore, the expected results were less certain. In general, the data from this study supports the idea that when the child is younger at the time of remarriage there is a higher degree of adaptability than in intact families. Also, when the level of adaptability is higher, family satisfaction will be higher. This fits with the results that indicate that the less complex the REM family, the greater the degree of adaptability. These findings would also support the theories that the earlier the REM is formed, the closer it will resemble an intact family. What does not seem to fit the literature are the results that indicate that more life experiences and having survived a variety of domestic crises do not necessarily increase one's adaptability. The fact that complex families scored lowest in adaptability and parents scored lower than step-parents with no natural children in the area of adaptability, indicate that the stresses associated with divorce and REM family living may tend to reduce the degree of adaptability of the family. While most of the literature accentuates the need of the stepparent to be flexible, perhaps there should be more emphasis placed on the need for

the parent to increase their degree of flexibility.

Methodological implications

The major methodological concern with this study is the sample size. With an overall sample of 39 families, the total number of couples was large enough to provide meaningful results. However, when the overall sample was divided to test different hypotheses, some of the resulting groups had relatively small sample sizes. While this may have strengthened the results of the significant findings, it may have also failed to produce significant results where trends were indicated. By increasing the the sample size and thus the power of the statistical process, those trends in this study that were indicated but not statistically significant may in fact become significant.

Between personal phone calls, letters of explanation and follow-up letters and phone calls, every reasonable effort was made to enhance the participation of the possible participants. However, the return rate of mailed questionnaires was disappointing with fewer than 50% of those who agreed to receive a packet actually returning them. This return may have been enhanced significantly if the packets had been delivered personally. Unfortunately, the size of the county and the limitations of personnel did not make this a practical option. The sample could have also been larger if clinical as well as non-clinical families had been used. However, this may have contaminated the results since

the emphasis was on non-problematic families.

Of those families questionnaires returned , all but three were fully completed. Of these three, all included only one adult questionnaire. Should this same method of collecting data be used again, the cover letter might emphasize that both adults need to complete the questionnaires.

In the questionnaire cover letter, the adults were asked to complete their questionnaires within three days and return them to the study coordinator. This may have discouraged those who could not complete the questionnaires within that time frame, resulting in a reduced number being returned.

The study may have provided more data if it had not been limited to those persons married at least 3 years. To have included those persons married for 1 to 3 years might have provided more insight into the effects of the REM in the earlier stages of development and how adaptability and cohesion change in these early years of REM family formation.

It is the opinion of this researcher that the statistical procedures chosen for data analysis were the best possible for the given hypotheses. More than one procedure was used with several hypotheses in order to achieve the most accurate results. This was done to assure that there were not results present which were hidden by

improper statistical procedures.

Because the study was an effort to uncover significant differences between norm and REM families, and because of the relatively small sample size, a critical vaule of .10 was chosen for the statistical procedures. When the resulting values were significant to the .05 level, this was indicated.

Chapter VI

Summary

The purpose of the present study was to examine the variables of cohesion, adaptability, and satisfaction in non-clinical REM families. The FACES III individual and family mean scores of the subjects were compared to each other and to norms of intact families as presented in the FACES III instrument. The instrument was completed twice by each of the subjects. The first time measured their perception of their family as it presently was. The second time measured how they would ideally like their family to be. The difference between the scores was the satisfaction score.

REM family literature suggests that the REM family will have a lower family cohesion score and higher adaptability score than the intact family. It further suggests that satisfaction is inversely correlated with cohesion and positively correlated with adaptability. Finally there is research that indicates the age of children at the time of the remarriage as well as later in the marriage affects the levels of cohesion and adaptability in the REM. This study was conducted to add, in some small way, to this growing body of knowledge of the REM as a unique family form.

Data was collected from 39 REM families in Chesterfield County, Virginia. Twenty-nine of the families included adolescents and 10 included pre-adolescent

children. In every family there was at least one child from a previous marriage residing in the home. A packet of FACES III and demographic questionnaires, one for each adult and adolescent, were mailed to each family along with a cover letter explaining the procedures.

The results of the study were varied. A significant negative correlation was found between family adaptability and the age of the child at the time of remarriage. Also, natural parents were found to be less adaptable than step-parents who had no natural children. This may be important to therapists who might attempt to increase the adaptability of the stepparent when perhaps they should be more concerned with parental adaptability. Both of these findings were contrary to expected findings. In support of adaptability literature were the findings that REM families with one or more pre-adolescent children were more adaptable than intact families, even though there was no significant difference between REM and intact family adaptability levels where adolescents were present.

Although REM families are more likely to fall into balanced ranges of cohesion as the age of the pre-adolescent child decreases, the same is not true for adaptability. When adolescents are present in the family, there is less cohesion in the REM than in the intact family. This finding is not surprising since literature strongly suggests that when adolescents are present at the time the REM is formed,

there will be lower cohesion due to the child's efforts to establish his/her own identity at the same time the couple is trying to establish a family unit.

In general, stepparents were more in favor of getting involved in stepchild discipline than were the parents. Both parents and stepparents as well as those persons filling both roles were in favor of the stepparent either helping the parent with discipline or sharing equally the responsibility. Sixty-four percent of the adults indicated that the stepparent was involved in discipline of the stepchildren in less than 1 year from the time the REM was formed.

As hypothesized, family adaptability varied according to the complexity of the family with simple families (those with only one set of stepchildren living in or visiting the home) having the highest level of adaptability and complex families (those with two sets of stepchildren in the home) having the lowest levels of adaptability.

In general, the results support the teachings of strategic and structural family therapy theorists. It appears that the earlier coalitions between parent and child, especially older pre-adolescent and adolescent children, may hamper the achievement of cohesion and adaptability levels of the REM. In both REM and intact families, both cohesion and adaptability scores are lower when adolescents are present.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter for Questionnaire Packet

VIRGINIA TECH

Department of Family and Child Development
College of Human Resources

Wallace Annex
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-8299
(703) 961-4794 or 4795

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of remarriage and stepfamily life. We are interested in gathering information from adults and adolescents living in the stepfamily to help us better understand how stepfamily living differs from first married families and what unique stressors might be affecting the remarried family.

Please read and fill out the enclosed consent forms and include them with the other materials when you return them to us.

Please set aside approximately 30 minutes within the next 3 days and complete the enclosed questionnaires. Please do so without assistance from anyone else. There is one set of questionnaires for each adult and each adolescent (age 12-19) living in your home. As each person completes their questionnaires, seal them in one of the small white envelopes and place it in the larger brown envelope. When all questionnaires have been completed, return them in the large brown envelope. Postage has been provided.

This is not an exam and there are no right or wrong answers. Please do not compare your answers until all forms have been returned. You are encouraged to respect your child's privacy, allowing him or her to answer the questionnaires without being reviewed. If for some reason the adolescent is not willing to participate in the study, it is still most helpful for the parents to complete and return their material as well as the incomplete adolescent material.

All information is identified by a code number. Once the data has been entered into the computer, all code numbers or other identifying information will be destroyed. All information is considered strictly CONFIDENTIAL and will be treated as such. Please DO NOT put your name on any of the forms except where asked to do so.

TIME IS VERY IMPORTANT IN THIS STUDY.

PLEASE -- TRY TO HAVE EVERYONE COMPLETE THEIR QUESTIONNAIRES WITHIN THE NEXT THREE DAYS AND RETURN TO US.

YOUR PARTICIPATION AND COOPERATION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED.

Bruce C. Prevatt
VPI & SU
Remarriage Study Coordinator
(804) 323-1044

Appendix B

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Name: _____ Date _____

Address _____

1. I _____ hereby authorize Bruce C. Prevatt, a Ph.D candidate in Marriage and Family Therapy at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, to use information provided by me in his study of remarried families. I understand the information will be held confidential and neither my name nor any information which can be directly attributed to me will be provided to anyone else. I further understand that all information will be destroyed when the research is completed.

2. I understand there is minimal psychological risk involved in my participation. I am aware that some people may be offended by some of the questions asked in the study. I may choose to not answer any questions I find offensive and I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason.

3. The procedures for this study have been adequately explained to me.

4. I wish to be informed of the results of this study. Please send me a summary of the project's findings when completed.

Yes _____ No _____

Signature _____ Date _____

ADOLESCENT CONSENT FORM

Natural Parent's Name: _____ Date _____

Address _____

Adolescent Child's Name _____

1. I _____, the natural parent and legal guardian of _____, do hereby authorize Bruce C. Prevatt, a Ph.D candidate in Marriage and Family Therapy at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, to use information provided by the above named adolescent in his study of remarried families. I understand the information will be held confidential and neither the adolescents name nor any information which can be directly attributed to that adolescent will be provided to anyone else. I further understand that all information will be destroyed when the research is completed.

2. I understand there is minimal psychological risk involved in participation in this study. I am aware that some people may be offended by some of the questions asked in the study. I may choose to not allow the above mentioned adolescent to answer any questions I find offensive and I may withdraw the adolescent from the study at any time and for any reason.

3. I agree to allow the adolescent to answer all agreed upon questions in private in order to assure the highest degree of accuracy of the study.

4. The procedures for this study have been adequately explained to me.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

FACES III Questionnaire

Page One of the Adult and Adolescent Questionnaire

REHARRIED FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE COMPLETE EVERY QUESTION IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE. PLEASE COMPLETE YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE PRIVATELY, WITHOUT THE HELP OF ANY OTHER FAMILY MEMBER. IF YOU WISH, YOU MAY DISCUSS THE QUESTIONNAIRE WITH OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS, AFTER ALL FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE COMPLETED AND RETURNED THEIR QUESTIONNAIRES. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

PART A:

PLEASE RESPOND TO EACH STATEMENT BY PLACING A CHECK IN THE COLUMN WHICH APPLIES MOST CLOSELY TO HOW YOU WOULD BEST DESCRIBE YOUR FAMILY AS IT IS NOW. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. THE RIGHT ANSWER IS WHAT IS TRUE FOR YOUR FAMILY.

	ALMOST NEVER	ONCE IN A WHILE	SOME-TIMES	FRE-QUENTLY	ALMOST ALWAYS
1. Family members ask each other for help.					
2. In solving problems, the children's suggestions are followed.					
3. We approve of each other's friends.					
4. Children have a say in their discipline.					
5. Different persons act as leaders in our family.					
6. We like to do things with just our immediate family.					
7. Family members feel closer to other family members than to people outside the family.					
8. Our family changes its way of handling tasks.					
9. Family members like to spend free time with each other.					
10. Parents and children discuss punishment together.					
11. Family members feel very close to each other.					
12. The children make the decisions in our family.					
13. When our family gets together for activities, everybody is present.					
14. Rules change in our family.					
15. We can easily think of things to do together as a family.					
16. We shift household responsibilities from person to person.					
17. Family members consult other family members on their decisions.					
18. It is hard to identify the leader(s) in our family.					
19. Family togetherness is very important.					
20. It is hard to tell who does which family chores.					

Page Two of the Adult and Adolescent Questionnaire

PLEASE RESPOND TO EACH STATEMENT BY PLACING A CHECK IN THE COLUMN WHICH APPLIES MOST CLOSELY TO HOW YOU IDEALLY WOULD LIKE YOUR FAMILY TO BE. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. THE RIGHT ANSWER IS WHAT YOU WISH FOR IN YOUR FAMILY.

	ALMOST NEVER	ONCE IN A WHILE	SOME- TIMES	FRE- QUENTLY	ALMOST ALWAYS
1. Family members would ask each other for help.					
2. In solving problems, the children's suggestions would be followed.					
3. We would approve of each other's friends.					
4. The children would have a say in their discipline.					
5. Different persons would act as leaders in our family.					
6. We would like to do things with just our immediate family.					
7. Family members would feel closer to other family members than to people outside the family.					
8. Our family would change its way of handling tasks.					
9. Family members would like to spend free time with each other.					
10. Parent(s) and children would discuss punishment together.					
11. Family members would feel very close to each other.					
12. Children would make the decisions in our family.					
13. When our family is together, everybody would be present.					
14. Rules would change in our family.					
15. We could easily think of things to do together as a family.					
16. We would shift household responsibilities from person to person.					
17. Family members would consult other family members on their decisions.					
18. We would know who the leader(s) was in our family.					
19. Family togetherness would be very important.					
20. We could tell who does which household chores.					

(Questionnaire pages 1 & 2 taken from FACES III Marriage & Family Inventory)

Appendix D
Demographic Questionnaire

16. What type of help have you or others utilized?

(Check all that apply)

- Individual Counseling. How many sessions? -----
 ----- Marital counseling. How many sessions? -----
 ----- Family counseling. How many sessions? -----
 ----- Family or couples group. How many sessions? -----
 ----- Other (Explain) -----

17. How well is your current marriage doing? (Check one)

- a.) Very Well ___
 b.) Well enough ___
 c.) So, so ___
 d.) Poorly ___
 e.) Very Poorly ___

18. Concerning stepchildren and discipline, a stepparent should:

- a.) Usually not become involved _____
 b.) Usually support the natural parent's actions but stay out of direct discipline _____
 c.) Usually support the natural parent's actions and help enforce them _____
 d.) Usually share equally with the natural parents disciplinary decisions and enforcement _____

19. How long should a couple be married before the stepparent becomes actively involved in the discipline of the stepchildren? _____

Answer 20 and 21 ONLY if you are a stepparent

20. Concerning stepchildren and discipline, as a stepparent I have:

- a.) Usually not become involved _____
 b.) Usually Supported my spouses actions but stayed out of direct discipline _____
 c.) Usually supported my spouses actions and helped enforce them _____
 d.) Usually shared equally with my spouse disciplinary decisions and enforcement _____

21. How long were you and your present spouse married before you became actively involved in the discipline of your stepchildren?

- a.) Immediately _____
 b.) less than one year _____
 c.) 1-2 years _____
 d.) over 2 years _____
 e.) Never have _____

Please add any comments below or on the back of this sheet you think might be useful in helping us better understand the quality of life and difficulties in the remarried family.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP. YOUR ANSWERS WILL HELP US BETTER UNDERSTAND LIFE IN THE REMARRIED FAMILY.

Adolescent Background Questionnaire

Thank you for providing the following CONFIDENTIAL information that will help us interpret the study results.

1. Your age today is _____ 2. Are you a Male _____ or a Female _____
3. In the place where you live most of the time, do you (check one):
- a.) Live with a mother only _____
 - b.) Live with a mother and a stepfather _____
 - c.) Live with a father only _____
 - d.) Live with a father and a stepmother _____

Does this family include:

- a.) Only natural brothers & sisters _____
- b.) Natural as well as step brothers & sisters _____
- c.) Only step brothers and sisters _____
- d.) Other (Explain) _____

(Example -Grandparents, Aunt, brother, etc)

4. Concerning stepchildren and discipline, a stepparent should:
- a.) Not become involved _____
 - b.) Support the natural parent's actions but stay out of direct discipline _____
 - c.) Support the natural parent's actions and help enforce them _____
 - d.) Share equally with the natural parents disciplinary decisions and enforcement _____
5. Concerning the discipline I receive, my stepparent:
- a.) Usually is not involved _____
 - b.) Usually supports my natural parent's actions but stays out of directly disciplining me _____
 - c.) Usually supports my natural parent's actions and helps enforce them _____
 - d.) Usually shares equally with my natural parent's disciplinary decisions and enforcement _____
 - e.) Usually does most of the disciplining _____
6. Since my parent has remarried I: (Check one)
- a.) Spend more time with my friends _____
 - b.) Spend about the same amount of time with my friends _____
 - c.) Spend less time with my friends _____
7. Since my parent has remarried I: (Check one)
- a.) Go out on dates more often _____
 - b.) Go out on dates about the same amount _____
 - c.) Go out on dates less often _____
 - d.) I don't date _____
8. Since my parent remarried my participation in extracurricular activities has: (Checked one)
- a.) Increased _____
 - b.) Stayed about the same _____
 - c.) Decreased _____
9. Since my parent has remarried my school grades have: (Check one)
- a.) Improved _____
 - b.) Stayed about the same _____
 - c.) Gotten worse _____

10. Since my parent remarried: (Check one)
 a.) I Feel good more often_____
- b.) I Feel down more often_____
- c.) I Feel about the same_____
11. Since my parent remarried: (Check one)
 a.) I have less conflict with him or her_____
- b.) I have more conflict with him or her_____
- c.) I have about the same amount of conflict with him or her_____
12. Since my parent remarried: (Check one)
 a.) I Feel closer to him or her_____
- b.) I Feel more distant from him or her_____
- c.) I Feel about as close as I did before_____
13. I do____ (or) do not_____ get along with my stepparent.
14. I do____ (or) do not_____ respect my stepparent.
15. I am glad____ (or) am not glad ____ my parent married my stepparent.
16. I do____ (or) do not _____ feel close to my stepparent.
17. I do____ (or) do not_____ want to feel closer to my stepparent.
18. How often do you see the natural parent you do not live with:
 a.) Never _____
- b.) Not more than once a year_____
- c.) At least once a year but not more than 3 times a year_____
- d.) Once a month_____
- e.) Twice a month_____
- f.) Once a week_____
- g.) Two or more times each week_____
- a.) My natural parent is deceased_____
- I.) Other (Explain)_____
19. How far do you live from the natural parent you do not live with?
 a.) Less than 5 miles_____
- b.) 5-20 miles_____
- c.) 20-50 miles_____
- d.) 50-100 miles_____
- e.) More than 100 miles_____
20. How well do you get along with your absent parent? (Check one)
 a.) Very well_____
- b.) Fairly well_____
- c.) So-so_____
- d.) Not very well_____
21. I would like to see my absent parent;
 a.) More than I do now_____
- b.) Less than I do now_____
- c.) about the same amount as I do now_____

Please use the back of this page to tell us anything else you think might help us understand what it is like to live in a stepfamily.

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US BETTER UNDERSTAND LIFE IN THE STEPFAMILY.

Appendix E

Follow-up Letter

VIRGINIA TECH

Department of Family and Child Development
College of Human Resources

Wallace Annex
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-8299
(703) 961-4794 or 4795

Dear

Recently a packet of questionnaires was mailed to you as part of the VA TECH Remarriage Study Project. We appreciate your willingness to help us in our efforts to better understand the dynamics of life in the remarried family.

If you have received your packet of information and have not had an opportunity to complete it, could you please take a few minutes and do so. If you have not received the packet, please contact us and another one will be mailed. Our target date for the return of all forms is April 1, 1988, with a project completion date of May 15, 1988. If you have completed and returned your questionnaires, thank you.

During the last week of March we will be calling everyone from whom we have not received a completed questionnaire to make sure they were not lost in the mail. We apologize if this additional phone call in any way inconveniences you. However, since only a limited number of forms were mailed, it is most important that we have as many as possible returned to us.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at my home (379-3209) or my office (648-7839). Again, thank you for sharing with us so that we might be better prepared to help others in the future.

Sincerely,

Bruce C. Prevatt

BCP:dme

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the scanned document**