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YOUNG ADULT PERSPECTIVES ON STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT DURING ADOLESCENCE: THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF SINGLE PARENT FAMILY DYNAMICS WITHIN THE STEPFAMILY

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS in the Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

November 1991

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YOUNG ADULT PERSPECTIVES ON STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT DURING ADOLESCENCE;

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF SINGLE PARENT FAMILY DYNAMICS WITHIN THE STEPFAMILY

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Abstract

This research explored the relationships of the single parent family within the stepfamily. The objective of the study was to assess the effect of the continuity of single parent family relationships upon stepfamily adjustment. Forty-nine female and male post-secondary students completed a questionnaire which addressed changes in family dynamics following the transition to stepfamily living. Students were between 19 and 29 years at the time of participation. All had lived in mother-custody households and had made the transition to stepfamily living during their adolescence. Data were also gathered which measured time in the single parent family, time since remarriage, and the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship in the single parent family. In addition, this research sought to provide data to assist in the further development of the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale.

The persistence of single parent family relationships within the stepfamily was found to be positively associated with stepfamily adjustment as perceived by these young adults. Specifically, the deterioration of the biological parent-child relationship predicted over half the variance in perceived stepfamily adjustment. In addition, the erosion of the adolescent's roles and responsibilities in relation to siblings and household duties proved to be a strong negative influence on perceived stepfamily adjustment. A shift in parental control from the biological parent to the stepparent was also found to exert a negative influence on stepfamily adjustment. Contrary to previous notions of child development, the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship exerted a positive influence on stepfamily adjustment in this study. Time in the single parent family and time since the remarriage did not appear to influence stepfamily adjustment. Equally, demographic variables did not serve to inform stepfamily adjustment as perceived by the respondents. Implications of these results for stepfamily development theory, as well as clinical and educational practice are discussed.
In loving memory of my father
I wish our years together could have been influenced by work such as this.

To my unborn children
I hope they do not become stepchildren. If they do, let it be done with love and with respect for them as unique individuals. As well as the inevitable loss, may they come to experience all the benefits a stepfamily can offer.

And to Dennis, who is the bridge between.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, Drs Mike Manley-Casimir, Elinor Ames and Roy Rodgers for their steadfast support in the face of an unusual project. Especially, I would like to thank Dr Rodgers for speaking the language of stepfamilies with me thereby ending my lonely monologue on this topic.

I am also excedingly grateful to Dr Rodgers for introducing me to the world of stepfamily research in such royal style. I am indebted to Drs Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, Kay Pasely, and Marilyn Ihinger-Tallman for their time and patience while I struggled to articulate my own experience in empirical terms. I am especially thankful to Dr Margaret Crosbie-Burnett for her pioneering work in creating the Stepfamily Assessment Scale.

I would also like to thank all the students who participated in this research. Their willingness to take part made this work possible. I was deeply touched by their life stories, so generously shared with me.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes out to Alison Van Buuren who volunteered to be my research assistant and who provided invaluable help and support during the data collection. Thank you also to Kevin Akins for gentle instruction and tutelage in the finer points of Macintosh use, often in the face of deadlines and soaring anxiety.

Last but not least I would like to thank Carolyn for her unwavering companionship and support throughout this adventure. I am also tremendously grateful to Pindy for her irresistible good humour and enthusiasm during the final leg of the journey.
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PREFACE

Graduate school presented me with the opportunity to ask a question and to pursue an answer. Without a doubt my greatest mystery had been the why's and wherefore's of my own family. By the age of nineteen I had been a part of three stepfamilies. This was long before I had begun to contemplate marrying or having children of my own.

Consequently, my question is about stepfamilies. Some of the experiences of stepfamily living have enhanced my life and have given me gifts from which I continue to benefit. Other experiences were extremely painful; these too, linger on. And yet, whether joyous or painful, these experiences have always been very difficult to communicate to others. Then, as now, the more I explained, the more bewildered my listeners became.

As a society, we lack a general understanding of this creature 'the stepfamily'. We are without a common knowledge base to consult when considering how these complex groups of people interact. What is 'normal'? What is predictable? What does one have the right to? What must one give up? Who decides which is which?

This study is my first attempt to formally articulate the critical components of stepfamily formation from an adolescent and young adult perspective. There are of course, many perspectives, each represented by its own questions and answers. Here are my questions and my answers.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This research addresses parental guidelines for stepfamily formation in cases where adolescent stepchildren are involved. This study attempts to identify critical elements for stepfamily adjustment from the point of view of young adults who became stepchildren during their teen years. This chapter provides a brief overview of the main topics germane to this study. Issues presented in this chapter are: (a) demographic information, (b) empirical findings and clinical observations, (c) parenthood in the stepfamily, (d) a new proposal for stepfamily development, and (e) a brief description of the current study. Each of these topics will be examined more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

1.1 Demographics

The rapid changes in the patterns of family life in western culture have attracted great interest from contemporary scholars. Although second and third marriages are not unique to the twentieth century (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987; Levin, 1990), the context in which they occur has changed dramatically. Divorce overtook death as the event preceding remarriage in the 1940s for men and the 1950s for women (Glick, 1980). The rates of divorce have risen rapidly and have levelled off. The remarriage rate, however, has continued to rise (Glick, 1989). With remarried families representing an ever-increasing segment of our population, the living arrangements of children have also changed dramatically.

Demographers struggle with often inadequate census material to give us estimates of the numbers of children living in remarried families. Hernandez (1988) concludes that "it seems that between one-third and one-half of all [American] children born around 1980 will eventually spend at least one year in a two-parent family including a stepfather" (p. 4). Glick (1989) describes the American trends and suggests that if one disregards age and place of residence, "it seems reasonable to speculate that well over half of today's young
people in the United States may become stepsons and stepdaughters by the year 2000" (p. 25).

The patterns of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in Canada reflect similar patterns but at a lower frequency. The most recent Canadian divorce statistics, based on 1984-1986 rates, predict that 4 out of every 10 Canadians will divorce (Statistics Canada, 1990b). These projections suggest that 75% of divorced men and 66% of divorced women will remarry. Although the number of Canadian children who become stepchildren each year could not be found, Canadian Health Reports (Statistics Canada, 1990b) state that the number of children whose parents are divorced has risen from roughly 20,000 per year in 1969 to nearly 60,000 per year in 1988.

1.2. Empirical Findings and Clinical Observations

Currently, the field of research in remarried families is conceptually divided. Historically, the generally accepted view of the family has been uniquely defined by the nuclear family model (Clingempeel, Flescher, & Brand, 1987; Ganong & Coleman, 1984). Although not supported by historical accounts of our ancestors (Furstenberg, 1987; Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987), this model has been called the 'traditional' model. Early work on remarriage families also used the nuclear family model as the definition of the 'normal family' (Clingempeel et al., 1987). Comparisons were made between the nuclear and the remarriage family on a number of points such as children's IQ and school performance, as well as the psychological adjustment of the family members. Although much research was done, few significant or consistent results were found to support the hypothesis that family structure affected these variables (Ganong & Coleman, 1984). This approach is now referred to as the "deficit-comparison approach ... The primary assumption underlying this approach is that variations from the 'intact' nuclear family (e.g., stepfamilies) produce undesirable effects on children" (Ganong & Coleman, 1984, p. 96). Therefore the remarriage environment was implicitly assumed to be deficient.
In the last two decades, researchers have become aware of this conceptual bias and have begun to highlight the distinctions, both in structure and in process, between the nuclear and remarriage family (Clingempeel et al., 1987; Dahl, Cowgill, & Asmundson, 1987). They argue that the conceptualization of the remarriage family must include concepts from the remarriage family form itself. Failing to do so corrupts our vision and biases our results. One researcher described this as trying to get a big woman into a small dress. It will never fit no matter how hard we try (I. Levin, personal communication, Sept. 1990). Another likened it to comparing apples and oranges and criticizing the oranges because they are not very red (M. Crosbie-Burnett, personal communication, Sept. 1990).

There are many critical structural differences between the two family forms. These differences clearly demonstrate that the remarriage family is structurally distinct from the nuclear family and as a result, the two family structures, like apples and oranges, are not comparable.

In the nuclear family, the spousal unit (husband and wife) is identical to the parental unit (mom and dad). The spousal unit grows in an evolutionary fashion from courtship to marriage. Generally the parental unit develops second (unwed mothers excepted) and also in a gradual fashion. In the nuclear family the relationship in the spousal unit predates the relationships between the parents and their children. The relationship between the adults in the nuclear family also holds the decision making power in the family. The 'family' relationships in the nuclear family are contained within the household. Family membership is synonymous with household membership.

In the remarriage family, the spousal unit (custodial parent and new spouse) is only 50% of the parental unit (mom and dad). The remaining 50% may be down the street, across town, or across the country. Like the nuclear family, the spousal unit grows from courtship to remarriage. In contrast, however, this takes place in the presence of children from the first marriage who may have highly ambivalent feelings about the new relationship. In this case the spousal unit is predated by the parental unit and by the single
parent family. All family members have experienced the divorce process except possibly the new spouse who has married for the first time. Change is characterized by sudden, often unexpected events rather than a gradual evolutionary process. In addition, the custodial parent and children have experienced living in a single parent household which may have profoundly altered and influenced the parent-child relationships. The decision making in the family now includes the current spousal unit (custodial and non-custodial parents) and the former spousal unit (the parental unit). This may result in decision making being distributed among 2 or 3 households. 'Family' relationships now cross over into 2 or 3 households. Family membership is not synonymous with household membership.

Clearly, the nuclear family and the remarriage families have many critical differences. Thus, the nuclear family model is desperately inadequate to describe the remarriage experience. However, efforts to describe the remarriage experience accurately have proven to be far more difficult than one might assume. Here again the literature is divided (Ganong & Coleman, 1986). Researchers report that many families seem to be making successful transitions to remarried families and that (as mentioned above) no significant differences in outcome have been found. Clinicians, however, have described complex and emotionally damaging consequences of divorce and remarriage. The literature contributed by clinicians has stressed the difficulties faced by these families and the emotional trauma involved in the transition from nuclear to remarriage families. Attempts to synthesize these two bodies of literature has led reviewers to liken it to "a case of the 'blind men and the elephant' with researchers and clinicians describing what they found to be true about the 'elephant' but neither description sounding like they were examining the same animal" (Ganong & Coleman, 1987, p. 94).

Nevertheless, it is possible to conceptualize the existing literature in a way that reveals the complementarity of these seemingly contradictory perspectives. Assuming that both researchers and clinicians are right, one is led to conclude that there is extreme diversity in the experience of divorce and remarriage. Some families or family members
experience extreme distress during the transitions and others, experiencing some stress in the short term, seem to recover and proceed to establish nurturing, safe family environments for family members whatever the new structure.

The experience of the transition from nuclear family to stepfamily could be conceptualized as a normal distribution along a continuum. The few families who experience extreme distress are described by the clinical literature and found at one end of the continuum. At the opposite end of the continuum, we find the equally few families who experience extreme relief followed by an immediate improvement in the quality of family life. The families who struggle through a difficult situation and eventually re-establish a nurturing family life represent the majority of cases and lie in the middle zone of the continuum.

What then are the guidelines for remarried families? Given that the nuclear model can no longer be our guide, what are the characteristics of the well adjusted remarriage family? Which characteristics predict outcomes at different points along the continuum? Research and theory are currently proposing new ideas for remarriage families and those who work with them. Nowhere do these new models confront our implicit assumptions about what constitutes a 'real' family more than for the issue of parenting in the remarriage family.

1.3 Parenthood

Researchers (Cherlin, 1977; Dahl et al., 1987; Messinger & Walker, 1981) and clinicians (Mills, 1984; Vischer & Vischer, 1978) agree that the primary source of difficulty in the remarriage family is how to parent the children from the first marriage appropriately. Divorce rates are higher for remarried couples with custody of children from the previous marriage. Custodial parents and their new partners, along with their children, report tremendous difficulty sorting out the new and the old relationships in the remarriage context. Adolescents are considered as the most problematic age group by both clinicians (Mills, 1984; Sager, Brown, Crohn, Engel, Rodstein, & Walker, 1983; Vischer & Vischer,
1978) and researchers (Duberman, 1975; White & Booth, 1985). Adolescent stepchildren leave home earlier than children in nuclear families (White & Booth, 1985) and run the greatest risk of being excluded from the stepfamily (Sager et al., 1983).

An important consideration for the remarriage family is the time spent in the single parent family. (The single parent family is not an element in nuclear family development.) For the members of the single parent family, a relationship that is more peer-like in quality often develops between the adolescent and the custodial parent resulting in a 'promotion' of the adolescent to pseudo partner, confidante and decision-maker for the custodial parent (Glenwick & Mowrey, 1986). Thus, for the adolescent, the remarriage results in a loss of the special relationship with the custodial parent and a 'demotion' to child status (Keshet, 1980).

The dominance of the nuclear family model has encouraged conceptual constraints concerning parenting in the remarried family. Indeed, the remarriage family is often diametrically opposed to the nuclear family. Researchers have demonstrated that in a remarriage, contrary to the nuclear family model, steprelations are more predictive of family happiness than the marital relationship (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984). Clinicians observe that the custodial parent-child bond is much stronger than the spousal relationship at the point of remarriage (Visher & Visher, 1988). The parent-child relationships continue to be stronger than steprelations many years post remarriage (Anderson & White, 1986). Again, in contrast to the nuclear family model, this is characteristic of FUNCTIONAL remarriage families. (Anderson & White, 1986).

The process of parenting the adolescent in remarried families profoundly challenges the nuclear family model. In spite of the significant differences between the two family forms, many adhere to the nuclear family model stating that to act otherwise would demonstrate that they were not a 'real' family (Clingempeel et al., 1987; Ganong & Coleman, 1987). This is encouraged by the persistent myth that 'instant love' will appear in the steprelations. However, a more realistic view is that even though the custodial
parent's new partner is now a member of the family household and as such a participant in the intimate life of the children, these relationships have not yet been formed. Those involved in steprelations are "relative strangers" (Beer, 1988) and are now confronted with the task of getting to know each other within the intimate context of the family.

1.4 New Proposals

Researchers, clinicians, and those developing models for stepfamily development now suggest that the parental role for the new spouse may be inappropriate particularly for adolescents. Further, to assume that the marriage confers parental status on the new spouse is a "precipitous assumption" (Mills, 1984, p. 371) that hampers the development of genuine relationships in the remarriage family. Unlike the nuclear family, the parental and spousal units are not identical and therefore the "separation of spousal and parental roles is the basic task in the coparental relationship" (Crosbie-Burnett & Ahrons, 1985, p. 130). They propose that the new couple consider the needs and personalities of the family members and consciously try on other roles such as aunt/uncle, mentor, adult friend, teacher, coach, etc. (Mills, 1984; Crosbie-Burnett & Ahrons, 1985; Papernow, 1988).

Rather than attempt to recreate the nuclear family structure, stepfamily educators advise the remarriage family to respect the strong bonds of the biological family (Papernow, 1988). As such, the custodial parent does not relinquish, delegate or abdicate parenting responsibilities to the new spouse. Mills (1984) proposes from therapeutic and educational work with stepfamilies that the single parent family structure can be augmented by a new adult. However, Mills proposes that the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the single parent family remain within the stepfamily, particularly where adolescents are concerned (Mills, 1984). Specifically, the parent should maintain exclusive authority over decision making for the biological children.

Eventually intimate relationships may develop between the custodial parent's new partner and the adolescent children. However, the new spouse may not be accepted as a parent but rather as an intimate outsider; one who cares deeply for the young person but
who is not as emotionally tied to them. In this way the new spouse has added a new kind of relationship to the family system; one that can often provide the young person a place to discuss issues that may not be acceptable to the parents precisely because of the emotional intensity of the parent-child bond (Papernow, 1988). Equally, those adolescents who are compatible with the new spouse are free to develop an intimate relationship with them while those who are not compatible are also free to NOT develop an intimate relationship with the new spouse. In this way the ambiguity which acts to confuse and complicate the problems of transition to remarried family life can be redefined as the flexibility which facilitates creative problem solving which then enhances the possibility that the needs of all the family members can be met.

1.5 The Present Study

Objective

The objective of the present research is to explore parenthood in stepfamilies from the perspective of college-age stepchildren. This research will provide empirical data concerning their perspectives on the association between stepfamily adjustment and the continuity of single parent family functioning within the stepfamily. Data concerning the association between stepfamily adjustment and the shift of parental control to the new spouse will also be collected.

This study will answer research questions that seek to define guidelines for parents and their new partners in order to enhance the sense of adjustment of adolescents and young adults in remarriage families. This will assist us for two reasons:

(1) The level of family happiness is predicted to a greater degree by steprelations than by marital relations. Thus resolution of this problem may have a direct impact on the level of family happiness.

(2) Adjustment in remarriage families with adolescents has been identified to be the most problematic and therefore central to successful remarriage family transitions.
This research also seeks to contribute to the development of the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale (SAS) (Crosbie-Burnett, unpublished). This scale has undergone two series of testing with populations in the American mid-west. This study will provide data from a Canadian west coast population to function as a comparison to the data already collected.

**Research Questions**

1. Is the continuity of single parent family functioning positively associated with the young adults' sense of adjustment in the new family?
2. Are assumptions of parental control by the new spouse negatively associated with the young adults' sense of adjustment?
3. How are the relationships between the dependent variable (stepfamily adjustment) and the independent variables (continuity of the single parent family dynamics and the assumption of parental control by the stepparent) affected by: (a) the length of time in the single parent family, (b) the length of time in the stepfamily, and (c) the peer-like quality of the relationship between the custodial parent and child during the single parent family?

**Definition of Key Terms**

1. Stepfamily - a family in which one spouse has children from a previous union. The current couple may be married or in a common-law relationship.
2. Remarried family - synonymous with stepfamily.
3. Single parent family - a family in which there is one residential parent as a result of divorce or separation.
4. Custodial parent - the biological parent who has at least 50% custody of their adolescent child(ren). For the purpose of this study, the biological parent is also the custodial parent unless otherwise stated.
5. New spouse - the new marriage/relationship partner.
6. Spousal unit - the wife and husband who are currently married to each other or are in a long term committed relationship with each other.
7. Parental unit - the biological parents of the children.

8. Parenting - limit-setting and decision making for a child or adolescent by an adult within the family context (Mills, 1984).

9. Family membership - those individuals who are considered to be 'family'. This may vary among members of the same family.

10. Household membership - those individuals who reside, primarily, in the same residence.

11. Extrusion - when a remarriage family system forms in such a way that a biological child of a remarried parent is no longer considered a member of the family (Sager et al., 1983).

Variables

1. Dependent variable - Stepfamily Adjustment. The young adult's perception of cohesion, happiness and self-efficacy in the stepfamily currently.

2. Independent variables.
   a). Continuity of the Single parent Family Dynamics. Adolescent perceptions of the continuity of single parent family dynamics within the stepfamily (including rituals, roles, responsibilities and relationships of the single parent family).
   b). Assumption of parental role by the new spouse. The degree to which the young adult perceives the new spouse to assume a parental role in the dynamics of the single parent family within the stepfamily.

3. Contingency variables.
   a). Time in the single parent family.
   b). Time since the remarriage (or decision to commit to a long term relationship).
   c). The degree of peer-like quality of the relationship between custodial parent and child during the single parent family.
Sample

The sample will consist of college-age young adults. The participants will be volunteers from post-secondary institutions.

The subjects will be adult children of mother custody homes whose mother remarried or made a commitment to a long term live-in relationship when the subject was between the ages of 13 and 19. (Due to the small number of father custody households, this study will be limited to mother custody households only.)

Method

The participants will be administered questionnaires concerning:

1. Demographic information (including time of divorce and remarriage/common-law commitment).
2. Their experience of current stepfamily adjustment.
3. Their perception of the continuity of single parent family dynamics within the stepfamily and the assumption of the parental role by their mother's new partner.
4. Their perception of the peer-like quality of the relationship with their mother during the single parent family.

Limitations

The sample will include young adult children of custodial mothers and will not include young adult children of custodial fathers. Unfortunately, the frequency of custodial fathers in the population is so low that a balanced design consisting of a group of custodial fathers equal in number to a group custodial mothers is not within the scope of this study. Therefore, the conclusions will primarily address mother-custody families.

The sample will consist of volunteers from post-secondary institutions. This will impose two types of limitations. First, those who volunteer may not represent the entire population but only those of the population who are interested in volunteering. Second, those attending post secondary institutions are not representative of all young adult children.
The study will examine the remarriage from only the perspective of the young adult who became a stepchild during adolescence. Other members of the family will not be asked to participate. Multiple perspectives are not within the scope of this study.

The measures used are self-report instruments. Observations of the participants by others will not be collected.

Although some of the instruments that will be used have been tested for validity and reliability, some measures are based on new research and theory. These measures can only offer face validity. They represent topics on the cutting edge of this field and therefore must rely on the logical interpretation of clinical and theoretical developments if these concepts are to be developed.

1.6 Organization Of Thesis

This thesis begins with the abstract which provides a very brief account of the hypotheses tested and summarizes the results which support or fail to support the hypotheses.

Chapter 1 provides the conceptual background to the problem and guides the reader to the statement of the problem. The methods are briefly reviewed, definitions of terms provided, the limitations of the design of the study discussed and the organization of the thesis presented.

Chapter 2 consists of the literature review. This chapter contains a review of the literature relevant to the hypotheses presented. This includes empirical findings as well as clinical and theoretical considerations germane to the topic. The focus of the project is distilled from this review. The chapter concludes with a concise statement of the problem.

Chapter 3 describes and discusses the method of data collection for the thesis. Justification for the measures and methods is provided. Problems encountered during the course of the project are accounted for.
Chapter 4 contains the process and results of the statistical analysis. It is determined if the findings are supportive or not supportive of the hypotheses. The findings are discussed in detail.

Chapter 5 provides the final chapter of the thesis. In this chapter, the conclusions drawn from the study are presented. The limitations of the project are discussed along with possible generalizations permitted by the findings. The implications for application to the clinical domain are explored. Insights into possible contributions to the theory of stepfamily development are also presented as well as implications for the practice of stepfamily guidance and education.
CHAPTER 2
Literature Review

The clinical, developmental, and research literature relevant to this research is presented in ten sections. The review begins with demographic information followed by a brief look at the stepfamily from an historical perspective. This leads to the current debate in the literature concerning stepfamily development and adjustment. The developmental process of the nuclear family and stepfamily are examined. Parenthood in the stepfamily is then generally discussed followed by a detailed examination of parenting in the single parent family. The divergent experiences of the transition to stepfamily living for different family members is then explored. Incorporating the information presented to this point, roles and relationships in the stepfamily are summarized. A new model of stepfamily development is advanced. The literature review concludes with a statement of the research.

2.1 Demographic Information

There have been dramatic changes in the patterns of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the American and Canadian cultures in the past 40 years. The pattern of marriage as a life-long commitment appears to be changing to one of conjugal succession. Although American trends appear to be more extreme, Canadian patterns are similar. The American statistics, presented in great variety and detail, dominate the academic literature. Therefore, demographics from the United States will be used as a guide, with equivalent Canadian demographics presented whenever possible.

The American divorce rate increased from 1 divorce per 1,000 women in 1860 to 22.8 in 1979 (Hernandez, 1988). Remarriage rates rose until 1970 at which time these rates decreased and continued to decrease into the 1980s (Glick, 1989). In the United States in 1984, of all those in their thirties in 1980, 90% were married, 24% had divorced, 16% had remarried, and 3% had experienced redivorce (Glick, 1984). Glick (1984) projects in this population 45% will divorce, 33% will remarry, and 20% will redivorce.
The living arrangements of children have been affected by these trends. The proportion of American children living in a single parent family was 9% in 1960 but rose to 19% by 1987 (Hernandez, 1988). In 1987, 21.3% of American children lived in remarried families; 12.7% were stepchildren (Glick, 1989).

The Canadian picture, although much less detailed or well analyzed, demonstrates similar trends at a lower incidence. The rate of divorce for married Canadian women 15 and over has also risen; from less than 2 per 1,000 in 1952 to nearly 12 per 1,000 in 1982 (Statistics Canada, 1986). In Canada, as in the United States, the greatest rate of divorce is seen in the group in their 30s in 1980.

The most recent Canadian divorce statistics, based on the 1984 - 1986 rates, predict that 4 out of every 10 Canadians will divorce before their eightieth birthday and that "3 of every 4 divorced men and 2 of every 3 divorced women will remarry" (Statistics Canada, 1990b, p. 65). Although future estimates are vulnerable to unforeseen changes in social conditions, these projections indicate that the phenomenon of divorce will affect a substantial number of Canadians.

Statistics Canada (1990c) reports that in 1988, 20% of women and 21% of men marrying had previously been divorced. The number of adults who have raised stepchildren has increased in nearly every age category for both men and women since 1984 with the greatest increase (from 7% to 10%) for men 40 years - 49 years (Statistics Canada, 1990a). The General Social Survey (Statistics Canada, 1990a) indicates that 763,000 Canadian adults have raised stepchildren.

A somewhat different pattern concerning the living arrangements of children is evident in Canada than in the United States. The number of Canadian children per year whose parents have divorced has risen from 20,119 in 1969 to 59,436 in 1988 (Statistics Canada, 1990b, p. 58). However, while the percentage of children living in a single parent family has actually decreased slightly between 1931 and 1981, the number of children has increased substantially from 291,943 to 714,010 (Statistics Canada, 1986). At the time of
this writing, the number of Canadian stepchildren could not be found. The Family History Survey (Statistics Canada, 1985) indicates that male respondents reported 4.5% of the children raised were stepchildren and female respondents reported 2.2% were stepchildren. The 17 - 20 year old group seemed the most prevalent with 6.8% of children raised for the men and 3.1% for the women.

Given the rapid change in this area, demographers remind us that data may become dated very quickly (Furstenberg, 1988). Equally, there are many who remain uncounted. Children who have a stepparent in a common-law relationship with the custodial parent or who have a stepparent living with the non-custodial parent are not represented (Crosbie-Burnett & Skyles, 1989). Equally, single parents who share parenting with a member of the extended family or with a homosexual partner are not counted.

American demographers (Glick, 1989; Hernandez, 1988) estimate that the incidence of stepparent relationships may be far more immense than the numbers indicate. Glick (1989) suggests that "well over one half of today's young persons in the United States may become stepsons or stepdaughters by the year 2000" (p. 25). Although the incidence of divorce and remarriage is lower in Canada than in the United States, the Canadian trends follow those documented south of the border. Clearly divorce and remarriage are exerting a strong influence on the patterns of family life in Canada today.

2.2 Historical Perspective on the Nuclear Family and Stepfamily

While patterns of marriage, divorce, and remarriage are changing, current attitudes regarding these changes seem founded on popular misconceptions of the past. Current views seem plagued by a nostalgia for the nuclear family that is based more on a fantasy of the 'good old days' than historical fact. High mortality rates, illness, and economic uncertainty resulted in a lower proportion of nuclear families in 1850 than in 1950 in America (Uhlenberg in Furstenberg, 1987). Contemporary remarriage rates are very similar to those of the 17th and 18th century at which time 20% - 30% of marriages were second or third marriages. The principal difference is that death rather than divorce was the
reason for the termination of the first marriage (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987). The number of remarriages following divorce exceeded those following the death of a spouse for the first time in American history in 1940 for men and 1950 for women (Glick, 1980).

The length of marriages today has much in common with those of the 17th and 18th century. In 1785 the average length of marriage was 7 years. In the US today, the average length of time between marriage and divorce is also 7 years (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987). Although these two statistics describe somewhat different categories, they suggest similarities in the length of marriage during these two periods of history that are not commonly acknowledged.

Living arrangements for children in the 17th century were not as stable as is popularly thought. Fully one quarter of children had lost one or both parents by age 5, 50% by age 13 and 70% by age 21 (Fox & Quitt cited in Ihinger-Tallman, 1987).

Clearly, demographic and historical information demonstrates that the nuclear family was not as prevalent in the past as is typically assumed. The nuclear family is not the unanimous 'traditional' family handed down to us by generations of our ancestors in the 'good old days'. In fact, it is more accurate to suggest that the second marriage family has always played a substantial role in our communities.

The principal difference is that now marriages are generally terminated by choice rather than by the death of a spouse. Consequently, our current challenge is to learn to adjust to a vast and complex network of biological and stepkin who are very much alive and often living nearby. Researchers, clinicians, and educators have only just begun to address the multitude of contemporary stepfamily concerns.

2.3 Current Debate

Deficit Comparison Approach

Although a recent and short term phenomenon, the nuclear family was adopted by early stepfamily researchers as "the standard by which all other family forms should be compared" while alternate family forms were considered "abnormal and may engender
negative outcomes for family members" (Clingempeel et al., 1987, p. 231). For research in stepfamily issues, the result has been a "deficit comparison approach" (Ganong & Coleman, 1984) which assumes that stepchildren live in a deficient family environment. The primary assumption underlying this approach is that "variations from the 'intact' nuclear family (e.g., stepfamilies) produce undesirable effects on children" (Ganong & Coleman, 1987, p. 96). Although recent research strongly challenges the deficit-comparison approach, the nuclear family is still included as a comparison group in nearly half the studies reported since 1983 (Ganong & Coleman, 1987).

Clinicians and researchers have not reached agreement on the nature of stepfamilies. The clinical literature describes in great detail the problematic issues plaguing stepfamilies (Carter & McGoldrick (Eds.), 1988; Ransom, Schlesinger, & Derdyn, 1979; Visher & Visher, 1978, 1988). The research literature, however, in spite of the nuclear family bias, has not been successful in demonstrating consistent significant differences between stepchildren and children from other family structures on such variables as "school grades, academic achievement, field independence, IQ, psychosomatic symptoms, personality characteristics, social behavior, family relationships, marriage attitudes, etc." (Ganong & Coleman, 1984, p. 390).

The Stepfamily as Structurally Distinct From the Nuclear Family

More recently, stepfamily researchers have begun to recognize the inequities supported by the assumptions that the stepfamily must fit into the nuclear family model. In an effort to liberate the stepfamily from the confines of the nuclear family ideology, many have described the structural distinctiveness of the stepfamily (Clingempeel et al., 1987; Crosbie-Burnett, 1985, 1989; Crosbie-Burnett & Skyles, 1989; Esses & Campbell, 1984; Gross, 1986; Levin, 1990; Mills, 1984; Papernow, 1987, 1988; Robinson, 1980; Walker & Messinger, 1979).

Clingempeel et al. (1987) list six structural differences between nuclear families and stepfamilies. They point out that the stepfamily members have had experiences not inherent
in the nuclear family structure such as: previous losses leading up to the formation of the stepfamily; biological parents living in two different households; the single parent household experienced by the child and biological parent; parent-child relationships that predate the new marital relationship; and a more complex network of stepkin and quasi-kin.

Among the discriminating factors, a lack of clarity concerning roles seems paramount. Messinger (1976) notes that the residual roles and responsibilities of the first marriage are added to the roles and responsibilities of the second to produce a confusing situation of role overload. She adds that:

North American society has not yet assigned status to the family of remarriage with a model that recognizes the differences in roles and function between members of a first marriage family and members of a remarriage family. (p. 195)

Cherlin (1978) contrasts the lack of institutional supports for the stepfamily with the implicit social support available to nuclear families. Levin (unpublished) confirms this lack of institutional support and adds that without a clear description of roles, it is difficult for stepfamily members to know how to deal with new situations.

Mills (1984) concludes that in the absence of clearly defined and accepted roles for stepfamily members, "most stepfamilies (and many professionals) base their notions of expected roles on models of the biological nuclear family" (p. 365). In the vacuum of socially sanctioned roles for the stepfamily, they attempt to recreate the original biological family.

The strength of the nuclear family model is prodigious. In spite of historical evidence, considerable current information, and often painful personal experience to the contrary, the nuclear family is steadfastly considered the 'real' or 'normal' family. Only recently have some professionals working with the complexities of stepfamily living disengaged from the terms of reference of the nuclear family model and begun to see the stepfamily in its own light.
2.4 Developmental Processes of the Nuclear Family and Stepfamily

Although a conclusive theory for stepfamily development is still elusive (Ihinger-Tallman, 1984), the profound differences between the nuclear family and the stepfamily are easy to observe by noting the basic steps in their respective developmental processes.

**Nuclear Family Development**

There is general agreement (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988; Sager et al., 1983; Schulman, 1981) that the developmental process of the nuclear family can be loosely described as: (1) marriage, (2) the birth of children, (3) the individuation of children, (4) the actual departure of the children, and (5) the integration of loss. In the biological family, change is experienced in an evolutionary way. Changes take place over time, thereby building confidence in the family members in their ability to adapt to change. Mutual bonds develop as members see similar patterns of change in other families.

**Stepfamily Development**

Schulman (1981) provides a developmental framework for the establishment of the stepfamily which assumes the completion of at least the first two steps of the nuclear family model. Schulman separates the process into three basic tasks:

1. the completion of the divorce process, including coming to a decision to separate and file for divorce, dissolving the marital relationship, and recognizing that parenthood is a non-divorceable item,

2. the establishment of the single parent family,

3. the creation of the stepfamily.

The stepfamily experiences change that is due to events rather than evolution. They are often abrupt and may seem unpredictable.

McGoldrick and Carter (1988) add to Schulman's model by introducing the idea of "prerequisite attitudes" (p. 22, 24) necessary to make the emotional transition from one stage to the next, in the stepfamily developmental process. They suggest that the emotional impact of the divorce will be rekindled at each step of the remarriage life cycle. "Failure to
deal sufficiently with the process at each peak may jam it enough to prevent remarried family stabilization from ever occurring" (p. 408). Remarriage involves the "interweaving of three, four, or more families, whose previous family life cycle course has been disrupted by death or divorce. ...So complex is the process whereby the remarried family system stabilizes and regains its forward developmental thrust that we think of this process as adding another whole phase to the family life cycle for those involved" (1988, p. 399).

Sager et al. (1983) provides the most detailed description. Building on earlier work of Carter and McGoldrick they propose 'multiple tracks'. They suggest that the "precursor to remarriage has been the disruption in all three life cycles: individual, marital, and family" (p. 45). They propose that the remarriage represents a new life cycle that is added to the existing nuclear family life cycles, thereby creating multiple life cycle tracks evolving simultaneously. Sager et al. maintain that the nuclear family cycle is not replaced but augmented. Using the hypothetical case of Amy Greenson, they demonstrate the multi-track developmental process as she separates from her family of origin, marries and has children, separates from her husband and divorces, lives as a single parent and remarries. Her second marriage is now at the beginning of a new life cycle while her family from her first marriage carries on in its life cycle completion.

Other authors (Goldner, 1982; Visher & Visher, 1982) have observed conflicting developmental stages in stepfamilies. Goldner (1982) describes the remarriage family as faced with a seemingly impossible situation in which the members must accomplish the tasks of family formation simultaneously with dealing with issues of a family much further along in the family cycle.

They must operate as if they had developed the complex inner structure of a family who has been together as least as long as the age of the oldest child while actually possessing only the rudimentary structures of a family just starting out. (p. 196)
Goldner (1982) refers to this situation, as one with "contradictory trajectories" (p. 196), where the needs of the individual are at odds with the needs of the family. Goldner suggests that this:

contradiction is most severe in remarried families who come together when their children are teenagers. At this juncture, the maturational tasks of adolescence, which involve challenging the family culture and beginning the process of separation from it, are in direct conflict with the developmental tasks of the new family, who must pull together precisely to create that culture.(p. 196)

Visher and Visher (1982) also explain the difficulty facing stepfamilies which form when children are teenagers. Their clinical experience leads them to note that teenage behavior, which is appropriate to the teenagers who are in the process of separation from their family, may be misinterpreted by the adults as it is perceived through their newlywed lenses. They observe that "teenagers are not motivated to become cooperative family members in a new family unit when they are already in the process of separating" (p. 116). Visher and Visher suggest that forcing the teenagers to conform to the needs of the newly remarried couple can actively encourage resistance.

Single parent Family Development

Although most of the developmental models presented here acknowledge the single parent family, they do not explore the unique characteristics of this stage of stepfamily development. Extensive work in this area is provided by Weiss (1979) in Going It Alone. Here he describes the results of interviews conducted at the Laboratory of Community Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School. Weiss maintains that single parent families can often demonstrate different dynamics than the nuclear family including greater intensity in the relationship between parent and child and the weakening of the generational boundaries. (Weiss' work is discussed in greater depth in section 2.6.)

However one describes the developmental process leading up to the remarriage family, many of the assumptions from the nuclear family are no longer appropriate. The
spousal unit in the remarried family (custodial parent and new spouse) is no longer made up of the biological parents. In the remarriage family, relationships between the parent and biological child predate the spousal relationship and may have been profoundly altered by the single parent family experience. Decision making in the remarriage family may be distributed between 2, 3, or even 4 households. All those who are considered family are no longer living in one household. In fact, exactly who is considered 'family' is likely vastly different among stepfamily members.

Given that the stepfamily has been described as structurally distinct from the nuclear family, what are the developmental guidelines appropriate for the stepfamily? Theoreticians and clinicians are currently proposing as yet untested possibilities for remarriage families and those who work with them. The implicit assumptions of what constitutes a 'real' family are strongly confronted when it comes to the issue of parenting.

2.5 Perspectives on Parenthood in the Stepfamily

Parenting and the appropriate relationships between the new spouse, custodial parent, and stepchild have received considerable attention in the research literature (Anderson & White, 1986; Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Amato, 1987; Brand & Clingempeel et al., 1987; Cherlin, 1978; Crosbie-Burnett, 1984; Dahl et al., 1987; Duberman, 1975; Fine, 1986; Furstenberg, 1987; Gross, 1986; Levin, unpublished; Lutz, 1983; White & Booth, 1985). These studies have provided the beginning of our empirical knowledge of the complexities of parenting in stepfamilies.

One of the main observations of these researchers is the unexpected complexity of the relationships in stepfamilies (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Amato, 1987; Brand & Clingempeel, 1987; Cherlin, 1978; Dahl et al., 1987). Often the results depend on which family member answered the questions. Adults seem to find parental involvement by the new spouse as desirable (Dahl et al., 1987; Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987), while children seem to have a negative perception of stepparents (Amato, 1987; Fine, 1986; Furstenberg,
1987) and feel acute loyalty issues when developing an attachment for the new spouse (Lutz, 1983).

Dahl et al. (1987) looked at a nonclinical sample and found that good parenting abilities were mentioned frequently by both men and women in discussing criteria for selecting a new partner. Ahrons and Wallisch (1987) also studied stepfamilies in a nonclinical sample and found that, for the adults involved in the stepfamilies, a high degree of involvement between the new spouse and the stepchildren was desirable with one third wishing the new spouse would be more involved. Equally, Ahrons and Wallisch (1987), found that one third of the new spouses wished to be more involved. It is interesting to note that the children were not interviewed but that their perceptions were inferred on the basis of whether the child called the new spouse "Dad". This method of measurement supports the notion that the appropriate role for the new spouse is to replace the absentee father and that other roles, such as coach, mentor, uncle, are not relevant.

On the other hand, when stepchildren are asked directly, their answers do not support father replacement. When primary aged and adolescent stepchildren were asked about their stepfather, stepfathers were said to "provide less support, control, and punishment than biological fathers" (Amato, 1987, p. 327). College-aged students echoed these attitudes in a study by Fine (1986). These students perceived stepparents more negatively than biological parents. While students from stepfamilies were less stereotyped in their responses, their attitudes toward stepparents were also more negative than toward biological parents. Lutz (1983) in her research with 12 - 18 year olds, found that these adolescents were acutely sensitive to loyalty issues involving their biological parents and stepparents. Furstenberg (1987), after reviewing data from the American 'National Survey of Children', found that "there are huge disparities in children's feelings toward step and biological parents. Parents and their non-biological children alike report less intimacy" (p. 54).
The nuclear family and associated parenting model is also not supported when members of remarriage families are asked how they see themselves (Gross, 1986; Keshet, 1988; Levin, unpublished). In fact, not only is the nuclear family model not the unanimous choice, but it is not even the majority in each of the studies found in the literature.

Gross (1986) surveyed 60 adolescents aged 16 - 18 years old in remarried families where the two living biological parents were divorced and at least one had remarried. She asked her participants to list the members of their family. A typology of four, mutually exclusive types were delineated. In only one type was the nuclear family model found. Gross named this group 'substitution', a situation in which the stepparent is included in the family group but the non-custodial parent is not. Only 13% of the children placed themselves in this type of family.

This group had definite characteristics. The children were mostly females who included a stepfather and excluded the biological father. All the noncustodial fathers had remarried or lived common law with a person with a child. The respondents were younger at age of separation than those in the other groups and also younger at remarriage. However, even in this group, the new spouse was not considered as equal to the biological parent. "I really care about him, but I could never be as close to him as to my mother...", "... sometimes he takes on the father role, at other times he doesn't" (Gross, p. 211).

Gross goes on to describe the three other groups who made up 87% of the participants. Thirty-three percent of the respondents listed both their biological parents and not the stepparent. This was the largest group. Gross suggests that "children do not reconstruct their remarriage families as nuclear families, but rather hold on to the ties of their original families" (p. 210). Here the noncustodial parent was actively involved, visits were frequent or future oriented, and more sons included their noncustodial father than daughters.

The next largest group, Augmentation (28%), listed both their biological parents and the custodial parent's new spouse. This group is characteristic of newer trends where
the new spouse is considered as an addition rather than a substitute. Twenty-five percent of children were described as Reduction. This group of participants included less than their two biological parents and also did not include the new spouse of the custodial parent.

Gross clearly challenges the nuclear family model as an appropriate model for stepfamily development. With only 13% of the respondents subscribing to the nuclear family model, Gross suggests that all the other models presented in this study are more suitable. The nuclear family model is, in fact, the least desirable option.

In a qualitative design, Levin (unpublished) studied a non-clinical sample from the area surrounding Oslo, Norway, consisting of 21 families in which at least one of the adults had been divorced and had one or more children residing with them. All members of the household age 5 and over were included. Using interviews, family lists, and family maps, she found different models of remarried family self-perceptions and parenting styles which accommodated the various concepts of the family. She found three groups: Reconstitution, Trial, and Innovation. The reconstitution families seek to 'reconstruct' the nuclear family. In this group the new spouse is expected to act as a substitute father. The trial group was characterized by striving to create relationships that are different from the nuclear family but they do not know how they will be different. They are not in a hurry and will patiently keep trying until they get it right. In this group the new spouse is more like a friend. These families believe "the child has two parents and do [sic] not need another" and that "you never divorce your children" (p. 11).

The final group, Innovation, believes that the most important thing is to create something new. These couples blame the structure of the nuclear family marriage for the end of the first marriage. They are making a concerted effort to not be a nuclear family. In this group, the children are the responsibility of the biological parents. The stepparent is more like an uncle or grandfather who takes care of the children when they are within his sphere but not otherwise.
Again, the nuclear family proved to be far from the unanimous choice of model for stepfamily development. Although some custodial parents may desire assistance in parenting their children, the children clearly indicate that they do not generally consider the stepparent as a family member, much less a parent! In addition, some families actively fight against the nuclear family model in an effort to create a family environment suitable for the members of the stepfamily.

2.6 Parenthood in the Single Parent Family

Generally, the creation of a stepfamily is preceded by the custodial parent and his or her biological children spending time in a single parent family. A closer examination of the single parent family provides insights and information that help understand why the nuclear family model is not appropriate for many stepfamilies.

Clinicians (Crosbie-Burnett, 1985; Glenwick & Mowrey, 1986; Keshet, 1988; Papernow, 1984, 1987, 1988; Visher & Visher, 1979; Weltner, 1982), theorists (Keshet, 1985; Messinger, 1976; Messinger & Walker, 1981), and researchers (Amato, 1987; Anderson & White, 1986; Weiss, 1979) suggest that relationships between the single parent and one or more children become more intense in the single parent family. Weiss (1979) provides the most thorough discussion of the single parent family. Weiss' work will be supplemented with that of other researchers as well as authors in the clinical and developmental domain.

Weiss (1979) collected interviews from a series of studies conducted at the Laboratory of Community Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School. Among a variety of sources, he cites: (1) a longitudinal study of social ties among single mothers (n=19) and married couples (n=6), (2) educational discussion groups made up of individuals who had separated (n=150), (3) interviews with single parents (n=50) and married couples (n=4), (4) adolescents living in single parent homes (n=40), and (5) high school students living in single parent homes (n not reported).
Each group is a nonrepresentative sample in its own way. However, Weiss explains that the goal was to improve our understanding of the single parent family. No statistical analysis was conducted. Five aspects of the single parent family germane to this research are highlighted: (a) blurred generational boundaries, (b) the end of the parental echelon, (c) permissive parenting, (d) the parent as partner, and (e) the parentified child.

**Increased Closeness**

Weiss (1979) found that the single parent in these studies have a "special investment" in their children (p. 66). Given the single parent structure of the family, there is abundant opportunity for the single parent to be closer to the children. Without a second adult with whom to share parenthood, there is no one to contribute complementary or contrasting understandings of the children or to share the parent's attention. Thus, the single parent and the custodial child win each other's attention more consistently and more frequently to discuss issues, concerns and topics that concern them. Each provides company for the other. "While talking to the children may not be the same as talking to another adult, it is better than talking to no one"(p. 72). Weiss suggests that the increased closeness is not a function of more time spent together, but rather a greater range of shared experiences and increased accessibility to each other.

Weiss (1979) also notes that the special relationship also accommodates tensions and uncertainties of everyday life. Weiss quotes one single parent:

Because I'm open with my kids, they're like two little adults. You know, I've shared my feelings with them. And I've shared my hurt with them. And they've seen my hurt. They've seen me cry. And they have said, 'Gee, Mom, are you ever going to be happy again? Are you ever going to stop crying?' And I said, 'Yes, some day, I suppose I will'. (p. 72)

Many other authors have reported similar observations. From clinical experiences, Papernow (1984) points out that in the single parent family "the single parent turns to his or her children for nourishment and support previously provided by the spouse"(p. 356). She
cites similar observations by other writers who have described these relationships as "overcathexis" (Neubaur, cited in Papernow, 1984), "exceptionally close" (Visher & Visher, cited in Papernow 1984), and "intense overdependence" (Messinger, cited in Papernow, 1984). Papernow concludes that "by whatever name, enmeshment seems to be a normal part of single parent/child relationships!" (p. 356).

Keshet (1985), also from a clinical perspective, suggests that the intimacy between the custodial parent and child may be intensified by the painful nature of the separation process. Walker and Messinger (1979) report from their work with remarriage groups that the custodial parent and child may "become more tightly bound together and interdependent, especially when the departing parent leaves the community and seldom sees his/her children" (p. 188).

Although these authors agree that relationships between the custodial parent and biological children often become more intense, there is less consensus on the effect on the children. Weiss (1979) as well as Hetherington and Anderson (1988) suggest that these interpersonal dynamics may influence the rate at which children mature. These authors propose that a delay in involvement in age appropriate peer relationships and activities may result from an increase in the assumption of adult responsibilities. Hetherington & Anderson (1988) suggest that this could be described as 'nonnormative stress' whereas Papernow (1984) indicates that this seems to be a 'normal' part of single parent family living.

Exactly what is normal or abnormal, functional or dysfunctional in stepfamilies has received little research attention. With an innovative conceptualization and correspondingly refreshing methodology, Anderson and White (1986) provide one of the few pieces of research that have attempted to redress this situation.

Sixty-three functional and dysfunctional step and nuclear families, each with a child between 11 and 17 years of age were compared. The stepfamilies were comprised of mother-stepfather couples and a stepchild. The objective was to identify critical features
that differentiate nuclear families from stepfamilies and functional from dysfunctional stepfamilies. Families were categorized as functional or dysfunctional based on two criteria: (a) neither individual family members nor the family were in therapy at the time of the study, and (b) the mean Family Adjustment score on the Family Concept Test was within the range for functioning families.

Anderson and White (1986) found a stronger parent-child coalition in functional and dysfunctional stepfamilies than in either functional or dysfunctional biological families. Also, significantly stronger parent-child coalitions were found in dysfunctional stepfamilies than functional stepfamilies. Dysfunctional stepfamilies demonstrated extreme patterns of parent-child coalitions along with a negative relationship between the stepparent and stepchild.

From this study, the authors conclude that when stepfamilies are not compared to nuclear families but rather to each other, "a stepfamily can have moderate levels of biological parent-child coalitions and perhaps still function effectively as a family unit" (p. 418). Contrary to the nuclear family, parent-child coalitions do not necessarily predict dysfunction. Unfortunately, these findings cannot be corroborated as no other studies of this kind were found in the literature at the time of this writing.

In spite of a dearth of empirical research to substantiate observations from clinical and educational contexts, it appears that the nuclear family model has once again failed to garner support as an appropriate model for stepfamily development. Stronger parent-child relationships in the single parent family have been directly observed in clinical and educational contexts and indirectly through the stepfamily research described above.

The End of the Parental Echelon

Weiss (1979) further describes a unique parenting style in the single parent family. He observes that the two-parent family includes a parental echelon, comprised of the two adults that have exclusive control of in the household. Weiss defines a parental echelon as "an implicit partnership agreement [which] exists among those on a superordinate level so
that ...[each person]...on the higher level has authority in relation to anyone on the lower level" (p. 74). Weiss concludes that a two parent family may function in this way but a single parent family cannot as it is necessary that there be at least two people in the superordinate position.

Weiss (1979) found that many single parents had formed a type of family council and announced that the family would now be run differently and that each member would be assuming a role that included greater responsibilities and greater decision making. Some parents called this the 'Inaugural Address'. One woman, a mother to four teenage children between 10 and 16 reported:

As soon as I was on my own I sat down with the children - I always had a good rapport with the children - and I told them, 'Now things are different. Instead of more or less being a family of mother and four children, we're all one family with all equal responsibility. And we all have a say, and we're all very important. And if it is going to work right, we all have to be able to cooperate with each other'. (p. 75)

In this way, children become "junior partners in the management of the household" (p. 76). Weiss clarifies that the single parent family is not a perfect democracy, just "more nearly one than the two-parent family" (p. 76).

Research by Weiss (1979) is supported by that of Amato (1987) who studied primary school children (n=172) and adolescents (n=170) in three types of families: mother-custody single parent, mother-custody stepfamilies, and two-parent nuclear families. Amato found that while the degree of mother control did not change significantly with family structure, the interaction between the age of child and the family type was significant. Adolescent children reported less control from mothers in single parent families. Amato (1987) concluded that:

it appears that children in one-parent families - particularly adolescents - have relatively high levels of both responsibility and autonomy. This suggests that
children in single parent families are subject to high parental demands but are also given corresponding privileges. (p. 320)

Other authors writing from a clinical perspective have made these same observations. Crosbie-Burnett (1985) discusses this process, specifying it as more of an issue for the older children. In describing the adjustment to the single parent family, she explains that the eldest may take on some of the responsibilities of the absent parent. "The eldest child may care for younger children, shop, cook, clean, and do laundry. Along with gaining responsibility is a rise in status and power within the family" (p. 133).

Keshet (1985) also supports Weiss' findings of the shift in the power balance of the single parent family. From a developmental perspective, she observes that:

the power structure of the single parent family often differs from the way it was in the nuclear family. The children gain power relative to the parent through participating in the upkeep of the household, providing support and feedback to the parent, being valuable companions, and giving the parent the sense of being a good parent. They perform functions that would ordinarily be the role of the other spouse... . (p. 278)

**Permissive Parenting**

Weiss found that the loss of the parental echelon structure and the more intense relationship between the custodial parent and child leads to more permissive parenting. He states:

to someone accustomed to the management style of two-parent households, single parent households may appear extremely permissive. The parents give greater weight to the children's wishes than is customary in two-parent households, while the children, as befits junior partners, are less deferential towards their parents (1979, p. 77).

Weiss notes that the single parent may not recognize that the generational boundary in the family has become blurred.
Although no additional research was found to corroborate Weiss' findings, Papernow's (1988) stages of stepparent role development concur with his research. In her work with stepfamily development she observes that the stepparent is generally on the side of stricter discipline. She adds that the custodial parent is generally not aware that the generational lines have blurred and that the parenting style is more egalitarian.

**Parent as Partner**

The more egalitarian relationship between parent and child allows the possibility of the development of a relationship resembling that of a pseudo partner. This shift has been described by many authors (Crosbie-Burnett, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1979; Weiss, 1979; Weltner, 1982).

Weiss suggests that "a change of this sort occurs when a single mother relies on her son to take on the responsibilities of man of the house....Or it can happen when a single father relies on his daughter to act as woman of the house" (1979, p. 88). By taking on a role similar to that of a spouse, the child has the opportunity to earn the parent's respect, feel loved, and indispensable. Weiss quotes one woman:

> Bill was really the man of the house around here for years. Any kind of physical labor that I couldn't do, he would always just do it for me. When he went into the service I missed him more than I had missed my husband. (1979, p. 89)

From a clinical context, Crosbie-Burnett (1985) observes that the eldest child may often become the single parent's decision making partner. In doing so "this child straddles the intrafamilial boundary that separates children from adults" (p. 133). Weltner (1982) echoes these concerns in stating that the lack of generational distance in the single mother household is the hardest for the eldest son. "This son is called upon to act as the man of the house, sometimes overtly and sometimes in more subtle ways" (p. 276).

Observations of researchers and clinicians suggest the relationships in the single parent family are likely to become closer and more intense. This has been observed to be
particularly frequent with the oldest child or adolescents in the family. Often they are seen to become a junior partner or pseudo spouse to the single parent.

Although these authors unanimously describe the increased closeness in the single parent and child relationship, they do not generally suggest that this process is dysfunctional. Contrary to what conformity to the nuclear family model might suggest, this shift in family dynamics is described as a fairly typical adjustment to life in the single parent family. Contrary to the nuclear family model, stronger parent-child coalitions appear to be a 'normal' part of single parent family living.

**The Parentified Child**

Some authors have reported an extension of the closer parent-child relationship in the single parent family to a more extreme and possibly dysfunctional degree (Glenwick & Mowrey, 1986; Keshet, 1985; Weiss, 1979). In this situation role reversal has occurred. Typically, the single parent and child have reversed roles so that the child is now attending to the needs of the parent more than the parent is attending to the needs of the child. Weiss (1979) quotes one woman who established a role reversal pattern with her son:

> If my fourteen-year-old sees me getting upset about something, he'll come over and say, "Now, Mom, calm down. I'll take care of it." and I really love that. When he does that I really feel good. (p. 87)

Keshet (1985) also describes this phenomenon when outlining developmental models for stepfamily development. She articulates three components that make up this process:

First, the adolescent is protective of the custodial parent by making sure that the parent's needs are met. Simultaneously, the parent sends the message that he or she is overwhelmed and incapable of functioning without the adolescent. Second, the adolescent is loyal to the departed parent by not allowing another adult to replace him or her. Finally, the adolescent attempts to gain control of a previously unpredictable life by assuming the role and tasks of an adult. He or she attempts to
control the household in collusion with the parent who has lost a mate of his or her own generation. (p. 289)

Keshet (1985) distinguishes between a functional and dysfunctional level of movement across the generations. She qualifies her descriptions by noting that replacement is typical in any single parent family as it reorganizes. The problem begins when the generational distance is so lacking that the child no longer functions well in her or his own generation and assumes responsibility for family tasks rather than being delegated authority by the parent.

Glenwick and Mowrey (1986) focus on the dysfunctional extreme of the parentified child in the single parent family. From their clinical experience in mental health clinics, they call this type of family PBP or "Parent Becomes Peer". Glenwick and Mowrey list several criteria that describe this type of single parent family. The single parent is raising one or more children alone with the eldest aged 9 - 13. The parentified child is bright, verbal, and acts as confidant(e) to the parent. The parent in turn feels free to communicate feelings on personal issues and to seek out the child's opinions on many issues including new male friends. The relationship is based on equality between the parent and child. However, only the parent's needs are met. These parents may make statements which indicate their own feelings more than that of the child i.e., He "would rather not see his father" or she "doesn't mind when I leave her alone at night with the sitter"(p. 58).

The theoretical, clinical, and sparse research described above strongly suggest that the relationships within the single parent family deviate from those in the nuclear family. The shift in family dynamics from a nuclear family hierarchy to a more egalitarian system in the single parent family has been clearly described. In addition, research (Anderson & White, 1986) suggests that these shifts in parent-child relationships do not disappear in the stepfamily as the nuclear family model would suggest. On the contrary, both functional and dysfunctional stepfamilies demonstrate stronger parent-child relationships.
What is the impact of this shift in family dynamics on stepfamily adjustment? Although Weiss (1979) describes the relationships in the single parent family in great detail, no mention is made of the transition from the single parent family to the stepfamily. It is reasonable to suggest that given the pervasiveness of these altered family dynamics in stepfamilies, they could be a critical factor in stepfamily development. Equally, given their distinctiveness from the nuclear family model, it is possible that these relationships may be misunderstood and, therefore, problematic in many cases.

To date, questions such as the one posed above have received virtually no research attention. Clinicians and those developing theoretical models for stepfamily development are the main contributors to the development of our knowledge in this area. Again, the systematic research appears to be nonexistent. What our limited conceptual knowledge does strongly indicate is that the transition to stepfamily living can be surprisingly complex. There are as many perspectives as there are stepfamily members. No one perspective is more right than another and many are conflicting.

2.7 Divergent Experiences of Remarriage for Adolescents, Custodial Parent and Stepparent

The complexity of stepfamily adjustment has been discussed in the recent developmental literature in terms of the divergent perspectives of stepfamily members. Papernow (1984, 1987, 1988) employs the metaphor of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ to articulate the perspectives from these disparate and often conflicting positions. Keshet (1980, 1988) refers to the smaller groups within the stepfamily as subsystems. She includes the biological parent and child(ren) subsystem, the former spouses' subsystem, the current spouses' subsystem, the child and noncustodial parent subsystem, etc. It is beyond the scope of this review to examine each position or subsystem. Therefore, this discussion will be limited to the experiences of remarriage for the adolescent, custodial parent, and stepparent.
Although the perspectives of each family member are important, the emphasis has been on the adult experience to date. The experience of children has received little attention (Amato, 1987; Gross, 1986; Lutz, 1983). Gross (1986) states that although the child's perspective has not been thoroughly examined, they, by necessity, are the "connecting links between households - without them there would be no kinship overlap" (p. 208). Amato (1987) points out that as well as the dearth of information from a child's perspective, many studies "rely on parents for information on children's experiences of family life; yet children themselves are the best people to comment on their own feelings and perceptions" (p. 329).

Few authors have chosen to focus on the adolescent experience (Clingempeel et al., 1987; Crosbie-Burnett, 1985; Gross, 1986; Lutz, 1983; Papernow, 1988; Visher & Visher, 1979). From their observations, it seems that for adolescents, the adjustment is complex.

Goldner (1982), in a discussion of therapeutic perspectives on stepfamilies, describes how children who are members of two households have a more complex network of relationships to manage. Their world may consist of not only two physical locations but two sets of stepparents, stepsiblings, and stepkin with all the rules and customs considered 'normal' in each family system. Goldner reminds us that the experience of these children "differs profoundly from that of the parents, since it varies as a function of their location in the maze of interconnected family units that constitute the kinship network of remarriage" (p. 200).

**Divergent Experiences of the Adolescent and Custodial Parent**

The experience of making the transition to stepfamily living may be very different for adolescents and the custodial parent. Papernow (1984) suggests from the clinical domain, that the single parent may be looking for someone with whom to share the duties of parenthood. Dahl et al. (1987) found empirical support for both men and women using good parenting skills as a criterion for selecting a partner.
The child, however, may not share this desire. Messinger (1976) reported from interviews with 70 remarried couples that "while couples were generally aware that remarriage meant a major personal adjustment, they very often expressed surprise at their underestimation of the emotional upheaval involved for the children ..." (p. 197).

In her research with 103 adolescents aged 12 - 18 who were living in stepfamilies, Lutz (1983) found that issues of discipline by the stepparent were found to be stressful by the greatest number of adolescents. In addition, discipline was rated as the second highest PLS (perceived level of stress) score. This score represented an individual calculation of what percentage of the subject's experience relating to each category had been perceived as stressful. Items within the discipline category were "Adjusting to living with a new set of rules from your stepparent", "Accepting discipline from a stepparent" and "Dealing with the expectation of your stepparent" (p. 372). Lutz suggests that teenagers may have clearer memories of how life was before the remarriage than younger children. Lutz also suggests that although children in nuclear families may also experience stress from discipline, rules from a stepparent may compromise the greater responsibilities and autonomy experienced during the single parent family.

This view is strongly supported by authors in the clinical domain. Papernow (1984) explains that the "...child's fantasies are markedly different [than the custodial parent]: "I thought that maybe if I just didn't pay any attention to him this new guy would go away" (p. 357). Crosbie-Burnett (1985) echoes these concerns in her article identifying potential problem areas for therapists working with remarriage families. She notes that "while courtship and remarriage may be a time of romance and excitement for the adults, it is often a time of crisis for the children. The more the couple is caught up in their dreams, the less they can see and hear any signs of distress in their children" (p. 124). In a later article, Crosbie-Burnett and Skyles (1989) explore this in more detail. She explains that: making this adjustment more difficult for children is the lack of understanding about and support for their concerns. Children rarely get permission from parents or
other adults to express anxiety or unhappiness about parental marriage because marriage, by definition, is supposed to be a happy occasion in our culture. (p. 59)

The clinical and developmental literature suggest that the perspectives of the adolescent and the custodial parent may diverge during the transition to stepfamily living. The custodial parent may be seeking assistance with parenting from the new spouse while the adolescent may experience parenting from the new spouse as extremely stressful and intrusive. The custodial parent may be experiencing the excitement of a new relationship while the adolescent is experiencing the loss of the special relationship with the custodial parent.

**The Divergent Experiences of the Adolescent and the New Spouse**

The divergent nature of the experiences of the new spouse and the adolescent has been discussed at length by clinicians and theory builders attempting to describe stepfamily adjustment. Although few researchers have addressed these issues, there does seem to be a consensus among the published authors about recurring themes.

Papernow (1988) provides an in depth interpretation of stepparent role development. She observes that many stepparents speak of a general hope that this relationship will be better than the previous one and that their presence in the family will promote the healing process and ease the burdens of the single parent family. Papernow mentions such fantasies as "rescuing the children from the excesses or inadequacies of a previous spouse..., mending a broken family ...and creating order out of chaos..." (1988, p. 61). There are also fantasies of "...stepparents adoring their stepchildren and being welcomed by them" (1984, p. 357). So pervasive is this phenomenon that Papernow describes it as "a universal and normal part of stepfamily development" (1984, p. 357).

On the other hand, Papernow points out that the children about to become stepchildren do not seem to share this optimism. She observes that "children rarely welcome stepparents" (1988, p. 58). She sees this transition as difficult for adolescent children on two levels. First, the stepparent creates a loyalty bind for the child between the
stepparent and the same sexed noncustodial parent. Second, "the stepparent's presence bumps the child from his or her intense relationship with the parent. While this may be somewhat of a relief, it is also a loss, another in a long series of changes over which the child has no say" (p. 58).

Clingempeel et al. (1987) echo this concern. They note that "when custodial parents remarry, children may feel conflicted about developing a relationship with the person who is both 'displacing' their nonresident parent and 'threatening to disrupt' the close parent-child bond" (p. 232).

In an empirical study, Lutz (1983) examined stressors as described by adolescents in stepfamilies. (See section 2.7 for a description of this research). She found that adolescents viewed positive relationships with the stepparent as creating a loyalty conflict. Issues of divided loyalty were rated as one of two most frequently cited stressors for the adolescents studied. Lutz concluded that a 'double-bind' situation was created for the adolescents because "the more they care for a stepparent, the worse they feel. It can also create a stressful situation for a stepparent who may feel positive and negative feelings coming from the stepchild" (p. 371).

Visher and Visher (1979) describe the difficulties of adjusting to the stepfamily situation from their clinical experience. "If there is an adolescent stepchild at the time of remarriage, the status this individual enjoyed in the single parent family may be partially usurped by the new stepparent. As one 16-year-old said, 'I can't go back to being a child again' " (p. 176).

Crosbie-Burnett (1985) in her article on implications for therapy with remarried families, points out that after single parent family life, the remarriage can be very traumatic. When the single parent remarries, the eldest child becomes displaced in the adult role he or she assumed, and stands to lose the concomitant status and power. Consequently, this child may spend a great deal of energy sabotaging the inclusion of the new stepparent into the family group. It is one thing for the previously single
parent say to this child, 'Thank you for helping me; now you can go back to being a kid.' It is another thing for the child to be able to relinquish the adult role and return to being one of the children. (p. 133)

Brand, Clingempeel, and Bowen-Woodward (1988) also consider a positive scenario. They propose that a positive relationship with a stepparent may complement the reduced time with the biological parent. The stepparent assuming tasks that were perceived as burdensome by the child may be a welcome relief as well as the opportunity to spend more time with peers. In successful remarriage families, the stepparent may become an additional resource for the children rather than a replacement of the non-custodial parent.

Research by Anderson and White (1986) offers new insights into stepfamily functioning. (See section 2.6 for a description of the sample, methodology, and research objectives.) One of the numerous aspects of the study germane to this discussion is their comparisons between biological father child relationships and stepfather stepchild relationships.

They found that as would be expected, biological fathers had the closest relationships with their children. Relationships between biological fathers and their children was more intense and reciprocally positive than between stepfathers and stepchildren. However, in examining functional and dysfunctional stepfamilies, they found that in functional stepfamilies, a mutually positive but less intense father stepchild relationship exists. This was in sharp contrast to the extremely low and nonreciprocal relationship between stepfathers and children in dysfunctional stepfamilies.

Anderson and White (1986) further report anecdotal data from the children of the dysfunctional stepfamilies.

Pressure for premature cohesion results in less positive involvement on the child's part: 'I wish they didn't make me call him dad- he's not my dad'; 'My mom says I should try to be close to him, but I don't want anything to do with him'; 'I hate it
when he [stepfather] says I better get used to our new family and then puts down my real dad'. (p. 418)

Anecdotal information from the functional stepfamilies presents a very different scenario and suggests that the acceptance of some distance and a gradual evolution of a relationship may encourage a positive adjustment. They quote the children of the functional stepfamilies.

My relationship with my stepfather is close but not intimate'; 'He's there when I need him and then he knows when not to come close'; 'My relationship with my stepdad is not really personal, like with my real dad, but we have become great friends'. (p. 418)

These results suggest that forcing the stepfamily into the nuclear family model is counterproductive to the development of positive stepparent stepchild relationships. Anderson and White (1986) suggest that "the strength of the biological parent-child bonds may create a preference for biological over steprelations even in a well-functioning stepfamily" (p. 418). Not only do children not consider stepparents as parents, but pressuring children to do so actually creates hostility and resentment that seem to prohibit a positive relationship.

Walker and Messinger (1979) have noted in their discussion groups with remarriage family members that the fantasies of those not previously married or without children of their own tend to bring the most romantic fantasies and the least appropriate expectations to the remarriage. They were reported to have misconceptions about the parental role, and to feel competition with the biological children for time and attention from their spouse.

Research examining the effect of parenthood of the stepparent on stepfamily outcomes is inconclusive. Crosbie-Burnett (1989) examined relationships in stepfather families with an adolescent (n=84). She found that stepfathers without children from a previous union reported more competition with the biological father than stepfathers who
had their own biological children. Also, couples with stepfathers (in joint custody situations) who had no prior children reported the most role confusion concerning the stepfather's role in the family.

On the other hand, Clingempeel, Ievoli, and Brand (1984) studied the effects of structural complexity in families of 9-12 year old stepchildren. They examined stepfamilies with only one spouse with children from a previous union (n=16) and stepfamilies with both spouses having children from a previous union (n=16) to compare the effects of structural complexity on the quality of stepfather-stepchild relationships. Their findings demonstrated no differences on questionnaire or behavioral measures based on family structural complexity.

While stepparents enter with generally unduly optimistic visions of the future, the actual adjustment process is often plagued with confusion and ambiguity about the appropriate role for the new adult in the family. Crosbie-Burnett (1984) points out that:

- If we assume a bond between natural parent and child and some type of positive attraction between the adult partners, then the relationships in the stepfamily that lack 'raison d'être' are those between stepparent and stepchild (p. 462).

This can result in "confusion and misunderstandings about what the stepparent 'is supposed to be doing' in the family ..." (1985, p. 133). (See section 2.8 for a discussion of stepparent roles.)

In examining the divergent perspectives of the adolescent, custodial parent, and stepparent, it is clear that the transition to stepfamily living can be complex and fraught with ambiguity. Stepfamily members report conflicting emotions for each other and within themselves. Assumptions based on a nuclear family mythology have been shown to be incompatible with the experiences of many stepfamily members.

Marital Satisfaction vs Family Happiness and Stepfamily Relations

The relationships between marital satisfaction, family happiness, and stepfamily relations have been discussed in the clinical, developmental, and research domains. Again,
clinicians and theorists articulate how the dynamics of the stepfamily are distinct from the nuclear family. Research by Crosbie-Burnett (1984), White and Booth (1985), and Anderson and White (1986) confirms the descriptions of other authors in the clinical and developmental domains and provides new insights into the stepfamily dynamics.

In a landmark study, Crosbie-Burnett (1984) examined 87 mother-stepfather families with at least one adolescent stepchild. In this work, Crosbie-Burnett sought to test the validity of nuclear family theory that assumes the centrality of the marital relationship.

Most family theories assume the centrality of the marital relationship in healthy family functioning - the marital relationship is primary and the viability of all other family relationships stems from this core. Stepfamilies, ... may challenge this basic tenet of family theory. Children in nuclear families gain security when the marital relationship is strong and satisfying. Children in a stepfamily may feel threatened by a biological parent's alliance with someone who is not emotionally bonded to them. This insecurity and children's responses to it may undermine the happiness of the family. (p. 459)

The main variables studied were marital happiness, family happiness and aspects of the relationships between the stepparent and stepchildren. Family happiness was the dependent variable. The independent variables were marital happiness, stepfather-stepchildren relationships, stepfather-stepchild nurturance, and stepfather discipline.

Crosbie-Burnett (1984) found that 59% percent of the variance in overall family happiness was predicted by the stepfather-stepchild relationship. Marital happiness accounted for an additional 10%.

These results strongly supported her hypothesis that the steprelations within the stepfamily may be more predictive of family happiness that the marital relationships. These results challenge the nuclear family model and run "contrary to the assumptions of most family theories and the practice of clinicians" (p. 462).
Research by Anderson and White (1986) also sheds light on this problem. As described in section 2.6, these researchers sought to identify key variables that distinguish stepfamilies from nuclear families, functional and dysfunctional families. Marital adjustment and satisfaction with family life in stepfamilies and nuclear families were examined.

Marital adjustment in dysfunctional nuclear families was significantly lower than marital adjustment in all other groups. There was no significant difference between the functional nuclear family and the functional stepfamily in terms of marital adjustment. However, functional stepfamilies had significantly higher marital adjustment than dysfunctional stepfamilies yet dysfunctional stepfamilies were not significantly different than functional nuclear families.

These results suggest that family functioning and marital satisfaction are not as directly linked in the stepfamily as in the nuclear family. A remarried couple can experience high marital satisfaction and still develop family dysfunction. Anderson and White (1986) suggest that perhaps:

- children are the glue holding the unhappy [nuclear family] marriage together, which creates a fertile ground for dysfunction. The husband and wife in a remarried family, on the other hand, have already been through a divorce and chosen to marry each other in spite of the possible unhappiness of either partner's children. The glue in this case is hypothesized to be the marital bond rather than the couple's mutual concern for the children. (p. 417)

Again, the underlying assumption that children's problems are a result of weakness in the marital unit may be appropriate for the nuclear family but are not supported by the findings of this study for the stepfamily. Rather, a different pattern was found where marital satisfaction did not predict family functioning.

White and Booth (1985) pursued similar theoretical reasoning in their attempt to separate the effects of remarriage and the presence of stepchildren on the stability and
satisfaction of second marriages. They interviewed 1,673 married people from first marriages, single remarriages (a second marriage for only one of the partners) and double remarriages (a second marriage for both partners) in 1980 and 1983.

Their results indicated that couples with stepchildren are more than twice as likely to redivorce as couples with no stepchildren. Equally, the results strongly suggested that a double remarriage with stepchildren is at the greatest risk of redivorce. Furthermore, both a double remarriage and the presence of stepchildren contributed a 50 percent increase in the likelihood of divorce. Together they caused nearly 100 percent of the variability in divorce. However, the analysis of marital quality by family structure demonstrated no significant differences.

A further comparison of satisfaction with family life reported by the parents with stepchildren and parents without stepchildren indicated that those with stepchildren "are significantly and consistently less satisfied with their family lives. On every dimension of attitude toward children and family, those with stepchildren are significantly less positive" (p. 695).

White and Booth (1988) report:

respondents with stepchildren in the home more often wish to live away from their children, say their children give them problems, are less satisfied with their spouse's relationships to their children, and think their marriage has a negative effect on their children. Perhaps more importantly, they are substantially more likely to report that if they had it to do all over again, they would not have married at all. (p. 696)

The studies unanimously conclude that the nuclear family assumption of marital satisfaction predicting family happiness is unfounded in stepfamilies. On the contrary, steprelations have been found to act as a more accurate predictor of family happiness than marital satisfaction. The presence of stepchildren was also found to reduce the quality of family life but not marital life in stepfamilies.
These findings support the abandonment of the nuclear family model as an appropriate source for guidelines for positive stepfamily adjustment and for a frame of reference for therapeutic interventions. The dynamics of the stepfamily have been shown to contain many divergent perspectives not evident in the nuclear family. In addition, family therapy has traditionally been based on the assumption that the marital relationship is the cornerstone of the family. These findings challenge the appropriateness of that assumption as accurate for the stepfamily. It is suggested that the quality of the steprelations is a more critical element in family happiness than the quality of the marital relationship.

Extrusion

The delicate balance of a functioning stepfamily is a complex and little understood feat. Clinicians and researchers suggest that while it is possible, in many cases it simply does not happen. The failure of the stepfamily to find that balance can result in drastic family boundaries being drawn which result in the exclusion of one or more members of the new family (Goldner, 1982; Papernow, 1988; Sager et al., 1983; White & Booth, 1986). The process of exclusion can result in the end of the marital relationship or the expulsion of one or more of the children from the family. For the purpose of this study, the discussion is limited to the exclusion of the adolescent from the stepfamily.

Sager et al. (1983) apply the term 'extrusion' to the phenomenon of the new stepfamily boundary being drawn in such a way that one or more family members are excluded. Working from the clinical domain, these authors describe this as:

a systems problem where the Rem [remarried] couple's excluding behavior provokes the adolescent to react in a manner that elicits a still more negative and distancing response from the Rem [remarried] couple. A reciprocating negative interaction between youth and adults builds up to an ultimate crescendo that eventuates a self-imposed or commanded banishment. While all degrees of extrusion can and do occur in most families, we have found that in Rem families
with an adolescent all too often the extrusion is skewed toward more severe consequences. (p. 259)

Sager et al. (1983) describe six progressively more severe forms of extrusion for adolescents. They describe the first stage as "Subtle Disengagement," common during the couple's honeymoon period, during which time the adolescent may respond with isolation or pseudomutual behavior. The second stage is "Open Hostility," in which both the adolescent and the couple feel victimized and respond with hostility. The third stage, "Threats of Extrusion," is typified by threats on the part of all concerned to leave the family environment. The fourth stage, "Temporary Extrusions - Spontaneous Outbursts of Rage," results in the adolescent leaving the family for a period of time either by a planned move or by running away. This may be followed by the fifth stage "Planned Permanent Extrusions" where a geographic cure, such as a change in custody arrangement or decisions to live independently, are employed. The sixth and final stage is described as "Banishment." In this most severe form of extrusion, the child is disowned by the adults. For her or his part, the adolescent may attempt suicide, become a missing person, or decide to disown the family, often making attachments with a parental surrogate.

Papernow (1988) describes the phenomenon of extrusion from a systems perspective. She observes that, as outsiders trying to become included in the intense relationships of the former single parent family, some stepparents seem to be driven by jealousy and resentment to challenge the ways of the biological family in every way. Their implicit expectation is that the children adopt new rules and a new lifestyle. The biological parent is demanded to break the intense relationships with the children and distance the former spouse far enough for the stepparent's comfort. She quotes one stepmother who married a man who rarely saw his son while they were dating, "I don't know what I thought. Maybe I thought his son would just evaporate, and that Jim really had no ties with him" (p. 61).
Papernow cautions that stepparents may find themselves exhausted and isolated. The biological parent cannot agree to such dramatic change even if requesting support with the children and will often undermine the stepparent. Even more unfortunate, if the stepparent is successful, they do so at the expense of the children who are now the new outsiders in the system at a time when they are particularly vulnerable.

Goldner (1982) observes from clinical interviews that "children often experience changing to new ways 'as a betrayal of their own family's subculture and as a triumph for the culture of the other side' " (p. 203). Family traditions and patterns of everyday routines have been described by several authors as critical to the maintenance of the family identity (Bossard & Boll, 1968; Wolin & Bennett, 1984; Wolin, Bennett, Noonan & Teitelbaum, 1980). Wolin and Bennett (1984) describe family culture and patterned family interactions as "the buttress for continuity" (p. 412). The repetition of familiar routines and prescribed traditions promotes the family culture and provides a sense of identity by defining "this is the way our family is" (p. 401).

Goldner (1982) echoes observations by Sager et al. (1983) and Papernow (1988) who describe the process of children becoming disenfranchised from the stepfamily. Her description of contradictory developmental trajectories which leave the couple and the adolescent moving in opposite directions, includes the possibility of extrusion. She describes the process of extrusion as:

a war between the generations characterized by complimentary [sic] escalation. As the children resist joining their parents' happy family, the parents respond by increasing their demands for proximity and identification with the family unit. If the cycle is not interrupted by the development of a symptom, then some kind of structural collapse can be the result. Since the parents remain committed to the new family (or more accurately, to their fantasy of the new family), it is usually the children who leave the field, either moving in with the
noncustodial parent, or if they are old enough, simply leaving home prematurely.

(p. 200)

In addition to the research questions described in section 2.7, White and Booth (1985) also examined the possibility that stepchildren may leave home sooner than biological children. Their hypothesis was that as an alternate to divorce, remarried couples solve the problems they perceive as caused by steprelationships by moving their children out of the home more quickly than biological children.

Six hundred and three teenagers were involved in the analysis. The results indicated a significant difference between biological and stepchildren. Fifty-one percent of the adolescents who were stepchildren had left home in the three years between interviews whereas only 35% of the biological children had left.

The authors suggest that these children may have chosen to leave the household of their own accord. Perhaps the adolescents, like their parents, are experiencing the situation as stressful. It is also noted that some of the stepchildren may have an alternative parent to live with and are somewhat freer to leave than biological children.

The findings of researchers strongly support the observations of clinicians and theorists. Stepfamily adjustment is viewed by all concerned to be a complex process. The higher rate of divorce in second marriages than first marriages suggests that many second marriage families will not succeed in making this adjustment. Even if the marital relationship is positive, the presence of a satisfactory marital relationship may not predict satisfactory steprelationships. Patterns of living borrowed from the nuclear family may not assist the stepfamily adjustment process. The perspectives of stepfamily members will likely be very different and often conflicting. Some adolescent stepchildren will prematurely leave their home. In some cases relationships with the family will be severed in the process.
Nevertheless, a large proportion of families do succeed in making the transition to satisfactory stepfamily living. Although steprelationships in functional stepfamilies do not mimic those of the nuclear family, they are positive and satisfying for those involved.

Far from being the model for stepfamily development, clinicians, theorists and researchers agree that the nuclear family model may in fact be contraindicated for stepfamily adjustment. Many authors have described how forcing stepfamily members into nuclear family roles may actually work against the adjustment process.

2.8 Roles and Relationships in the Stepfamily

Walker and Messinger (1979) describe the ambiguity inherent in stepparent adjustment. They stress the difficulty of stepparents assuming a predetermined role in the stepfamily, particularly as this role seems to be derived from the nuclear family model and discourages genuine stepfamily adjustment. The unreasonable expectations that:

- the new spouse should love, support, protect his or her spouse's children is likely to be incongruent with the actual sentiments of the new spouse, and the children likewise may feel that the obligation to love the new spouse is inappropriate.

(p. 187)

Among the first to address this issue were Fast and Cain (1966). They noted in their case studies that "attempts at individual resolution of pressure to be a parent, not parent, and stepparent were observed in the behavior of almost all stepparents." (p. 486). Their conclusions at this time demonstrate support for the nuclear family model. They suggest that to "the extent that the stepparent does not appropriately carry out the role functions of parent, the complementary roles and relationships of the natural parent and of the children will also suffer." (p. 489).

On the other hand, Messinger (1976) conducted a series of 70 interviews with remarried couples and found results to suggest the opposite. She found that:

- remarried couples frequently revealed guilt feelings about the lack of positive affect or indeed, frequently, even negative feelings toward their partners'
children. Similarly, the children who were required to respond to the parent's new mate as though he or she were the child's 'real' parent often gave rise to feelings of guilt, hostility, rebellion, or withdrawal. (p. 196)

Nearly 30 years after Fast and Cain made their suggestions, professionals in the field are still struggling to define appropriate stepparent roles. Crosbie-Burnett (1985) notes that "misunderstandings about what the stepparent 'is supposed to be doing' in the family abound" (p. 133). From research with adolescents in stepfamilies Crosbie-Burnett (1984) observes that, counter to the nuclear family model, unwanted nurturance may work against the establishment of positive relationships between stepfamily members. She stresses that:

proactive attention should be given to the steprelationship if all members of the household are to be happy in the new family. In stepfamilies, it is not enough to nurture the conjugal relationship and assume that the others will 'fall into place'. (p. 462-463)

Papernow (1988) provides the most detailed interpretation of stepparent role development. She conceptualizes the stepfamily as comprised of those who perceive it from the insider position and those who perceive it from the outsider position. The stepparent is clearly the outsider confronted by "a biological relationship with a longer intimate history, ... and a common set of agreements, many of them covert, about the right way to do things-all of which have been further intensified in a single parent family" (p. 58). Papernow sees the biological system competing with the new marital unit for domination of the family culture.

In her analysis, Papernow (1988) suggests that stepparents sense the looseness of the generational boundary and seek to increase the authority and decision making of the couple. This meets direct opposition not only from the children who are not prepared to accept a stranger who wants to change family rules but also the biological parent who may be anxious to protect her or his children. Papernow observes that "predictably, the
stepparent is on the side of more discipline, [and] more boundaries around the
couple,... while the biological parent defends the need to spare the child more pain, [and] to
remain available to children ..."(p. 68). She describes this struggle.

The stepparent is fighting to gain entrance, to have the family shaped in a form that
includes his or her needs and tastes. The biological parent and children are fighting
to retain some of their familiar and comfortable form. Children particularly are
fighting against becoming the new outsiders. (p. 69)

2.9 A New Model of Stefamily Development

Mills (1984) presents a new model for stefamily development. He acknowledges
that the most difficult problem facing stefamilies is the appropriate development of the
stepparent-stepchild relationship. Mills suggests that any model of stefamily development
must allow that the stepparent role "might never approximate that of a biological parent" (p.
365). The model must include "the persisting inequality of the biological parent-child
relationship compared to the stepparent-stepchild relationship" (p. 367). He further asserts
that although the marital couple is the "architect of the stefamily system" (p. 367), "the
parent is to be entirely in charge of setting and enforcing limits for that parent's biological
children" (p. 368).

When considering stefamily dysfunction, Mills states that the main cause is often
"the precipitous assumption of the parental role by the stepparent" (p. 371). He suggests
that although the parenting role of the stepparent may differ with different children, the
parenting role is particularly inappropriate for children who are adolescents at the time of
stefamily formation. "It seems improbable that a stepparent could achieve a full parental
role with a teenager, given the lack of a common history over most of the teenager's life
and the developmental push for the teenager to move away from the family" (p. 365).

From his clinical work, Mills finds that genuine relationships between stepparents
and stepchildren are blocked by a continuing cycle of conflict. The cycle of conflict
characteristic of mother-stepfather families begins when the stepparent attempts to make
decisions about what is appropriate for the stepchild. (A similar scenario is described for father-stepmother families concerning nurturing by the stepmother.) The biological parent may not agree with the stepparent but may choose to avoid conflict in the new marital unit by deferring to the stepparent. The child, however, knows that the biological parent does not operate this way and fights for the continuity of the single parent family culture. The struggle remains between the stepparent and stepchild and in this way inhibits the development of a positive bond between the two individuals. In working with couples in clinical and educational settings, Mills stresses the need to help stepfamily members build genuine relationships with each other.

Mills (1984) provides guidelines covering six major area of stepfamily development. Briefly, they are:

1. The parent and new spouse must decide on the long term goal for the stepfamily structure, in accordance with the needs of all stepfamily members (i.e., parent-like relationships or other).
2. The parents are completely in charge of decision making for their biological children.
3. The first year of stepfamily living involves intentional nurturing by the new spouse in an effort to encourage bonding.
4. Comfortable rules for living in the stepfamily must be negotiated.
5. Relationships with the non-custodial parent should be supported and competition avoided.
6. Mills suggests that the adjustment time for stepfamilies has been greatly underestimated. If the goal of the stepfamily is for the new spouse to have a parent-like relationship with the children, then one could expect that to happen once the child had spent an amount of time with the stepparent that is equal to the age of the child at the time of the formation of the stepfamily. In other words, stepparents could allow "three years for a three year old, six for a six year old" (p. 370).
Mills (1984) acknowledges that research describing functional stepfamily roles is very sparse and suggests that "it would be useful to know which roles stepfamily members naturally develop over time, especially over the long run, and the correlates with family satisfaction" (p. 371).

2.10 Research Objectives

This study proposes to determine the correlation between stepfamily adjustment and one of Mills' (1984) guidelines for parents and new spouses concerning appropriate parenting roles in the stepfamily. The concept of limit setting will be employed to assess the impact of a shift in parental control from the biological parent to the stepparent on stepfamily adjustment. Mills' model suggests that the "parent is to be entirely in charge of setting and enforcing limits for that parent's biological children" (p. 368). This study will assess the degree to which the adolescent perceived a shift in parental control from the biological parent to the stepparent. The degree of shift in perceived parental control will then be compared with stepfamily adjustment.

Mills' concept of limit setting is expanded to include Crosbie-Burnett's (Crosbie-Burnett & Skyles, 1989) work on issues for young adult stepchildren. Crosbie-Burnett suggests that college-age young adults are still "psychologically, and financially dependent stepchildren in their stepfamilies" (p. 59). She adds that children who are adolescents when the custodial parent remarries have strong memories of the single parent family including the special relationships which may have developed during that time. Therefore questions addressing shifts in parental control concerning decision making and emotional support are also included in this study.

Conceptual work by Mills (1984) and Crosbie-Burnett (1989) is combined with that of Papernow (1988) to complete the concept of 'The Continuity of the Single Parent Family Dynamics'. Papernow suggests that stepfamily adjustment is in some ways a struggle between the cultures of the two families. In her view, the desire for each family's culture to dominate is at the root of stepfamily struggles. An assessment of the changes to the
'cultural' life of the single parent family since the formation of the stepfamily (i.e., celebrations, traditions and everyday patterns of living) completes the components of the 'Continuity of the Single Parent Family Dynamics' in this study.

A complimentary concept, 'The Assumption of the Parental Role by the Stepparent' is also considered. This assesses the young adult's perception of the stepparent's role in initiating changes to the single parent family functioning. (The Continuity of the Single Parent Family Dynamics considers only the biological parent's role as perceived by the young adult.) Within this concept the shift in parental control is considered as well as the displacement of the adolescent from the single parent family roles, responsibilities and relationships.

Three other concepts are considered in their ability to affect the association between stepfamily adjustment and the continuity (or discontinuity) of the single parent family dynamics within the stepfamily. They are: the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child bond, the time spent in the single parent family, and time since the remarriage.

The peer-like quality of the biological parent-child bond during the single parent family is assessed. Research by Weiss (1979) and others strongly suggests the development of a more peer-like relationship between parent and child in the single parent family. The influence of this relationship on the association between stepfamily adjustment and the perceived changes in family dynamics is explored.

Time is also considered for its influence on relationships. Information concerning the length of time the young adult spent in the single parent family will be collected and analyzed. Given that the parent-child relationship may change during the single parent family, the amount of time spent in the single parent family may influence the degree to which this occurs. The nature and strength of this new parent-child relationship may then influence other relationships in the family. Equally, if the structure of the single parent family alters the parent-child relationship, then it is reasonable to suggest that the structure
of the stepfamily could also exert an influence on this and other family relationships over time.

In conclusion, the objective of this research is to provide information on young adults' perceptions of changes in their family dynamics following the transition to stepfamily living and how these perceptions influence their experience of stepfamily adjustment. The goal of the study is to assess how the continuity of single parent family dynamics and the assumption of a parental role by the new spouse combine to predict stepfamily adjustment. The effect of the peer-like quality of the parent-child relationship in the single parent family is explored for its influence on this association. Time in the single parent family and time since the remarriage are also explored for their influence on the association between the shift in family dynamics and stepfamily adjustment.
CHAPTER 3

Method

3.1 The Design

This research employs a correlational design (Borg & Gall, 1983). Data were collected using an anonymous questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaire used in this study was developed from eight subscales of the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale (SAS)-Adolescent Form, an unpublished work provided by Dr. Margaret Crosbie-Burnett. (See Section 3.3 in this chapter for a detailed explanation of modifications to the SAS.) The data provided information regarding the participants' perceptions of the variables described below. The relationships between the dependent, independent, and contingency variables provided empirical data to inform guidelines for stepfamily development as described by Mills (1984).

The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, Stepfamily Adjustment, was a measure of young adults' perceptions of three aspects of their stepfamily. Specifically, participants were asked questions concerning their perceptions of family cohesion, family happiness and their sense of self efficacy within their stepfamily. The score for the dependent variable consists of three subscales from the SAS-Adolescent Form (Crosbie-Burnett, unpublished):

(a) Family Cohesion
(b) Family Happiness
(c) Self Efficacy

The Independent Variables

The independent variables were measures of the young adults' perceptions of changes to family functioning since the remarriage. The first variable, Continuity of Single Parent Family Functioning, assessed the degree to which the family dynamics evident in the single parent family specific to the biological parent had changed since the remarriage.
The Continuity of Single Parent Family Functioning was measured by three subscales:

(a) Effect of Remarriage on the Biological Parent-Child Relationship, based on the SAS subscale of the same name.

(b) Shift in Parental Control - Biological Parent, a three item subscale developed from one question from the SAS.

(c) Ritual, a nine item subscale generated by the author based on literature in this area.

The second independent variable, The Assumption of a Parental Role by the New Spouse, was measured by two subscales:

(a) Shift in Parental Control - Stepparent, a three item subscale developed from one question from the SAS.

(b) Displacement of the Adolescent, based on the SAS subscale of the same name.

(See section 3.3 for an explanation of subscale development).

The Contingency Variables

It was further hypothesized that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables would be influenced by three contingency variables:

(a) Length of time spent in the single parent family (Time 3). This variable was calculated as the length of time between the final separation of the biological parents and the remarriage or common-law commitment of the remarried couple. Time spent in intermediate relationships was subtracted from the total time between final separation and the most recent or current commitment.

(b) Length of time since the remarriage (Time 6).

(c) Parent as Peer - a measure of the peer-like quality of the relationship between the young adult and the custodial parent during the single parent family. This variable was measured using the three-item subscale from the SAS entitled Biological Parent Allies with Adolescent in addition to three items generated by the author.
3.2 Validity and Reliability of the SAS

Validity

Content validity of the SAS. Variables for the first generation of the SAS were generated through searching the limited stepfamily literature available in 1981 and by interviewing clinicians and stepfamilies. Three to five items were generated to operationalize each variable. The first generation of the SAS was administered to 87 stepfamilies on the American West Coast.

The second generation of the SAS was used for this study. Items and subscales from the first generation were modified using reliability and validity tests. Experience with the first generation resulted in new variables being added. In total, the present generation of the SAS contains 25 subscales, each with a biological parent form (mother/father), a stepparent form (stepmother/stepfather), an adolescent form (adolescent with stepmother/adolescent with stepfather) and a child form (child with stepmother/child with stepfather).

Family members independently completed the second generation SAS and other instruments (card-sort and audio taped interview) to calculate validity. Subsamples of families were administered the SAS twice (for test-retest measure) and others completed three additional scales (for test validity).

Construct validity of the SAS scales used in this project. The construct validity of the Family Cohesion and Family Happiness Subscales is described by Crosbie-Burnett (unpublished). The Family Cohesion subscale was compared to the cohesion scale of the FACES III by Olsen, Portner and Lavee (cited in Crosbie-Burnett, unpublished). The Family Happiness Scale was compared to the Family Satisfaction Scale by Olsen, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxem and Wilson (cited in Crosbie-Burnett, unpublished).

Low correlations were found when the SAS subscales Family Cohesion and Family Happiness were correlated with the respective established scale. It was speculated that the non-normal distribution of the subscales deflated the correlations. Therefore, in each case,
the sample was divided into high score and low scores by dividing the sample along its midpoint (high score indicating more cohesion or happiness and low score denoting low cohesion or happiness). T-tests were computed using the established instruments as the dependent measures. In each case, the SAS subscales were strongly supported.

The Self Efficacy Subscale responses were also divided into a happy and unhappy sample along the midpoint. T-tests were computed using the other SAS subscales as dependent variables (happy/unhappy, high/low cohesion). The validity of the Self Efficacy Scales was reported to be supported. (The calculations were not provided.) Correlations with the card sort method of reporting adjustment was moderate. Social desirability was suggested as a possible bias in the card sort.

Reliability

Internal consistency. Crosbie-Burnett (unpublished) provides a brief description of the calculations undergone for each SAS subscale. Item to subscale correlations were computed. The subscales were found not to be normally distributed but rather to cluster toward scores indicating a positive adjustment. Crosbie-Burnett suggests that this is to be expected from a volunteer sample. This also seems appropriate as those who redivorce screen themselves out of the remarriage population. Crosbie-Burnett reports Spearman correlation coefficients and Pearson product moment correlation coefficients for each subscale.

The internal consistency ratings of the subscales used in the current study varied as indicated in the Pearson product moment correlations. The Family Cohesion Subscale and the Family Happiness Subscale demonstrated the highest degree of internal consistency with a mean r of .80 and .83 respectively. The mean r for the Self Efficacy Subscale was reported at .67. The Displacement of Adolescent Subscale, the Biological Parent Allies with Adolescent Subscale and the Effects of Remarriage on the Biological Parent-Child Relationship Subscale had internal consistency scores of r = .44, r = .71 and r = .82 respectively.
With the exception of the Displacement of Adolescent Subscale, the SAS Subscales demonstrated a moderate to high degree of internal consistency. This is acceptable given that the SAS represents a ground breaking endeavour in a field that is virtually untouched by empirical research. The SAS is in a relatively early stage of development and as such, it is the hope of this researcher that the current study will contribute to its further development.

For this project, the Displacement of the Adolescent Subscale was substantially modified. A detailed description of this process is found in section 3.3 below.

**Test-retest.** The two-week test-retest reliability scores (Pearson r) for each subscale were reported. Crosbie-Burnett reports that most subscales had excellent test-retest reliability (e.g., Family Happiness r = .83, r = .78 respectively; Effect of Remarriage on Biological Parent-Child Relationship r = .82, r = .88 respectively). However, some of the subscales were not consistent over time (Bioparent Sides With Adolescent r = .71, r = .62; Bioparent Supports Stepparent r = .52, r = .73). Crosbie-Burnett suggests that this may be due to heightened awareness stimulated by participation in the first assessment. Some families reported family discussions and 'break throughs' after completing the SAS.

**3.3 The Modification and Implementation of the SAS and Other Subscales**

The research presented here has utilized the SAS as a model and a guide. The SAS is the only instrument known to the author that attempts to assess stepfamily functioning. As such, the SAS has been invaluable for this project.

In some instances, the SAS Subscales were used as presented by Crosbie-Burnett (unpublished). In other cases, it was necessary to make slight to moderate modifications to the SAS Subscales to respect the conceptualizations developed for this project. (See Appendix B for a question by question log of the SAS subscale questions and subsequent changes). In one instance, a subscale was generated which did not originate in the SAS. A complete description of subscale construction and modification is provided below.
Development of Subscales used in the Dependent Variable

Three subscales made up the dependent variable: Family Cohesion Subscale (#29-31), Family Happiness Subscale (#32-36) and Self Efficacy Subscale (#37-39). The three subscales were implemented as presented in the SAS with only slight modifications. In all items, a Likert scale of A to D was used in the SAS. A and D are labeled as representing two opposite choices. Positions B and C represent options between A and D. In some questions positions B and C are also labeled. However, in all but one question (#30), these three SAS subscales contained an E option which was not labeled. As there were no directions concerning the E option, it was removed in all cases where it was not labeled. The E option was retained when it was labeled.

Two slight alterations were made to questions #29 and #37. In question #29 "...closeness of my family." was altered to "...closeness of my stepfamily." In question #37, several examples of the kinds of activities asked about in the main sentence were offered. These examples ("Like: Where to go for ice cream, what TV show to watch, etc.") were removed because they suggested activities that may not be relevant for the 19-29 year old age group who would be participating in this study.

Subscales used in the Independent Variables

Continuity of the single parent family. This variable is made up of three subscales: Ritual Subscale, Shift in Parental Control - Biological Parent Subscale, and Effects of Remarriage on Child-Biological Parent Relationship Subscale. The Ritual Subscale is a nine item subscale generated by the author for this project. As instruments that assess changes in family rituals following a remarriage were not found in the existing literature, the Ritual Subscale was based on empirical work by Wolin and Bennett (1984) and Wolin et al. (1980). Three levels of ritual are suggested by these authors to represent the ritual or symbolic life of the family. Three questions were generated for each level, using constructs suggested by Wolin & Bennett (1984).
The Shift in Parental-Control - Biological Parent Subscale is a three item subscale. This subscale grew out of one question in the Adolescent Inhibiting Stepparent From Leadership Subscale of the SAS. The question in the SAS is "It's okay with me if my mother gives up some of her authority to my stepfather". The modified question (#12) reads "My mother has given up some of her authority to my stepfather."

The changes were made for two reasons. First, this question seemed to include two ideas, an expression of affect and an observation of a shift in parental control. The objective of this subscale for this project was to address only the shift in parental control. Second, the questions making up the independent variables in this project were restricted to statements of perceptions of behaviors. No affective dimensions were addressed in the independent variables. Therefore, the question was simplified to include only the perception of shift in parental control.

This question also contained an E option which was not labeled. The E option was removed.

The Shift in Parental Control - Biological Parent Subscale includes two additional questions not found in the SAS. The questions are extensions to other domains of parental decision making which are relevant to young adult students. The first (#10) asks the respondent to rate the extent to which their "...mother has given to [their] stepfather some of her control over how much financial support [the student] receive[s]". The next, (#11) asks the respondent to rate the extent to which their "...mother has given to [their] stepfather some of her control over how much emotional support [the student] receive[s]".

The control over financial support and emotional support are concerns for college age children rarely addressed in the literature on stepfamily development (Crosbie-Burnett & Skyles, 1989). However, young adults who are attending post secondary institutions may be dependent on such support from their custodial parent. Particularly for those students living away from home, this is a more relevant though not exclusive, expression of 'parenting' than discipline or limit-setting.
Effects of the Remarriage on Biological Parent-Child Relationship Subscale contains a number of modifications. It is a four item subscale (#13 - #16) with modifications, some very slight, in every question. Question #13 resembles question #12 in that the SAS question contained an affective component as well as a behavioral observation. The same process applied and the SAS question "It bothers me that my stepfather has come between me and my mother." was modified to "My stepfather comes between me and my mother." This reduced the conceptual complexity of the question and retained only the observational aspect. In this way it remained consistent with other items determining the independent variable.

Questions #13 and #14 contained an E option with no label. The E option was removed. This is the only modification of question 14.

Question 15 was substantially modified. The SAS question reads "Since my mother's remarriage, I feel ....". The respondent chooses between: A less secure about my mother's love for me, B (undefined mid-point) or C. more secure about my mother's love for me. An unlabeled E option was also included. The question was altered to read "Since we have become a stepfamily my mother demonstrates her love for me ...". The options were also modified to read "A less frequently, B (undefined mid-point) and C more frequently."

For question #15, changes were made for two reasons. First, these modifications translate an affective question to a behavioral question in order to remain consistent with other items in subscales measuring the independent variable. Also, "Since my mother's remarriage..." was changed to "Since we have become a stepfamily..." because young adults who became stepchildren because of their mother's common-law relationship were included in this study. The SAS was used with remarried couple families only.

Similarly, #16 used the term "remarriage" to indicate the transition to stepfamily life. Therefore, "Since my mother's remarriage ..." was altered to read "Since we became a stepfamily..."
Questions #15 and #16 did not contain a D option but did contain an unidentified E option. The E option was removed from both questions.

The assumption of parenting by the new spouse. This variable was made up of two subscales: (a) Shift in Parental Control - Stepparent Subscale and (b) Displacement of the Adolescent Subscale. The first of these two subscales is the companion subscale to the Shift in Parental Control - Biological Parent Subscale. It too was developed from a single question in the SAS. The SAS question reads "I have to try to keep my stepfather from taking over this family too much." A modified version of this question (#19) was used in this project which reads "My stepfather has taken over this family." This modification removed the affective dimension of the question keeping it consistent with other items in the independent variable. Again, the unlabeled E option was removed.

Two questions were generated from the SAS question to extend the concept of parental control to those areas of relevance to young adult post-secondary students. Question #17, "My stepfather has taken over some of my mother's control over how much financial support I receive from my family" and question #18 "My stepfather has taken over some of my mother's control over how much emotional support I receive from my family." were added.

The inclusion of two discrete subscales, the Shift in Parental Control Subscale for each of the Biological Parent and Stepparent, permits exploration of perceived responsibility of the shift in parental control. Two questions originally found in the same SAS subscale were separated and used as the foundation for two separate subscales in this project. These SAS questions were segregated to create two subscales, one for the perceived actions of the biological parent and another for the perceived actions of the stepparent. The biological parent subscale asks questions about the biological parent giving up control while the stepparent subscale asks questions about the stepparent taking over control. In this way it is possible to distinguish between different perceptions of which
adult is considered to be responsible for the shift in parental control and to explore possible effects of this difference.

The Displacement of Adolescent Subscale (#20 - #22) contains the most dramatic modifications. The questions were altered slightly and the entire subscale was coded in the opposite direction to the SAS. In question #21, the verb was changed from "... has made..." to "...makes..." to remain consistent with the other questions. Also, the unlabeled E option was removed.

In question #22, several changes were necessary to reduce the item to a behavioral observation. The SAS question asks "When my stepfather tries to do the things in the family that are OR were my jobs,..." followed by five choices. The choices read: A "I do not like it," B unlabeled, C unlabeled, and D "I like it." The E option reads "He does not do this." To effect the change to a behavioral observation the 'When' was removed from the question. Also the choices were altered to A. true, B. often true, C. rarely true, and D. not true. No E option was provided.

The conceptualization of the impact of perceived displacement in this project challenges that of the SAS. The SAS conceptualized the displacement of the adolescent as a positive contribution to stepfamily adjustment. Crosbie-Burnett (M. Crosbie-Burnett, personal communication, March, 1991) suggests that traditional notions of family theorize that the parentification of the child is potentially damaging. The child is exposed to the responsibilities of adulthood too soon and may not have the opportunity to engage in age appropriate activities because of the additional responsibilities taken on during the single parent family. Therefore, a return to child status would contribute positively to stepfamily adjustment as the child could now attend to developmentally appropriate activities such as playing and socializing (M. Crosbie-Burnett, personal communication, March, 1991).

As described in Chapter 2, the process of displacement is conceptualized as a negative influence on stepfamily adjustment in this project. It is the theory of this author that displacement of an adolescent from the roles and responsibilities assumed in the single
parent family is perceived by the adolescent as rejection by the stepfamily. This may be experienced as interference with the relationship between the adolescent and the biological parent as well as disempowerment and alienation from the stepfamily when forced to return to a less mature position. Therefore, the displacement of the adolescent is theorized to be an obstruction rather than a positive contribution to the adolescent's perception of stepfamily adjustment. Consequently, the Displacement of Adolescent Subscale was coded in the opposite direction from the coding suggested by the SAS.

**Development of Subscales Measuring the Contingency Variables**

Three contingency variables were included in this study. Two were measures of time. Time in the single parent family (Time 3) was calculated by subtracting the amount of time spent in intermediate relationships from the total time between the final separation of the biological parents and the most recent or current remarriage or common-law commitment. Time since the remarriage (Time 6) measured the time between the most recent remarriage or common-law commitment and April 1, 1991.

**Parent as Peer**. The Parent as Peer Subscale measures the peer-like quality of the parent-child relationship in the single parent family. This subscale comprises a three item SAS subscale and three items generated by the author for this project.

The SAS Subscale "Biological Parent Maintaining Alliance with Adolescent" was used with little modification. In all three questions (#23, #24 and #25) the tense of the verb was changed from the present to the past. This was appropriate as the questions for this project were directed to the time, prior to the respondent's 19th birthday, when she/he lived in a single parent family. In one question (#25) the word 'future' was inserted before 'stepfather' to indicate the time before the couple's commitment. In all three questions, the unlabeled E option was removed.

The SAS subscale was elaborated upon by adding three questions generated by the author for this project. These questions addressed points raised by Glenwick and Mowrey (1986) in describing a profile of the 'parent as peer' family. Glenwick and Mowrey (1986)
provide the profile of characteristics which translated easily into questionnaire items. The structure of the SAS questions described above were adhered to in item construction.

Following the completion of the questionnaire development for the current study, two individuals aged 22 and 31 read the questions. Their comments were solicited to confirm that the questions were age appropriate. Given that the SAS questionnaire was designed for adolescents, it was important that the questions in this study not patronize or speak down to older respondents. This also gave the researcher the opportunity to confirm the clarity of the questions for individuals not familiar with the often awkward vocabulary necessary to describe stepfamily relationships.

Subsequently, two individuals who fit the criteria specified for participation in the study, completed the questionnaire. (See section 3.4 for a description of the criteria.) These individuals were then requested to comment on the questions and to indicate which, if any, did not make sense to them or seemed incompatible with their situation. This provided an opportunity to confirm that the questions were suitable for individuals of the age group and family structure selected for study.

List of Definitions

A list of definitions was generated to accompany the questionnaire (see Appendix C). Definitions specific to the current study were provided in an attempt to further clarify the questions. The list of definitions explained that a 'stepfamily' could be created by a common-law relationship as well as a formal marriage ceremony. For the purposes of this study, the custodial mother's partner in a common-law relationship would be considered a 'stepfather'. Instructions were also given to consider the beginning of the stepfamily as the time the relationship between the custodial mother and her partner became permanent whether in a common-law stepfamily or one formed by a remarriage.
3.4 The Subjects

The sample consisted of 48 students between 19 and 29 years old attending post-secondary institutions in metropolitan Vancouver who responded to advertisements on notice boards (see Appendix D). The structure of the students' families were strictly controlled in accordance with theoretical and practical considerations. Five criteria regarding family structure were specified.

(a) The biological parents had separated and/or divorced. Students from families in which the marriage of the biological parents was terminated by the death of one member of the marital couple were excluded. This helped to promote a more homogeneous sample. Also, generating precise questions for stepfamily situations is very difficult given the variety in stepfamily situations. Developing questions which also include the experience and changes to family structure after the death of a parent proved to be impossible.

(b) The biological mother had remarried or made a commitment to a common-law relationship. Only students who had a stepfather were included in this study. Demographic information (Glick, 1984) suggests that mother custody/stepfather families make up the majority of stepfamilies. Given the limited time and resources available for this project, it was not reasonable to reach an equal number of father/stepmother families in order to make comparisons between these two family structures. Regretfully, father-custody/stepfather families were excluded from this study, but remain as an area of interest for this researcher for future work.

(c) The student's primary residence was with the biological mother at least 50% of the time between the final separation of the biological parents and the mother's most recent remarriage/common-law commitment. By definition an even 50 - 50 division of custody is the least amount of time spent with the biological mother for her to be considered the 'custodial parent'.
(d) The student was a teenager (12 - 19) at the time of the commitment to the new relationship. Mills (1984) suggests that the assumption of a parental role by the stepparent is particularly questionable for stepfamilies that include an adolescent. However, little empirical information is available regarding adolescents in stepfamilies and even less that considers young adults (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989). This study focuses on the adolescent and young adult experience in an effort to contribute to this as yet unexplored area of research.

(e) The relationship that became permanent when the student was a teenager is the current or most recent committed relationship for the biological mother. If the relationship that began when the participant was a teenager has now ended and a new commitment was made after the respondent had turned 20, the student was excluded. This stipulation ensures that the experience of adjusting to a new stepparent began while the respondent was a teenager.

3.5 The Procedure

Potential participants contacted the researcher by telephone. During the initial conversation the students were screened for characteristics described above. (See Appendix E for the screening check list.) Students whose current status and family history matched the criteria were offered the opportunity to participate in the study.

An appointment was made to meet the participants for 30 to 45 minutes in a location and at a time that was convenient for them. Meetings generally took place in cafeterias or public areas on the campus the student attended. After initial introductions and instructions, the student was given a questionnaire to complete (see Appendix A).

The researcher supervised the completion of the questionnaire to ensure that any confusion regarding the meaning of the questions or vocabulary could be clarified. More importantly, students' family situations were, at times, more complex than the conceptualizations underlying the questions. (See section 4.1 for examples of these complexities.) At these times, the researcher paraphrased the questions or provided illustrations of possible choices. As much as possible the same scenarios were offered. In
no instance did the researcher suggest which response would be most appropriate for the respondent.

Following the completion of the questionnaire, the students were paid $5 for their participation. Also, the researcher debriefed the student at this time. The students were invited to ask questions and to make comments about the study. Frequently students took this opportunity to tell the story of their family.
CHAPTER 4

Results

The results are presented in four sections. The first section reports a demographic description of the sample. The second section describes the reliability scores of the scales used. Reliabilities from this study and those of the Wisconsin sample are compared. The third section reports the results of the multiple regression analysis on the proposed model including changes to the model as suggested by the analysis. The final section reports specific questions relating demographic characteristics to subscale scores as suggested by the literature.

4.1 Demographic Information

One hundred and sixty-nine individuals responded to the notices advertising the study. Forty-nine students matched the criteria and participated in this study by completing the questionnaire. One questionnaire was discarded because of missing pages. The remaining 48 questionnaires were used. Two students made errors in reporting their age. Their answers to these questions were entered as missing data.

Participants ranged in age from 17.9 years to 29.3 years (mean 23 years). Twenty-seven were female, 21 were male. Their age at the time their biological parents separated ranged from 4 months prenatal to 18.6 years. (The age of those whose parents separated before their birth was adjusted to zero to avoid negative numbers in the calculations.) The mean age at separation was 8.8 years (S.D. = 4.5 years).

The custody arrangements in place while the participant was a minor varied. Four respondents lived half time at each biological parent's residence (8%). Twelve spent 75% of the time at their mother's residence (25%). The largest group saw their biological father for occasional visits (41.7%) while a substantial number had rarely seen him or had never met him (19%).

For most participants (69%) there had been no marriages or common-law commitments between the separation of their biological parents and their mother's
commitment to her current or most recent partner. In 25% of the cases there had been one intermediate relationship. One respondent indicated that there had been two intermediate relationships. In one case there had been three intermediate relationships and in another there had been four. (This does not include new relationships on the part of the biological father.)

The length of time between their biological parents' final separation and their mother's commitment to her current or most recent partner ranged from 0 to 16 years with a mean of 6.5 years. The age of the participants at the time of their mother's remarriage or common-law commitment varied from 11.5 years to 20 years (mean of 15.1 years). In 69% of cases the mother's new partner had children from a previous union. Most remarried couples did not live common-law before marrying (60%). For those who did, the mean duration of common-law relationships before marriage was 2.4 years.

Living arrangements post remarriage were considered. The length of time the young adult had spent living with the remarried couple ranged from 0 to 12 years (mean 3.8 years.). Thirteen percent were still living with their mother and her partner full time, 8% lived with them part time and 65% do not live with the remarried couple at all. In 7 cases (15%) the relationship between the couple had ended. (If the mother was in a remarriage or common-law relationship other than the one which began when the participant was a teenager, the individual was not considered for the study.)

Four percent of the students were completely dependent on their mother and/or stepfather for financial support, 25% were partially dependent, 17% received occasional support and 54% received no financial support from the remarried couple. For those who were supported by their mother and/or her partner, 40% received the support from their mother and her partner together, 55% from mother only and 5% from their mother's partner only. (Financial support from the biological father was not examined.)

Contact with the biological father ranged from frequent (41.7%) and regular (43.7%), through infrequent and irregular (30%) to rare or no contact (15%). (These
groups do not add up to 100% because of the possible combinations of frequent/infrequent and regular/irregular contact. See question 13 of the demographic section of the questionnaire, Appendix A.)

The demographic description provides a superficial view of the diversity of the respondents and their stepfamilies. However, the complexity of the experience of the respondents is not well articulated by these statistics. In many cases, respondents struggled to fit the events that shaped their families into the categories provided for them. For example, in a few cases, the respondent reported that the biological father was involved with the respondent's biological mother and his next conjugal partner at the same time. This made it difficult for the respondent to know the date of the final separation of the biological parents or the starting point of the next commitment. In one case, the prospective common-law partner roomed with the family. This made it difficult for the respondent to know when the common-law relationship began. In another case, the respondent did not meet the stepfather until two years after the wedding because the stepfather lived in another country. This made it difficult for the respondent to decide when the family had really become a stepfamily.

In addition to the demographic questions, respondents answered questions focusing on their perceptions of their stepfamily. This 39 item questionnaire included eight subscales that make up three of the five variables defined in this study. (The remaining two are measures of time.)

4.2 Internal Consistency and Reliability Estimates

Cronbach's Alphas, Item to Subscale Correlations

The response to each question was recorded on a 3, 4 or 5 point Likert scale. For each item, the mean and standard deviations are reported in Table 1. The subscale scores were calculated by adding the scores of each item in the subscale. The mean and standard deviation of each subscale is reported in Table 1. Item to subscale Pearson correlations are also shown in Table 1.
Table 1

Item and Subscale Means and Standard Deviations, Subscale Alphas, Item to Subscale Correlations and Average Item to Subscale Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item/Subscale Name</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>Item to Subscale Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohesion Subscale</strong></td>
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<td>Cohes_A</td>
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<td>1.07</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohes_C</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.17</td>
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<td>Mean = .88</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Happi_C</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Happi_D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happi_E</td>
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<td>1.02</td>
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<td><strong>Self Efficacy Subscale</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mean = .81</td>
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<td>Selfef_C</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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</table>
Table 1 cont'd

Item and Subscale Means and Standard Deviations, Subscale Alphas, Item to Subscale Correlations and Average Item to Subscale Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Item/Subscale Name</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S D</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alphas</th>
<th>Item to Subscale Correlation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual Subscale (a)</td>
<td>Ritual_A</td>
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<td>.73</td>
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<td>Ritual Subscale (a)</td>
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<td>.64</td>
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<td>Mean = .86</td>
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<td>1.02</td>
<td>.83</td>
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<td>Shift in Parental Control - Biological Parent Subscale</td>
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<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effects of Remarriage on Biological Parent-Child Relationship</td>
<td>Rem-Effects_A</td>
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<td>Mean = .82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effects of Remarriage on Biological Parent-Child Relationship</td>
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<td>1.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effects of Remarriage on Biological Parent-Child Relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effects of Remarriage on Biological Parent-Child Relationship</td>
<td>Rem-Effects_D</td>
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<td>Shift in Parental Control - Stepparent Subscale</td>
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<td>Displacement of Adolescent Subscale</td>
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<td>Displacement of Adolescent Subscale</td>
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<td>Displacement of Adolescent Subscale</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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Table 1 cont’d

Item and Subscale Means and Standard Deviations, Subscale Alphas, Item to Subscale Correlations and Average Item to Subscale Correlations.

Contingency Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item/Subscale Name</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Item to Subscale Correlation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parent as Peer Subscale</td>
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<td>Peer_A</td>
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<td>.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer_B</td>
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<td>Peer_C</td>
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<td>Peer_D</td>
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<td>Peer_E</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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</table>

Note. aRitual_C was removed to improve reliability of the Ritual Subscale. bPeer_F was removed to improve reliability of the Peer Subscale.
Many of the subscale names are long and convoluted. The vocabulary to describe stepfamily concepts and relationships is lugubrious and inadequate at best. In order to facilitate the following discussion, the subscale names have been shortened. An attempt has been made to retain the essential concept of the subscale to remind the reader of the content of the subscale while reading. The names have been condensed as follows:

| Ritual | Ritual |
| Shift in Parental Control - Biological Parent | Shift-Bio |
| Shift in Parental Control - Stepparent | Shift-Step |
| Effects of the Remarriage on the Biological Parent-Child Relationship | Rem-Effects |
| Displacement of the Adolescent | Displacement |
| Parent as Peer | Peer |

The dependent variable. Cronbach's Alphas for the subscales contained within the dependent variable, Stepfamily Adjustment (Y), indicate moderate to high internal consistency. The Happiness Subscale demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of .93. The other subscales making up the dependent variable show moderate internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha of .79 for the Cohesion Subscale and .73 for the Self Efficacy Subscale.

The independent variable. The subscales making up the independent variables (Continuity of the Single Parent Family Dynamics and Assumption of Parental Control by the Stepparent) also indicate moderate to high internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha varied from .72 for the Displacement Subscale, to .80, .82, and .85 for the Ritual Subscale, the Shift-Bio Subscale and the Rem-Effects Subscale respectively.

The contingency variable. The contingency variable measured by the the Peer Subscale also showed moderate internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha of .72.
Intercorrelations of the Subscale Scores and Correlations of the Subscale Scores to the Variable Scores.

Intercorrelations of the subscale scores and correlations of the subscale scores to the variable scores are reported in (Table 2). The subscales making up the dependent variable were moderately correlated with each other ($r = .77$ to $r = .79$). Each of the the subscales were highly correlated with $Y$ ($r = .88$ to $r = .96$).

The subscales making up the independent variables showed a moderate correlation ($r = .50$ to $r = .76$). However, segregating these subscales into two groups as was hypothesized for this study, one set reflecting the actions of the biological parent (Continuity of the Single Parent Family) and the other set reflecting the actions of the stepparent (Assumption of a Parental Role by the Stepparent) was shown to be unwarranted. The correlations among the five subscales making up the two independent variables supported the interconnectedness of these constructs. (As is discussed in Section 4.3, the regression analysis and factor analysis confirmed this.)

The moderate negative correlation between Displacement Subscale and the stepfamily adjustment variable supported the conceptualization of the impact of displacement on adolescents as described in Chapter 2 and challenged that of the SAS. In the current study, a high degree of displacement was hypothesized to predict a low degree of stepfamily adjustment as perceived by the young adult. This conceptualization challenged that of the SAS which predicted a positive correlation between displacement and stepfamily adjustment as perceived by the young adult.

The Peer Subscale had very low correlations with all the other subscales ($r = .15$ to $r = .23$) within the independent variables. This supported its inclusion as measuring a distinct construct not represented by the other subscales. It is noteworthy that while the independent variables correlate negatively with $Y$, the Peer Subscale correlates in a low but positive direction with $Y$. 
Correlation Matrix for Subcales and Variables

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<td>Rem. Efficacy</td>
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<td>Skill-Step</td>
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<td>Skill-Bio</td>
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<td>Ritual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
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TABLE 2
All the subscales making up the independent variables are negatively correlated with those making up the dependent variable, indicating a reverse relationship. The high negative correlation between the Rem-Effects Subscale and the Self Efficacy Subscale \((r = -.81)\) suggested a strong relationship between these constructs. Also, the moderate negative correlation between the Displacement Subscale and the Happiness Subscale \((r = -.71)\) suggested a relationship between these two constructs.

**Comparisons between the SAS and the Current Study**

Subscales used in this study were provided in part by Dr. Margaret Crosbie-Burnett from an unpublished work entitled The Stepfamily Adjustment Scale (SAS). The modifications to several of the subscales preclude many statistical comparisons. Nevertheless, the mean subscale reliability coefficients can be compared.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Reliability Coefficients of the SAS and the Current Study</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subscale Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rem-Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all cases the reliability coefficients increased. In the case of the Self Efficacy Subscale, the Rem-Effects Subscale and the Displacement Subscale, this increase may be as a result of the modifications made to the questions.
Marked differences were found in the Displacement Subscale with the mean \( r \) rising from .44 to .80. This subscale is coded in a reverse direction to the SAS in accordance with a different conceptualization of the experience of displacement in stepfamily adjustment. One question was omitted entirely. Both negative correlations found in the SAS data were replaced by modest positive correlations.

However, in the case of the Cohesion Subscale and the Happiness Subscale very slight changes were made. This suggests that the differences in the mean \( r \) are perhaps attributable to a more homogeneous sample. The SAS sample was drawn from the general population of stepfamilies whereas the sample from the current study was drawn from the population of students of a specific age range in attendance at one of nine post-secondary institutions in metropolitan Vancouver. Also, the SAS research did not screen for family structure. As was described in Chapter 3, the family profile was carefully controlled for in this study.

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression proceeded in three stages. First, a multiple regression was performed using the hypothesized formula. Based on the results of this regression and observations of the correlations between subscales not originally clustered together, many different configurations of the subscales were explored. No distinct clustering was found among the subscales making up the independent variables.

Regressions were then conducted with each of the subscales individually. Regressions were also carried out using the individual subscales in different sequences to determine how the variance explained by each subscale was related to the variance explained by the others. This provided a more textured view of the landscape described by these subscales. The conclusion of this stage was that four of the five subscales contributed to the explanation of variance in \( Y \). All four correlated moderately with each other and were therefore placed within one variable labelled '\( X_1 \)' or Erosion of the of the Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily. A factor
analysis also supported the conclusion that the four remaining subscales were measuring the same concept.

The third and final step to the regression process was to enter the contingency variables into the equation. Regressions were conducted using the contingency variables against Y (Stepfamily Adjustment) alone and in conjunction with X1 (Erosion of Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships ...). A final formula is suggested based on the results of this process.

**Stage 1**

The multiple regression was begun by inserting the data into the formula hypothesized in Chapter 2. Could Y (Stepfamily Adjustment) be predicted by the Continuity in the Single Parent Family (Ritual, Shift-Bio, Rem-Effects Subscales) and the Assumption of a Parental Role by the Stepparent (Shift-Step and Displacement Subscales)?

The regression equation and results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of SPF</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.1776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption of Parental Role</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.0002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R^2 = .5878 \]

In this configuration, the Continuity of the Single Parent Family and the Assumption of Parental Roles by the Stepparent accounted for considerable variance in Y as shown in Table 4.

Next, the Shift-Bio Subscale was removed from the regression. Respondents had reported that the two subscales measuring shift in parental control seemed to be asking the
same questions. Also, these two subscales were moderately correlated. This configuration of the regression equation is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale grouping</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual, Rem-Effects</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.0753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift-Step, Displacement</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² = .6016

In this configuration 60% of the variance in Y is explained. Also, the probability level of the variance explained by the subscale group that includes Ritual and Rem-Effects improved substantially.

The Shift-Bio Subscale was then reintroduced in the same cluster as the Shift-Step subscale. Respondents reported finding these two sets of questions conceptually similar. This model and results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale grouping</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual, Rem-Effects</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.0587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift-Step, Shift-Bio, Displacement</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.0007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² = .5417

In this configuration 54% of the variability in Y is explained as shown in Table 6.
A fourth and final configuration was explored. In this configuration, the five subscales were grouped into three variables. This regression and results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale grouping</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.3654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rem-Effects, Displacement</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift-Step, Shift-Bio</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.6255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this configuration, the greatest amount of variance in $Y$ is explained. The subscales Rem-Effects and Displacement appear to be the most accurate predictors.

Stage 2

At this point, the categories hypothesized in Chapter 2 were discarded. To determine which subscales contributed to the strong effect found in the configurations explored in Stage 1, each subscale was regressed onto the $Y$ variable separately.

The subscale assessing changes to ritual patterns predicted little variance in $Y$ ($R^2 = .06$, $p = .0987$) and did not reach a level of significance comparable to the other four. Ritual was therefore eliminated from the model. Possible reasons and implications of ritual not significantly contributing to the model are discussed in Chapter 5.
The predictive values of the remaining four subscales are:

- **Shift-Bio**
  - \( R^2 = 0.22 \)
  - \( p = 0.0047 \)
  - \( \beta = -0.47 \)

- **Shift-Step**
  - \( R^2 = 0.34 \)
  - \( p < 0.0001 \)
  - \( \beta = -0.58 \)

- **Displacement**
  - \( R^2 = 0.49 \)
  - \( p < 0.0001 \)
  - \( \beta = -0.70 \)

- **Rem-Effects**
  - \( R^2 = 0.51 \)
  - \( p < 0.0001 \)
  - \( \beta = -0.72 \)

All four of the subscales demonstrated a predictive value in a negative direction. In section 4.2, the subcales were reported to be moderately correlated with each other. Therefore, for the purpose of the current study, these four subscales were grouped into a single variable, 'X1', Erosion of the Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily.

A factor analysis was conducted to confirm that the four subscales were measuring the same construct. The factor loadings were:

- **Shift-Bio**
  - 0.84

- **Shift-Step**
  - 0.89

- **Displacement**
  - 0.82

- **Rem-Effects**
  - 0.83

The high values demonstrated that each subscale contributed significantly to the construct measured by X1 (The Erosion of the Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily). These subscales are highly related and representative of a single construct.

Given that the four subscales had contributed to the construct, calculations were performed to determine the amount of variance explained by each subscale in relation to the strongest predictor. The Rem-Effects Subscale predicted the greatest amount of variance in Y (\( R^2 = 0.51, p < 0.0001 \)). Each of the other subscales were entered into the regression equation after the Rem-Effects Subscale to determine if more variance could be explained. If more variance could not be explained then it was concluded that the variance explained by the second subscale was within the variance explained by the Rem-Effects Subscale.
The Displacement of Adolescent Subscale increased explained variance to $R^2 = .61$, $p = .0006$ for Displacement; $p = .0018$ for Rem-Effects. When added to the Rem-Effects Subscale the Shift-Step Subscale increased explained variance slightly at a moderately significant level ($R^2 = .54$, $p < .0001$ for Rem-Effects; $p = .0999$ for Shift-Step). The Shift-Bio Subscale did not add to the variance described by the Rem-Effects Subscale ($R^2 = .52$, $p < .0001$ for Rem-Effects and $p = .3964$ for Shift-Bio).

The results of Stage 2 indicated that the variance explained by the Shift-Bio and Shift-Step Subscales is contained within the variance explained by the Rem-Effects Subscale. Also, much of the variance explained by the Displacement Subscale is included in the Rem-Effects Subscale. The combination of the Rem-Effects Subscale and the Displacement Subscale appear to explain the variance predicted by this model. However, since the Shift-Bio and Shift-Step Subscales do predict significant variance in $Y$ on their own and are critical conceptual considerations, they remain in the model. To this point,

$$Y = -.73 X_1, \quad R^2 = .54, \quad p < .0001$$

Stage 3

Three contingency variables were hypothesized to modify the relationship between the dependent variable (Stepfamily Adjustment) and the independent variable (Erosion of Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships). The contingency variables were a) time in the single parent family (Time7), b) time in the remarriage family (Time6), and c) the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship (Peer). It was hypothesized that these three variables would interact with the independent variable and strengthen or weaken the relationship between $Y$ and $X_1$. 


The results demonstrated that the contingency variables did not improve the amount of variance explained by X1.

\[ Y = X1, R^2 = .54, p<.0001 \]

\[ Y = \text{Interaction Time3} \times X1, \ R^2 = .02, \ p = .3558 \]

\[ Y = \text{Interaction Time6} \times X1, \ R^2 = .19, \ p = .0029 \]

\[ Y = \text{Interaction Peer} \times X1, \ R^2 = .16, \ p = .0055 \]

Regressions using each of Time3, Time6, and Peer as an interaction term did not improve the variance explained in the dependent variable. Each of these three variables employed as an interaction term were not as good a predictor of Y as X1.

**Exploring the Contingency Variables as Independent Variables in the Regression.**

Given that the nature of this study is exploratory, the contingency variables were also tested as independent variables in the regression equation. These calculations found that Time3 and Time6 did not add to the variance explained by X1. Also, the two measures of time did not predict variance in Y when used alone.

The third contingency variable, the Peer Subscale, demonstrated a low correlation with the other subscales supporting its inclusion as a separate variable. The Peer Subscale did not predict variance in Y when used alone. However, the Peer Subscale did contribute to the regression equation at a significant level. The regression equation is presented in Table 8 with results.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X1</td>
<td>-.80</td>
<td>&lt; .0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.0010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 = .64 )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the results in Table 8, the final regression equation is calculated.

\[ Y = -0.80 \times X_1 + 0.32 \text{ Peer}, \quad R^2 = 0.64, \quad p < 0.001, \quad p = 0.0010 \text{ respectively.} \]

These results suggest that both the cluster of subscales making up the \( X_1 \) variable and the Peer Subscale make a statistically significant contribution to explaining the variance in \( Y \). In other words the young adults' perceptions of stepfamily adjustment (family cohesion, family happiness and self efficacy) decrease as the the erosion of the single parent family roles, responsibilities, and relationships in the stepfamily increase. In contrast, the young adults' perceptions of a greater peer-like relationship with the biological parent during the single parent family moderates the inverse relationship between \( Y \) and \( X_1 \). The inverse relationship between \( Y \) and \( X_1 \) is reduced by the positive relationship between Peer and \( Y \). The negative effect of the erosion of the single parent family roles, responsibilities, and relationships is reduced by a peer-like relationship between the biological parent and adolescent.

4.4 Effects of Demographic Characteristics on Subscale Scores

Innumerable questions could be generated exploring possible relationships between demographic characteristics and young adult perceptions as indicated by the subscale scores. Questions were selected from the clinical and stepfamily development literature. Only one comparison demonstrated statistical significance. It is described first.

1. Are the perceptions of young adults of stepfamilies in which the remarried couple is no longer together associated with differences in Stepfamily Adjustment\(^{10} \) as measured by the \( Y \) variable?

Results support the idea that the perceptions of Stepfamily Adjustment (\( Y \)) were only slightly yet significantly lower in cases where the remarried couple were no longer together.

\[ R^2 = 0.0911, \quad p = 0.0370, \quad \beta = -0.30 \]
2. Are the perceptions of young adults of stepfamilies in which the remarried couple is no longer together associated with differences in perceptions of the Erosion of the Single Parent Family in the Stepfamily as measured by the X1 variable? The results suggest no relationship.

\[ R^2 = 0.0092, \ p = 0.5168. \]

3. Are the perceptions of Stepfamily Adjustment associated with whether or not the stepfather has biological children from a previous relationship? The results suggest no relationship.

\[ R^2 = 0.0182, \ p = 0.3606. \]

4. Are the perceptions of the Erosion of the Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily associated with whether or not the stepfather has biological children from a previous relationship? The results suggest no relationship.

\[ R^2 = 0.0000, \ p = 0.9485. \]

5. Is financial dependency on the new couple associated with the young adult's perception of a shift in parental decision making concerning financial support? The results suggest no relationship.

Mother giving up decision making about financial support to the stepparent.

Chi square = 9.7267, \( p = 0.3731 \), Cramer's V = 0.2599

Stepfather taking over decision making about financial support.

Chi-square = 7.5102, \( p = 0.5842 \), Cramer's V = 0.2284.
6. Is the source of perceived financial support associated with the young adults' perceptions of a shift in parental decision making concerning financial support. The results suggest no relationship.

Mother giving up decision making concerning financial support to the stepfather.
Chi square = 5.5887, p = .1334, Cramer’s V = .5423
Stepfather taking over decision making concerning financial support.
Chi square = 3.6428, p = .3027, Cramer’s V = .4379.

7. Are perceptions of Stepfamily Adjustment associated with the differences in current living arrangements of the young adult (i.e., home full-time, home part-time, etc.)? The results suggest no relationship.
\[ R^2 = .0352, p = .2401 \]

8. Are perceptions of the Erosion of the Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily associated with the differences in current living arrangements of the young adults? The results suggest no relationship.
\[ R^2 = .0107, p = .5198 \]

9. Are perceptions of Stepfamily Adjustment associated with differences in the length of time spent living with the couple? The results suggest no relationship.
\[ R^2 = .0014, p = .7996 \]

10. Are perceptions of the Erosion of Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily associated with differences in the length of time spent living with the couple? The results suggest no relationship.
\[ R^2 = .0108, p = .4876 \]
11. Is the nature of the division of time between the residences of the biological parents (i.e., 50/50, 75/25, visits only to biological father, never met biological father) associated with Stepfamily Adjustment? The results suggest no relationship.

\[ R^2 = .0014, p = .8007 \]

12. Is the nature of the division of time between the residences of the biological parents (i.e., 50/50, 75/25, visits only to biological father, never met biological father) associated with the Erosion of the Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily? The results suggest no relationship.

\[ R^2 = .0000, p = .9962 \]

13. Is the frequency or regularity of contact with the biological father associated with the perceptions of the stepparent? The results suggest no relationship.

Frequency \[ R^2 = .0087, p = .5271 \]

Regularity \[ R^2 = .0029, p = .7145 \]

14. Is the perception of displacement by the new spouse different for oldest children than for those not first born? The results suggest no relationship.

\[ R^2 = .0153, p = .4018 \]

15. Are the perceptions of Stepfamily Adjustment associated with the length of time the custodial parent lived in a common-law relationship before marriage? The results suggest no relationship.

\[ R^2 = .0077, p = .7202 \]
16. Are the perceptions of the Erosion of the Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily associated with the length of time the custodial parent lived in a common-law relationship before marriage? The results suggest no relationship. \( R^2 = .0101, p = .6820. \)

17. Is the regression equation influenced by gender? The regression equation and the results are presented in Table 9. The results suggest no relationship.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>.3374</td>
<td>.0008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.0711</td>
<td>.4541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( X1 )</td>
<td>- .8235</td>
<td>&lt; .0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( R^2 = .6430 \)

18. Is the quality of parent as peer as measured in this study influenced by time in the single parent family (Time3 or Time1)? The results suggest no relationship. Time3 \( R^2 = .0045, p = .5922 \), Time1 \( R^2 = .0063, p = .6516 \).

19. Is the quality of parent as peer as measured in the current study influenced by time since the remarriage (Time6)? The results suggest no relationship. \( R^2 = .0527, p = .1291 \).
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The discussion of the research consists of six sections. The first section provides a brief review of the research objectives. The second presents the main findings. The third provides a detailed discussion of the statistical analysis. The fourth section consists of the implications of these findings for approaches to stepfamily development theory, and for clinical, and educational interventions with stepfamilies. Limitations of this research and suggestions for future research which could overcome these limitations are then discussed. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the objectives and findings of this research project.

5.1 Research Objectives

The objective of this research was to provide information on young adults' perceptions of changes in their family dynamics following a transition to stepfamily living. The focus was on young adults who became stepchildren in their teens. The study explored the association between how these young adults perceived stepfamily adjustment and their perceptions of the continuity of single parent family rituals, roles, responsibilities and relationships following the formation of the stepfamily. The effect of the peer-like quality of the parent-child relationship in the single parent family was explored for its influence on this association. Time in the single parent family and time since the remarriage were also explored for their influence on the association between the shift in family dynamics and stepfamily adjustment.

Knowledge of the association between the continuity of the single parent family dynamics within the stepfamily and stepfamily adjustment can contribute to the development of stepfamily theory and to educational and clinical guidelines for stepfamilies. Although the nuclear family is far from the only family model evident in our history and in contemporary society, it seems to be the norm against which other family forms are compared. Perhaps because of the romantic notion of the nuclear family as
immemorial, stepfamily development has been continually encouraged to follow the nuclear family model.

Models of parenting in the stepfamily have not been immune to the pervasive influence of the nuclear family model. In the stepfamily context, this would suggest that the stepparent should indeed 'parent' her or his adolescent stepchildren. Failure to do so would result in the stepfamily not being a 'real' family.

On the other hand, clinicians and theorists have begun to advocate a departure from the nuclear family mold as a positive step for stepfamilies (Mills, 1984; Crosbie-Burnett, 1985, Crosbie-Burnett & Skyles, 1989). Furthermore, adherence to the nuclear family model of parenting has been considered by some as problematic because it sets up expectations that are precisely 'unreal' (Mills, 1984). Adhering to nuclear family ideology results in a situation where a stepparent has decision making authority concerning her or his stepchildren. For a new stepfamily which includes an adolescent, this means that decisions concerning the adolescent are made by someone who does not have an intimate bond or a shared history with the young person. Equally, this creates a situation where the biological parent may defer to the opinion of the stepparent in spite of the biological parent's blood ties, shared history, and intimate bond with the adolescent. Although this may seem illogical, this is the outcome suggested by the nuclear family model.

Due to the dearth of established instruments that assess stepfamily dynamics, a relatively new and consequently unstandardized and unpublished instrument was used. This instrument, the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale (SAS), was provided by Dr. Margaret Crosbie-Burnett. In addition to the objectives stated above, this research sought to contribute to the development of the SAS. Also, supplemental items were generated by the author of this thesis for the current research.

5.2 Principal Findings

The results of this study strongly suggest that the level of stepfamily adjustment for young adults is negatively associated with their perceptions of the erosion of the single
parent family roles, relationships and responsibilities within the stepfamily. Within the concept of single parent family dynamics, the level of stepfamily adjustment was most strongly predicted by the degree to which the young adult perceived that the relationship with the biological parent had been interfered with by the new spouse. The experience of displacement from roles and relationships with other members of the single parent family added to the variance explained. The shift in parental control from the biological parent to the new spouse also predicted a substantial amount of variance in stepfamily adjustment.

Contrary to the conceptual position of previous research, the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship during the single parent family provided a positive influence on the relationship between stepfamily adjustment and the conservation of the single parent family dynamics within the stepfamily. The peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship did not change the nature of the relationship between the conservation of single parent family dynamics within the stepfamily and stepfamily adjustment. Rather, this characteristic acted to moderate the force of the negative relationship between the two variables.

Time in the single parent family and time in the remarriage family did not predict variance in stepfamily adjustment or in selected subscales. Equally, with the exception of one analysis, the demographic characteristics assessed did not influence selected subscales. The lack of significant associations between the temporal and demographic characteristics and perceptions of stepfamily dynamics suggests that the circumstances and structure of the single parent family and stepfamily have little predictive value. This implies that the relationships within the stepfamily are far more critical to stepfamily adjustment than its structure or circumstances.

These results have significant implications for developmental theory and clinical practise. See Section 5.4 for an in depth discussion of these implications.
5.3 Detailed Discussion of the Results

The Reliabilities

The reliabilities in all subscales of the current study increased slightly or substantially when compared to those from the SAS. Some of the increase in reliability may be due to the nature of the sample. The sample used to test the SAS was drawn from the general population of stepfamilies. The sample used in the current study was limited in terms of current status, family structure and age of transition to stepfamily living.

In some cases the increase in reliabilities may be due to the modifications made to the SAS subscales. Changes were made to the SAS items to simplify the questions or to tailor them to the age group targeted in this study (see Appendix B). In the instance of the Displacement Subscale, the items were coded in a reverse direction to the SAS. (The results of the modifications to the Displacement Subscale are discussed in the following section.)

The Subscales Considered Individually

These subscales touch on several issues in stepfamily adjustment. The subscales and associated issues will be discussed in the following order: 1) Rem-Effects Subscale - continuity of the experience of love and affection from the biological parent, 2) Displacement Subscale - continuity of authority of the adolescent in the single parent family roles and responsibilities within the stepfamily, 3) Shift-Bio Subscale - continuity of parental control by the biological parent, 4) Shift-Step Subscale - assumed parental control by the stepparent, 5) Ritual Subscale - change in family rituals following stepfamily transition, and 6) Peer Subscale - peer-like quality of the biological parent-child bond.

The Rem-Effects Subscale: The Rem-Effects Subscale assessed the young adult's perception of the continuity of the experience of love and affection from the biological parent. Specifically, this subscale assessed the degree to which the young adult felt that the relationship with the biological parent had been interfered with since the remarriage. The Rem-Effects Subscale predicted the greatest amount of variance to the lowest level of
probability of error. \( R^2 = .51 \ p < .0001 \). Interestingly, the Shift-Bio and Shift-Step Subscales did not add to the variance explained by this subscale. In other words, the variance explained by the Shift-Bio and Shift-Step Subscales was included within the Rem-Effects Subscale.

This suggested that the parenting relationship is just one area in which interference can be experienced. The ability of the Rem-Effects Subscale to account for variance in perceived stepfamily adjustment suggested that the experience of interference may transcend the issue of parenting (as defined in this study) and reach deeper into the relationship between the biological parent and child. This may be a particularly sensitive area, if, as the literature suggests, the parent-child bond has been intensified during the single parent family.

**The Displacement Subscale.** The Displacement Subscale is the only subscale that added to the variance explained in stepfamily adjustment by the Rem-Effects Subscale. This subscale dealt with the adolescent's role and relationships within the family excluding those with the biological parent. The Displacement Subscale assessed the continuity of the adolescent's authority in single parent family roles and responsibilities within the stepfamily. The respondents were asked about their perceptions of how their stepparent respected their authority in the family and if the stepparent is now doing things that were previously the respondent's job.

The results suggested that the relationship between the biological parent and adolescent is not the only aspect of family dynamics to influence the adolescent's perceptions of stepfamily adjustment. The young adult's perceptions of changes in other relationships within the single parent family appeared to have predictive value as well.

The conceptual work behind the Displacement Subscale is worth noting at this point. Several modifications were made to the Displacement Subscale. These modifications were supported by the results. The theoretical assumption guiding the original SAS Displacement of the Adolescent Subscale was that children who had been
promoted to positions of responsibility in the single parent family would be relieved to relinquish these responsibilities to the stepparent. It was hypothesized that the additional responsibilities interfered with the development of appropriate peer relationships and activities and were experienced as a burden. Thus displacement was seen as a positive influence in the long run (M. Crosbie-Burnett, personal communication, March, 1991).

The conceptual approach of this study was that the child's promotion to a position of greater responsibility also included greater privileges and a more intimate relationship with the custodial parent. This position becomes intimately woven into the relationship with the biological parent. To lose this position then threatened the relationship with the custodial parent and represented a second 'divorce', or the loss of the last remaining parent.

The results supported the conceptualization of this study. In the SAS development research, this subscale (coded in the reverse direction) seemed to have negative correlations with happiness scales. Not only did the reliabilities improve substantially in this study, but the Displacement Subscale explained nearly half the variance in the outcome variable (49%) when considered individually.

**The Shift-Bio and Shift-Step Subscales.** The Shift-Bio Subscale assessed the continuity of parental control by the biological parent. The Shift-Step Subscale assessed parental control assumed by the stepparent. The Shift-Bio and Shift-Step Subscales proved to have predictive value in this study (22% and 34% respectively). Although these subscales did not predict the highest amount of variance, they represent an important piece of the conceptual puzzle. The results confirm the hypothesis that the young adults perceived a shift in parental control from the biological parent to the stepparent as negatively associated with stepfamily adjustment.

The students' reactions to the questions making up these subscales provide interesting insights into the relationship between these two subscales. Students commented that they found the questions on these two subscales to be very similar. Not surprisingly, these subscales correlate at a moderate level ($r = .76$).
Interestingly, the Shift-Step Subscale (34%) seemed to predict more variance than the Shift-Bio Subscale (22%). Perhaps it was easier for children to view the stepparent as the villain who has taken over decision making than to realize that the biological parent had given up decision making. Also, in the cases of extrusion (Sager et al., 1983), children may be able to express anger toward a stepparent who is critical of them more easily than toward a biological parent who is drawing new family boundaries that do not include them. The loss of the relationship with the remaining biological parent may be more difficult to accept than the unwelcome presence of the stepparent.

Nevertheless, the Shift-Bio subscale and the Shift-Step subscale did support Mills' proposition that a shift in parental control to the stepparent was a negative influence on stepfamily adjustment. Mills (1984) and Crosbie-Burnett (1985) are each supported in their suggestion that the strong relationships between the custodial parent and the biological children must be respected to encourage positive stepfamily adjustment.

This position challenges the nuclear family model. By necessity, the nuclear family model cannot include the implicit valuing of one parental relationship over the other. Although the relationships between mothers and their children may not be identical to those of fathers and their children, the nuclear family model assumes that they are equally valuable.

In the nuclear family model, both parents have known the children from infancy. The stepfamily, by definition, contains relationships that are not equal in length or hereditary character. This is impossible in the nuclear family model. The biological parent and the stepparent relationships are not comparable, particularly for children who become stepchildren during their adolescence. Contrary to the nuclear family model and in support of Mills (1984), results from this study supported the biological parent having exclusive decision making authority over her or his biological children and the stepparent finding another way of relating to children who were adolescents at the time of stepfamily formation.
The Ritual Subscale. The independent variables (the continuity of the single parent family dynamics and the assumption of parenting by the stepparent), were originally assessed by five subscales. Of the five, only one, the Ritual Subscale, did not explain an appreciable amount of variance in stepfamily adjustment. This subscale did not originate in the SAS but was generated from work by Wolin and Bennett (1984). Although the subscale had face validity and achieved a reasonable level of reliability (alpha = .80), it did not explain variance in the dependent variable (stepfamily adjustment).

Several explanations for the lack of predictive power in the Ritual Subscale are possible. This scale is untested and may have failed to assess the maintenance of single parent family rituals in the stepfamily. It may also be possible that counter to the theory and empirical work of Wolin and Bennett (1984) and Wolin et al., (1980), family rituals do not play an essential role in assessing relationships in the single parent family or changes in stepfamily transitions. On the other hand, perhaps the relationships transcend the ritual. Old rituals may become hollow if the new relationships do not have meaning (Bossard & Bell, 1950; Whiteside, 1989; Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

Another possibility is found in the comments made by the participants as they completed the Ritual Subscale. Many students felt that family traditions had changed because they had become older, not because of a transition to stepfamily living. These students observed that they had difficulty knowing which rituals had changed because of family development over the years and which rituals had changed because of becoming a stepfamily.

From their comments, it seems that the questions addressing changes in family rituals may have put the respondents in a difficult situation. Perhaps it was necessary to be able to speculate about how the family traditions and celebrations would have evolved if they had not become a stepfamily. For students who had become stepchildren in their early teens, this may not have been possible.
This confusion could possibly have been avoided by substituting the phrase "......... have changed since we became a stepfamily" by the phrase "......... changed when we became a stepfamily" (see #1 - #9 of The Stepfamily Questionnaire, Appendix A). If the questions had addressed the time immediately after the remarriage, a more specific period of time would have been delineated. Perhaps limiting the temporal element could have avoided the confusion experienced by the respondents.

The Peer Subscale. The Peer Subscale was not included in the variables described above. It was, however, included in the regression equation. For this reason the discussion of this subscale is included in that of the regression equation below.

The Regression Equation

The original hypothesis proposed that two independent variables and three contingency variable may predict stepfamily adjustment. The independent variables were a) the continuity of the single parent family dynamics and b) the assumption of parental control by the stepparent. The contingency variables were a) time in the single parent family, b) time in the stepfamily, and c) the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship.

The independent variables. The first independent variable, continuity of the single parent family dynamics, (Ritual, Shift-Bio, and Rem-Effects Subscales) was hypothesized to assess the respondent's perceptions of maintenance of the single parent family dynamics as embodied in the actions of the biological parent. The second independent variable, the assumption of parental control by the stepparent, (Shift-Step and Displacement Subscales) attempted to assess the respondent's perceptions of the degree of assumption of a parenting role by the stepparent.

The results of many different configurations of regression equations, the intercorrelations of the subscales, and a factor analysis confirmed that four subscales (Rem-Effects, Displacement, Shift-Bio and Shift-Step) were in fact measuring the same
construct. (The Ritual Subscale did not explain variance in stepfamily adjustment and was therefore eliminated from the regression.)

The interrelatedness of these four subscales would seem to argue for the existence of a systemic experience in the stepfamily. The actions of the family members are not perceived as independent. The systemic view would suggest that their actions are part of a larger system and as such are experienced as interdependent. If the mother giving up authority to the stepfather is seen as the same phenomenon as the stepfather taking over from the mother, then one could argue that these two notions are in fact experientially inseparable for the adolescent, like two sides of a coin.

The systemic view could also be argued for the experience of displacement. If the stepparent takes responsibilities in what used to be the single parent family, those responsibilities probably belonged to someone else, possibly the adolescent, prior to the stepparent's arrival on the scene. The stepparent's inclusion in the family system through the route of responsibilities and authority, necessarily means less opportunity for another family member to experience authority in the stepfamily context. As Crosbie-Burnett reports (personal communication, March, 1991) one young woman struggling with becoming a stepteenager shouted at her mother in frustration, "But you used to ask me which earrings to wear!".

The contingency variables. Three contingency variables were also examined: time in the single parent family, time in the stepfamily, and the peer-like quality of the relationship between the single parent and the adolescent. The time variables did not predict variance in stepfamily adjustment individually, as additive terms in the regression equation, or as interaction terms in the regression equation. The Peer Subscale, assessing the peer-like quality of the relationship between the single parent and the adolescent, did not explain variance in stepfamily adjustment when tested individually or as an interaction term in the regression equation. It did, however, add to the explained variance in stepfamily adjustment when included as an additive term in the regression equation.
The lack of the explanatory value of time is an interesting, almost counter-intuitive finding. One would expect that a long period of time in the single parent family could influence the peer-like quality of the single parents' relationships with their children. Equally, time in the stepfamily did not predict variance in stepfamily adjustment. These results suggest that the dynamics of the relationship resist change due to the passage of time. 'Getting used to each other' is not sufficient to promote stepfamily adjustment.

The Peer Subscale assessed the degree of peer-like quality of the biological parent-child bond during the single parent family. The peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship alone did not explain variance in stepfamily adjustment. This suggests that it does not have a direct relationship with stepfamily adjustment. Families with a high or a low degree of peer relationship between biological parent and child can make successful transitions to stepfamily living.

Also, when used as an interaction term, the Peer Subscale did not improve the predictive value of X1. Again we can conclude that variance in the Peer Subscale does not change the nature of the relationship between stepfamily adjustment and the erosion of the single parent family dynamics within the stepfamily.

However, the Peer Subscale did add to the explained variance in stepfamily adjustment when included as an additive term in the regression equation. The addition of the Peer Subscale served to reduce the negative effects of the erosion of single parent family dynamics on stepfamily adjustment.

This finding seems to create more questions than it answers. Perhaps a strong peer-like relationship with the custodial parent enables the adolescent to feel connected to the stepfamily in spite of unwelcomed parenting by the stepparent. Perhaps a strong peer-like relationship with the biological parent gives the adolescent an avenue to express the frustrations of stepfamily adjustment in a way that promotes understanding rather than withdrawal. Perhaps parents who see their adolescent as more of a peer can accept their
emotional concerns in a more supportive manner. Perhaps feeling understood is most important for the adolescent.

**The demographic information.** Demographic data were not generally associated with stepfamily adjustment. With the exception of a slightly less positive stepfamily experience for those whose custodial parent had experienced a second divorce, none of the demographic variables correlated with the characteristics assessed by the stepfamily questionnaire.

Like the time variables, this suggested that the quality of the relationships is a more significant influence than family structure, or demographic characteristics. In other words, the effect of the structure of the living arrangements is subordinate to the effect of quality of the relationships within the family. What happens doesn't matter as much as how events or situations impact on the relationships involved. Young people can adapt to changes in structure, but the relationship with the biological parent and the roles and responsibilities within the family appear to be critical to their sense of well-being in the stepfamily.

5.4 Implications for Stepfamily Development Theory and Clinical Practice

**Stepfamily Development Theory**

In family development theory, the process of change and development in the stepfamily has been compared to the nuclear family and found to be different in character. The nuclear family is considered to change in an evolutionary fashion whereas the stepfamily is considered to change because of unpredictable and sudden events. The results of this study suggest that the nature of change may not be as critical a factor in stepfamily development as the dynamics of the relationships within the single parent family and the stepfamily. The implications of this suggestion for models of stepfamily development will proceed in the same sequence as these models were presented in Chapter 2. Comments relevant to Schulman's work will be followed by those pertaining to McGoldrick and Carter, Sager et al., Goldner, and Weiss.
Schulman - Parenthood as a nondivorcable item. Schulman (1981) suggested three stages to stepfamily development: the completion of the divorce process, the establishment of the single parent family, and the creation of the stepfamily. Schulman stresses that parenthood is not a divorcable item. The results of this research strongly support Schulman's notion of the continuity of parenting by the biological parent. The young adults who participated in this study reported that their experience of stepfamily adjustment was positively associated with the continuity of the biological parent as the exclusive authority for decision making in their regard. They also reported that the continuity of the relationship with the biological parent was a critical factor in stepfamily adjustment.

A parallel statement could be made from the results of this study concerning the new spouse. The results suggest that not only is parenthood a nondivorcable item, but marriage does not bestow parental status on a relative stranger. Young adult perceptions of the assumption of parental control by the new spouse were found to be negatively associated with their perception of stepfamily adjustment. Also, the young adults' perceptions of displacement from their roles and responsibilities by the new spouse was found to have a negative effect on stepfamily adjustment.

McGoldrick and Carter - Prerequisite attitudes. McGoldrick and Carter (1988) suggest that stepfamily adjustment is dependent on family members arriving at 'prerequisite attitudes', the lack of which can impede and eventually halt the process of stepfamily adjustment. The results of this study suggest that the 'prerequisite attitudes' are fostered by conservation of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the single parent family. Specifically, the acceptance by the new couple that parenthood is the responsibility of the biological parent is critical. The new spouse is then free to establish a relationship with the adolescent that is responsive to the developmental needs and personalities of the individuals involved. This research also suggests that for new stepfamilies with an adolescent, a 'prerequisite attitude' may be a willingness to look beyond the nuclear family model.
Expecting to recreate the nuclear family may be an attitude that hinders stepfamily adjustment rather than enhancing it.

**Sager et al. - Multiple tracks.** Sager et al. (1983) suggest multiple tracks of stepfamily development. The first marriage family (now including a separation) continues in its developmental cycle while a new developmental cycle is begun with the second marriage family. Thus, multiple developmental cycles are in process simultaneously.

This research supports the encouragement of separate developmental paths for single parent family members and steprelations. The results of this study suggest that the developmental cycle of the biological parent and children needs to progress with a minimum of interruption. The new spouse does not attempt to join the single parent family unit but rather begins a new developmental cycle with her or his stepchildren. As Mills (1984) suggests, the stepparent begins the relationship with the stepchildren by bonding with them. In the case of adolescents, Mills suggests that this may take many years or it may never happen.

**Goldner - Contradictory trajectories.** Goldner (1982) proposed 'contradictory trajectories' for members of new stepfamilies with adolescent stepchildren. As the teenage children distance from the family, the new stepfamily is looking for cohesion. The process of individuation on the part of the adolescent may be perceived as threatening the goals of the new family. Thus the new couple may attempt to draw the adolescent into the stepfamily precisely when the adolescent is seeking distance.

This study suggests that the experience of stepfamily members may contradict Goldner in some respects. These results indicate that adolescents are very concerned with their relationship with their custodial biological parent. Although they may be growing more independent, the relationship with the biological parent is still critical to the adolescent's sense of well-being in the stepfamily. Perhaps their desire to individuate and separate heightens their sensitively to perceived alienation from the biological parent by the formation of the new couple.
It appears that the 'contradictory trajectories' suggested by Goldner (1982) is appropriate to a certain degree. There may be opposition in the stepfamily, however, these results suggest that the contradiction is not between the adolescent and the stepfamily, but rather the adolescent and biological parent subsystem and biological parent and new spouse subsystem (Keshet, 1980). The new couple is split experientially. The two members of the couple do not experience the children in the same way. As Papernow (1988) explains in her interpretation of stepparent role development, the biological parent is inside the single parent family relationships and the new spouse is on the outside.

The two adults making up the new couple have disparate experiences of the children. Therefore, each adult should act in accordance with the actual relationship with the children rather than the expected or desired relationship with them. The custodial biological parent continues in the developmental process with her or his biological children. The new spouses proceed in their relationship with each other. Over time, attachment between the steprelations may form and bring together these originally divergent developmental trajectories.

**Weiss - The special relationships in the single parent family.** Weiss (1979) observed that a special relationship between the biological parent and children develops in the single parent family. He suggested that a more peer-like relationship with looser generational boundaries may develop. This observation was supported by this study. This research does not compare single parent families with other family structures to determine if there is a greater magnitude of peer relationships between parent and child in the single parent family. However, this research does suggest a more peer-like quality in the relationship between the biological parent and child in stepfamilies may encourage stepfamily adjustment. This more intense relationship between the biological parent and child was found to lessen the negative influence of the erosion of the single parent family roles, responsibilities, and relationships on stepfamily adjustment.
Clinical and Educational Implications

**Stepfamily adjustment as a continuum.** The current literature on stepfamilies suggests that the clinical literature and the empirical literature are contradictory (Ganong & Coleman, 1987). The clinical literature depicts stepfamily transition as fraught with difficulties whereas the empirical literature fails to demonstrate consistent characteristics which would confirm the existence of these difficulties in the non-clinical population.

This study is based on the assumption that stepfamily adjustment is best articulated on a continuum. Successful and unsuccessful stepfamily transitions are not distinct entities, but represent different degrees of resolution of critical criteria for stepfamily adjustment. Stepfamily adjustment can be conceptualized as the delicate process of balancing the different perspectives of stepfamily members such that no family members are excluded and each one experiences a nurturing and meaningful family life.

This research has identified critical characteristics for young adults who became stepchildren in their teens. From the perspective of these young adults, the erosion of the roles, responsibilities and relationships of the single parent family were very strongly associated with a negative experience of stepfamily adjustment. The peer-like quality of the biological parent-child bond moderated this relationship. Time in the single parent family, time in the remarriage family, and demographic characteristics did not contribute to explained variance in stepfamily adjustment.

**Challenging the nuclear family model.** These results challenge the nuclear family model of parenting in stepfamilies. The statistical analysis clearly indicated that young adults who became stepchildren during their adolescent years did not support the new spouse as a new parent. Rather, their responses confirmed Mills' (1984) suggestion that a positive stepfamily adjustment is encouraged when the biological parents maintain complete control of decision making and limit setting for their biological children. This challenges the nuclear family model as appropriate for stepfamilies in a therapeutic context.
It is possible that an inability to balance the conflicting needs of the stepfamily members may result in family members reflexively defaulting to inappropriate nuclear family roles in the stepfamily. Mills (1984) explains that, generally, the nuclear family model includes more stereotyped sex roles. For example, following the nuclear family model, the father typically holds more authority for decision making and the mother is typically more responsible for nurturing. In the stepfamily, this arrangement risks creating a situation in which the stepfather assumes authority in the absence of a relationship with the teenager. The custodial mother abdicates decision making in spite of her intimate relationship with her children. In a stepmother family, there is a risk of a stepmother offering unwanted nurturing and the biological father abdicating nurturing despite his biological ties with his children.

The critical roles of biological relationships and steprelationships. Most traditional family therapy considers the couple as the pivot of the family (Crosbie-Burnett, 1985). Difficulties with the children are traced back to the couple relationship on the premise that the children are drawn into a triangle relationship with the couple as an alternate focus for the tension between the couple. The goal of therapy is to remove the children from the role of outlet for the stress and conflict of the couple relationship and to contain the spousal difficulties with the adults (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

Recent research in stepfamily dynamics contradicts some of these basic assumptions (Crosbie-Burnett, 1985; Anderson & White, 1986; White & Booth, 1985). This study supported the findings of these researchers. The critical role of the biological relationships and steprelationships within the stepfamily were confirmed by this research.

What does this mean to the clinician and educator? A conceptualization of the stepfamily by Keshet (1980) is useful for this discussion. Keshet proposes that stepfamilies are composed of subsystems, i.e., the new couple, the single parent family, the children, and the non-custodial parent, the former spouses, etc. The formation of the stepfamily poses threats and offers benefits to each subsystem.
The results of this study suggested that from the perspective of the adolescent in a new stepfamily, the greatest threat to the single parent family subsystem is interference by the new spouse. On the other hand, researchers (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987; Dahl et al., 1987) have demonstrated that single parents welcome involvement by the new spouse in parenting children. Given these opposing perspectives, the cohesion of the single parent family is likely to be threatened.

This study suggested that it is precisely the conservation of the single parent family, particularly the maintenance of the relationship with the biological parent, that makes the critical difference for adolescents. On the one hand, for adolescents, cohesion in the biological parent-child relationship ensures a sense of belonging in the stepfamily. On the other hand, a lack of security promotes alienation. The experience of alienation could be intensified by the experience of displacement from other roles and responsibilities of the single parent family. Perhaps these experiences combine to promote a feeling of powerlessness in the stepfamily. This sense of powerlessness would be in painful contrast to the semi-adult or pseudo-spouse position the adolescent may have inherited in the single parent family (Weiss, 1979). Not only is the relationship with the biological parent threatened in this way, but those with other members of the single parent family are also at risk.

The implication of this research is that difficulties between the stepparent and stepchild are best treated within the biological parent-child relationship and/or the new couple relationship, and not within the stepparent-stepchild relationship. The biological parent-child relationship is central to adolescent adjustment in the stepfamily and as such is pivotal to resolution of stepfamily issues. Insisting that conflicts be addressed in the steprelationship would be counter-productive. The steprelationship is just beginning and as such lacks the maturity and stability to deal with conflict (Sager et al., 1983). More importantly, this type of intervention further distances the adolescent from her or his central
relationship with the biological parent thereby providing opportunities for alienation and withdrawal.

Difficulties experienced by the new spouse concerning decision making and the discipline of the adolescent should be clarified within the new couple relationship. If the new spouse does not agree with the disciplining of the biological parent or the habits of the adolescent, then this is an issue for the new couple. What is the history of this behavior for the adolescent and the biological parent? How did this situation come to be? Does the adolescent 'come by this behavior honestly'? The biological parent is the one who must take responsibility for the management of the family prior to the formation of the stepfamily regardless of the circumstances at the time.

Conservation of the peer-like quality of the parent-child bond. The stepparent is likely to misinterpret the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child bond (Papernow, 1988). Therefore, the new spouse should be helped to understand that the adolescent may be less deferential to the biological parent because of the experience of the single parent family. The peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship need not be attributed to disrespect on the part of the adolescent. The stepparent may believe that the adolescent has too few behavioral controls and intervene to correct the situation. However, permissive parenting in the single parent family is not necessarily pathological (Weiss, 1979). After all, this style of relationship has allowed the single parent family to survive the transition from separation to stepfamily formation.

Furthermore, the results of this study suggested that the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child relationship moderates the negative effects of the erosion of single parent family roles, responsibilities and relationships in the stepfamily. This relationship is a valuable resource for the stepfamily. To encourage a demotion for the adolescent to reverse the progressive promotion that evolved during the single parent family represents a loss to the adolescent and the stepfamily. Rather than seeking to reduce the biological parent-child relationship to the style typically found in the nuclear family with a strong
generational boundary, clinicians and educators should acknowledge the presence of the peer-like parent-child relationship and draw on its strengths in order to enhance stepfamily adjustment.

**Intentional triangulation.** This study also supports Mills' (1984) suggestion of intentionally creating a pattern of triangulation of the adolescent, biological parent and stepparent. As was mentioned earlier, traditional family therapy endeavors to end triangulation among family members (Bowen, Whitaker & Satir cited in Becvar & Becvar, 1988; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). In direct contradiction to traditional family therapy, Mills suggests that stepparents act only as instructed by the biological parent in the area of limit-setting. If the stepparent must communicate to the adolescent about a limit set by the biological parent, it is done by stating this explicitly. "Your mother said you were to clean up your room before going out so I am relaying this message to you." This method leaves decision making with the biological parent. The adolescent will recognize the rules and responsibilities of the single parent family. If the adolescent does not comply, then the difficulty is dealt with within the biological relationship not the steprelationship. 11

Consider the alternative. If the new spouse were to insist that she or he wanted the room cleaned up, what meaning would this have for the adolescent? Discipline or limit-setting from a relative stranger within the intimacy of the home is likely to breed resentment toward the stepparent. More importantly it may also promote a sense of alienation from the biological parent and a sense of powerlessness within the stepfamily. This is likely to be a demotion for the adolescent from the special roles, relationships, and responsibilities of the single parent family. In this scenario, the stepparent has crossed over to the developmental stage of the biological parent in the single parent family subsystem (Sager et al., 1983). There is considerable potential for the stepparent to lose whatever gains have been made in the relationship with the adolescent.

**Intentional triangulation of the biological parent into the relationship between the adolescent and stepparent allows the behavior of the respective adults to conform to a**
developmentally appropriate relationship with the adolescent. In this way the new spouse is acting in accordance with a developmental stage appropriate to the actual relationship with the adolescent. The biological parent has a relationship with the adolescent that can tolerate conflict and defiance. Over years, this subsystem has evolved a particular way of "doing business." Many of the subtleties of the parent-child communication will be covert; a gesture, a nod, a sigh, a look. A stepparent in a new stepfamily with a teenager is not likely to understand the subtleties of this relationship, let alone actively participate in it. The only possible solution is to defer to the biological parent. If this proves to be difficult, then perhaps outside help is needed. Overpowering the adolescent is not a solution which will encourage positive stepfamily relationships.

Continuing to ignore the need for developmentally appropriate relationships for the biological parent, the adolescent and the new spouse in a new stepfamily is to encourage the alienation and withdrawal of the adolescent. This process has been thoroughly described by Sager et al. (1983) who articulated the six steps of extrusion of the adolescent. This process begins with alienation and withdrawal. Continued alienation and withdrawal escalates through periodic outbursts of rage to eventual self-imposed or commanded banishment from the family. While this may appear extreme, it is a scenario many clinicians have witnessed (Sager et al., 1983).

Paradoxically, intentionally creating a pattern of triangulation to communicate the biological parent's limit-setting to the adolescent by the stepparent actually serves to 'de-triangulate' the new spouse from the relationship between the adolescent and the biological parent. On this level the biological parent-child relationship does not express tension through the new spouse. Equally, this move de-triangulates the adolescent out of the tensions of the new marital relationship. The adolescent does not bear the brunt of differences of opinion concerning child-rearing, or 'adolescent-rearing' between the new spouse and biological parent. Therefore, creating a triangle in new spouse-adolescent communication on limit-setting serves to de-triangulate two other sets of relationships in the
stepfamily. Also, in this way conflicts between any two members of the 'adolescent-biological parent-new spouse' triad remain within the developmentally appropriate relationship.

**Preventing the alienation of the adolescent.** To bring the adolescent back into the family, the clinician may need to reinstate the dynamics of the single parent family to a degree that incorporates enough of the adolescent's previous roles, responsibilities and relationships for the young person to be reassured that they do indeed belong to the single parent family subsystem. Next, the steprelationships can be encouraged, although not forced, while the adolescent's main connection remains within the single parent family. The steprelationships are a critical, although secondary priority. To add to this delicate balance, the adolescent's developmentally appropriate need for more independence from the family needs to be respected, not to mention the new couple’s need for intimacy.

This suggests the idea of separate groups operating within the stepfamily. The stepfamily subsystems (Keshet, 1980) may need to articulate their experience of the stepfamily transition from their point of view. Like groups lobbying for their interests, each group can define their critical needs and negotiate with the others who in turn present their critical needs. The results of this study suggested that the biologically related individuals represent a critical group for adolescents who become stepchildren.

**'Instant' family and 'real' family myths.** The expectation of 'instant family' is challenged by the results of this study. The young adults who participated demonstrated that the 'instant family' myth is not accurate for them. Their responses did not support a new spouse taking on a parental role, and time did not have a significant effect on the outcome. This suggests that the relationship with the biological parent is not transferable to the new spouse when adolescents are involved, and that more time does not necessarily make a difference. For some young adults, a new spouse is never a parent.

The notion that the new spouse must adopt a parental role for a stepfamily to be a 'real' family is also challenged by this research. In fact, the opposite was confirmed. The
highest rating of family happiness and cohesion were given by young adults whose stepparent had in fact NOT taken on decision making authority.

**Successful and unsuccessful stepfamilies.** These results strongly suggested that stepfamily development can avoid pitfalls and move toward a positive outcome if parenting attitudes that are not limited to those of the nuclear family are implemented. Given the continuum for stepfamily outcomes conceptualized for this study, stepfamilies are more likely to find themselves on the positive end of the continuum if the nuclear family model of parental decision making is challenged.

It is always possible that sometimes the best interest of the stepfamily may be served by the stepparent playing a decision making role, for example, the sudden illness or death of the biological parent in the absence of the non-custodial parent and high compatibility between the stepparent and adolescent. However, this possibility should be considered as an exception only and certainly not the first or only choice for positive stepfamily functioning.

Perhaps the stepfamilies who made the transition to stepfamily living successfully found a balance among the conflicting threats and benefits of each subsystem. Perhaps the acceptance of moderate levels of affiliation of the biological parent and child, including a loose generational boundary, was accepted and allowed to survive. Perhaps a moderate level of displacement by the new spouse has been negotiated with the adolescent and a satisfactory outcome was found that allowed both the new spouse and the adolescent to experience a sense of belonging and thereby diminish the risk of alienation of either party. In this way the adolescent did not lose the specialness of the relationship with the biological parent or the privileges of the single parent family. The stepparent can then be known as a new individual with special qualities and skills to offer the members of the single parent family subsystem rather than a stranger who threatens the adolescent's attachments to the biological family.
The erosion of the single parent roles, responsibilities and relationships predicted a lower level of stepfamily adjustment. Using Keshet's (1980) metaphor of subsystems within the stepfamily, this study has provided empirical support that the erosion of the single parent family dynamics is clearly a threat to adolescents in a new stepfamily. If this is indeed the difference between the clinical and non-clinical population, then clinicians and educators are well advised to work with stepfamilies to increase their skills at negotiating the delicate balance described above.

**Stepparent as an intimate outsider.** What new metaphors can replace the idea of stepPARENT? Here, our vocabulary is hopelessly inadequate. New roles such as mentor, coach, favorite aunt or uncle, or intimate outsider allow flexibility and also serve to distance the new spouse from the parental role. This allows the role of limit-setting to remain with the biological parent.

Papernow (1988) provides a view of a positive stepfamily outcomes that incorporate a model other than a parental model for stepparents. Papernow quotes one stepmother who explains the role of an 'intimate outsider':

> Mary calls me her 'motherly friend'. Sometimes I think of myself as her mentor. I'm the one who helped her think about going to college. I'm the one who helped her decide she could be an architect. She confides deeply in me and it is such an honor and yet to be seen as someone with enough distance that she can trust me not to take what she says personally. It's worth all the struggle to have this relationship with her. (p. 81)

The role of 'intimate outsider' includes intimacy but specifies a distinction from a parental role. This woman quoted above is experiencing a relationship that is actually *not possible* for a biological parent. Papernow (1988) reports a similar breakthrough for a stepfather:

> When I walked into Cory's room, she was lying there looking absolutely awful. Her whole face was black and blue. She was a mess. Jannine and Cory's dad
were standing on either side of her bed, and they looked stricken. Nobody was saying a word. For a moment I had the usual feeling that I really didn’t belong there - Cory had her parents and there was no place for me. And then something shifted in me and I decided I would go in, not only that I belonged there, but that I was the only one with enough cool to cheer poor Cory up!

So I walked in and I started joking with Cory about how awful she looked, and it was like the tension broke, and there I was, the one who’d made a difference! It was a real turning point for me in the family. (p. 69)

The therapeutic position of the clinician and educator. The task of the clinicians and educators is to encourage the remarried couple toward a new conceptualization of parenting in the stepfamily when children are adolescents at the time of stepfamily formation. Although a difficult prospect, the new couple may need to become aware of implicit assumptions that can promote negative reactions in the stepfamily and breed resentment among the children. This may involve letting go of the myths of the ‘instant’ or ‘real’ family. This research strongly suggested that perservering in these ideals only serves to lessen the chances of positive stepfamily outcomes.

Clinicians and educators are responsible for facilitating the creation of new roles for stepfamily members, roles that can accommodate a delicate balance of conflicting histories, current needs and future goals among stepfamily members. Solutions to stepfamily difficulties should incorporate the uniqueness of each family member. Clients should be encouraged to experiment with new attitudes and behaviors and to challenge their own preconceived ideas of how a ‘real’ family acts. Clinicians may need to challenge their own beliefs in this area before being able to facilitate this change for their clients. Only when stepfamilies are liberated from the burden of replicating the nuclear family can the advantages of stepfamily living be experienced.
Although the results strongly supported the proposition that a young adult's perceptions of stepfamily adjustment are associated with her or his perception of the erosion of single parent family roles, responsibilities and relationships within the stepfamily, there are many limitations to this research. The limitations discussed here concern the characteristics of the sample, the size of the sample, and the place of the young adults' perceptions in the larger context of the stepfamily.

**Limitations of the Sample**

The sample of young adults consisted of volunteers from the post-secondary student population of metropolitan Vancouver between 19 - 29 years of age. Participants were screened for a particular family history and current family structure. The limitations of the sample are discussed below.

This was a volunteer sample. Borg and Gall (1983) suggest that a volunteer sample may demonstrate specific characteristics. These authors strongly argue that volunteers tend to rate high on need for social approval. There may have been a response bias based on their interpretation of the intended direction of the researcher's questions. Furthermore, the need for social desirability may predispose this group to experience acceptance or rejection by the stepparent or biological parent more acutely than others.

The small number of participants is a limiting factor. A larger sample would allow more sophisticated analyses such as path analysis or median and quartile splits, which could explore the relationships between variables in a more sensitive way.

All participants were currently or had recently been students in one of ten post-secondary educational institutions in metropolitan Vancouver. Although the results strongly support association of perceived stepfamily adjustment and the erosion of the single parent family dynamics for these participants, perhaps students are more vulnerable to changes in their family relationships because of the financial insecurity associated with
student life. Additional research with young adults who are not students is necessary in order to generalize beyond this particular group.

A critical limitation of this sample is the age at which the students became stepchildren. This research addressed issues of children who became stepchildren during their adolescence. It seems likely that children who have known their stepparent since a very young age would have different perceptions. Working toward a parental role for the stepparent may be quite appropriate with children who were very young at the time of stepfamily formation. The conclusions of this research do not necessarily apply to children who became stepchildren prior to their teenage years.

The participants in this study were limited to stepchildren in mother-stepfather families. The concept of a shift in parental control is consistent with Mills' (1984) proposition that stepfathers who presume to parent typically do so by assuming authority and/or decision making in the absence of a bond with the stepchild. Mills (1984) further suggests that steppmothers typically move to nurture stepchildren without the formation of a relationship. The results of this study supported Mills' notion for authority in stepfather families. Further research is needed with stepmother families to determine if a similar effect is found regarding nurturing.

Future Research

A longitudinal design including both stepfather and stepmother families could remedy many of the limitations described. Beginning at the point of formation of the stepfamily, adolescents could be assessed either through interview methods or pencil and paper instruments. This assessment would provide a profile of the family dynamics of the single parent family. Follow-up measures could be taken throughout the transition to stepfamily living and through the developmental cycles of the stepfamily. Of the issues relevant to this study, perceptions of stepparent assumptions of authority and nurturance as well as interference in the relationship with the biological parent and the perceptions of stepfamily adjustment could be assessed.
In this way, participants would not be required to remember back to the single parent family, and both stepfather and stepmother families could be assessed for the roles of authority and nurturance in the stepfamily. Follow-up assessments would provide ongoing information about adjustment through the transition time and through the developmental cycles of the family members.

A limiting factor in this research would be the effects of repeated assessment. Crosbie-Burnett (unpublished) found that stepfamily research interviews often triggered lengthy family discussions. Perhaps because of this, not all of the SAS measures had high test-retest reliability.

The Larger Context of the Stepfamily

The objective of this research was to explore the young adult perspective of stepfamily adjustment and to collect data on one aspect of stepfamily adjustment. The results strongly supported an inverse relationship between the young adult's perception of stepfamily adjustment and the erosion of the single parent roles, responsibilities and relationships. This finding does not appear to be influenced by time in the single parent family or by time in the stepfamily. The association appears to be positively influenced by the peer-like quality of the biological parent-child bond.

Stated simplistically, the more the roles, responsibilities and the relationships of the single parent family are maintained in the stepfamily, the better the young adults feel about their stepfamily. What of the other stepfamily members? If a stepfamily was organized such that the single parent family roles, responsibilities and relationships continually took priority over others in the family, would such an arrangement be a viable family environment for the stepparent and/or the custodial parent? Would this arrangement then be an impediment to adaptation in the stepfamily? What of the stepparent's need to feel included in the stepfamily? What of the single parent's need to establish intimacy with her or his new spouse? What of the needs of the new couple to pursue a spousal relationship?
What are the ingredients that allow these seemingly opposing forces to find a balance rather than to confront a forced choice where loss for at least one party is inevitable?

This study has attempted to explore critical elements of adolescent and young adult perceptions of stepfamily adjustment. Developmental theorists (Papernow, 1988; Keshet, 1980) and clinicians (Visher & Visher, 1978; Sager et al., 1983) suggest that there are many perspectives to consider in the stepfamily. Future research could define and evaluate critical elements of the role of custodial and non-custodial biological parents and stepparents as well as those of younger custodial and non-custodial biological children and stepchildren. Combined, the critical elements of the perspective represented by each stepfamily member could provide a comprehensive description to guide stepfamilies.

Communication styles could be compared to evaluate the sophistication of the family members to express their needs, the ability of the family system to acknowledge these concerns, and the willingness of all family members to negotiate the different needs of each stepfamily member. Does the nuclear family model act as a default mechanism for those individuals who have difficulty communicating with other family members? Does traditional sex-role stereotyping prevent stepparents and custodial parents from seeing the importance of relationships between individuals which affirm the uniqueness of each individual. Is the the value of the experience leading up to the formation of the stepfamily obscured by a strict adherence to traditional roles? Comparisons could be made between families that continue on as stepfamilies and those that chose to end their stepfamily affiliation through extrusion or redivorce. What characteristics differentiate these groups?

Research could explore stepfamily perspectives through the progressive developmental stages of the child. At what age do stepchildren cease to accept two 'moms' or two 'dads'? It appears that adolescents are generally not prepared to incorporate another parent. For younger children this may not be a problem. If so, at what age does this change typically take place?
5.6 Conclusion

The results of this research suggested that the erosion of the single parent family roles, responsibilities and relationships are strongly associated with the experience of stepfamily adjustment for young adults who became stepchildren as teenagers. The more the single parent family roles, responsibilities and relationships are perceived to be eroded in the stepfamily, the less positive the stepfamily adjustment. The factors of the single parent family dynamics considered in this research are a shift in parental control from the biological parent to the stepparent, interference in the biological parent-child relationship by the stepparent, and demotion of the adolescent from her or his roles and responsibilities in the family.

These results supported Crosbie-Burnett's (1989) observation that to encourage a positive stepfamily experience, we must find new roles for these positions that do not assume a parental relationship. Crosbie-Burnett suggests that we need to "liberate stepfathers from thinking they have to father" and to begin discussing "which of a variety of roles is most appropriate for their family given factors like the availability of the biological father, child age etc." (1989, p. 14). It appears from this research that the less stepfathers take on decision making and an authority position in the stepfamily, the higher the sense of stepfamily adjustment experienced by young people who become stepchildren in their teens.

Bernstein (1988) suggests that stepfamilies are disadvantaged by the lack of "conceptual handles for grasping these socially meaningful categories" (p. 106). If the stepfather is not to 'father', what then is his role? Without the nuclear model to guide us, stepfamily adjustment may be dependent on each family's attempt to find unique solutions that are compatible with the needs of the individuals involved. If stepparents are not to 'parent' is the term 'stepparent' still appropriate? If it is not, what term is appropriate?

This research has attempted to describe the critical elements from the adolescent and young adult perspective. Clearly there are other perspectives involved. The delicate
balancing of all the perspectives of the stepfamily members is essential to positive stepfamily adjustment. This research has been a first step in this direction.
Initially the great majority of respondents were female. As this trend continued, the advertisement was altered. The contents of the advertisement remained the same. Only the sentence order was changed. In this way the focus was changed from the nature of the study to the time and money involved. In the final phase of the project only male respondents were needed. At this time the notices were modified to direct the message to males specifically.

One questionnaire was completed by a 17 year old student who had entered university at 16. This student's lifestyle seemed to reflect that of a college age student and as such her questionnaire was retained.

The subscales generated by Crosbie-Burnett contained 3, 4 and 5 point Likert Scales. The scales used in the original study were retained to allow the two samples to be compared as much as possible.

These two variables were eventually combined to create X1, the Erosion of Single Parent Family Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships in the Stepfamily. See section 4.3 for an explanation of this process.

The Peer Subscale used in the current study is made up of three questions from the SAS subscale 'Biological Parent Allies with Adolescent' and two items generated by the author. The r value for the 5 question Peer Subscale was .72. The two sections of the Peer Subscale were analyzed separately. The r values for the SAS questions and the new questions were .50 and .60 respectively.

The purpose of this study is to explore guidelines for positive stepfamily adjustment. The risk of a Type I error is not as important as a Type II error. Strict adherence to the standard p<.05 risks dismissing concepts which may hold promise for future research and development. Therefore, although p=.09 does not meet the standard p<.05 criteria, it is considered noteworthy.

Time1 and Time3 are slightly different measures of the time in the single-parent family. Time 1 represents the total time from the final separation of the biological parents to the current or most recent commitment. Time 3 is calculated by subtracting the time in intermediate relationships from the time between the final separation of the biological parents and the commitment of the current or most recent couple.

Time1 was also tested as an interaction term and was not found to add to the variance explained in Y.

Time1 did not add to the variance explained in Y when used as an independent variable alone or in conjunction with X1.

Respondents were requested to rate the level of happiness, cohesion and self-efficacy in the stepfamily during the period of time that the couple were in a committed relationship.

It is important to note that this does not include situations in which the adolescent may have said or done something rude or hurtful to the stepparent. For example, if the adolescent had borrowed the stepparent's scarf and lost it, this would be an issue between the stepparent and the adolescent. However, if the scarf had been lost in a location which was off limits to the adolescent, the violation of the 'off limits' rule would be an issue for the biological parent.
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Date of birth _______________________

2. Gender ________

3. How old were you when your biological parents separated for the last time?_______________(in years and months).

4. What was the length of time between your biological parents' final separation, and your mother's remarriage to her current/most recent partner?_______________(in years and months)

The following questions may include an option called "not applicable". Please place a check mark in the space provided if this question does not apply to you. Also, some questions will ask you to chose one item from several choices. Please select ONLY ONE ANSWER that best describes your situation by placing a check mark in the space provided.

5. If your mother has remarried more than once, or was involved in other committed long-term live-in relationships, between the time of final separation from your biological father and her current/most recent remarriage, list the month and year of the remarriage(s) and separation(s) below.

Remarriage ___________________________ (month/yr)
Separation_____________________________ (month/yr)

Remarriage ___________________________ (month/yr)
Separation_____________________________ (month/yr)

Remarriage ___________________________ (month/yr)
Separation_____________________________ (month/yr)

Remarriage ___________________________ (month/yr)
Separation_____________________________ (month/yr)

__ not applicable
6. If your mother and her new partner lived together in a committed long-term live-in relationship for more than 6 months before their wedding, what was the length of time that they lived together between that commitment and the wedding. 

__________________________ (in years and months)

   _ not applicable

7. Which option below best describes how your time was divided between your biological mother and your biological father while your mother was a single-parent and you were under 19 years of age.

   _ 50% of the time. I spent 1/2 my time living at each parent's place.
   _ 75% of the time. I lived with my mother mostly and went to my father's place, for a regular part of each two week period (i.e., every other weekend).
   _ always with my mother except for visits with my father.
   _ always with my mother. I hardly ever/never saw my father.

8. What is the length of time you have spent living with your mother and your stepfather since their remarriage?

__________________________ (in years and months).

9. Are you still living with your mother and stepfather?

   _ Full time
   _ Not at all
   _ Part time
   _ They are no longer living together.

10. Are you financially dependent on your mother and/or stepfather?

    _ Yes, completely.
    _ Yes, partially.
    _ I receive only occasional financial help from them.
    _ No, I receive no financial support at all from them.

11. If you do receive financial assistance from your mother and/or stepfather, indicate who the funds are from.

    _ your mother and stepfather together.
    _ your mother only.
    _ your stepfather only.

    _ not applicable
12. At the time of remarriage did your stepfather have children from a previous marriage/relationship?
   __ yes __ no

13. Since the time of your biological parents' separation, how would you describe your contact with your biological father generally?
   __ frequent and regular
   __ frequent and irregular
   __ infrequent and regular
   __ infrequent and irregular
   __ I have rarely had contact with him.
   __ I have never met him.

14. Are you the first born child in your biological family?
   __ yes __ no __ only child
   (If you have an adopted sibling in your biological family, include him/her according to age.)

15. If any of your siblings died before your 19th birthday, please indicate if this changed your position to oldest and at if so at what age.
   __ I became the oldest at __________ (your age)
   __ not applicable
THE STEPFAMILY QUESTIONNAIRE

Answer the following questions by circling the letter which corresponds to the answer which best describes your family from your perspective. Please read the questions carefully. If you need to refresh your memory concerning the definitions of the terms used in this study, refer to the definitions described in the comments at the beginning of the study. Also, do not hesitate to ask for clarification at any time. Thank you for your participation.

1. For me, Christmas/Hanukkah celebrations in my family have changed since we have become a stepfamily.

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<th>A</th>
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<th>C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very</td>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>not at</td>
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<tr>
<td>much</td>
<td></td>
<td>little</td>
<td>all</td>
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</table>

2. For me, New Year's celebrations in my family have changed since we have become a stepfamily.

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<td>very</td>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>not at</td>
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<tr>
<td>much</td>
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<td>little</td>
<td>all</td>
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3. For me, graduation celebrations in my family have changed since we have become a stepfamily.

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<tr>
<td>very</td>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>not at</td>
<td>There</td>
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<tr>
<td>much</td>
<td></td>
<td>little</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>have</td>
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</table>
<pre><code>                  |                       |        |        | been      |
                  |                       |        |        | none.      |
</code></pre>

4. For me, summer holidays have changed since we have become a stepfamily.

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<td>somewhat</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>not at</td>
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<tr>
<td>much</td>
<td></td>
<td>little</td>
<td>all</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5. For me, visits from my extended family (biological mother's and biological father's family) have changed since we have become a stepfamily.

A  B  C  D
very somewhat very not at
much little all

6. For me, birthday celebrations have changed since we have become a stepfamily.

A  B  C  D
very somewhat very not at
much little all

7. For me, the family routines around dinner have changed since we have become a stepfamily. (i.e., seating arrangements at the table, duties, conversation topics or style).

A  B  C  D
very somewhat very not at
much little all

8. For me, morning and end of the day routines and activities have changed since we have become a stepfamily.

A  B  C  D
very somewhat very not at
much little all

9. For me, the way everyday things are done has changed since we have become a stepfamily. (i.e., shopping, everyday problem solving, cleaning, passing along information).

A  B  C  D
very somewhat very not at
much little all
10. My mother has given to my stepfather some of her control over how much financial support I receive.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>true</td>
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<td>rarely</td>
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<tr>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
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11. My mother has given to my stepfather some of her control over how much emotional support I receive.

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<tr>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
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12. My mother has given up some of her authority to my stepfather.

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<td>rarely</td>
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<tr>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
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13. My stepfather comes between me and my mother.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>always</td>
<td>often</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>never</td>
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14. Since my stepfather has been with my mother, she gives me

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<td>less good</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>more good</td>
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<tr>
<td>attention</td>
<td>attention</td>
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15. Since we have become a stepfamily my mother demonstrates her love for me

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<td>less</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>more</td>
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<tr>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
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</table>
16. Since we have become a stepfamily, my mother and I are

A    B    C
not as    same    closer
close

17. My stepfather has taken over some of my mother's control over how much financial support I receive from my family

A    B    C    D
true    often    rarely    not
true    true    true    true

18. My stepfather has taken over some of my mother's control over how much emotional support I receive from my family

A    B    C    D
true    often    rarely    not
true    true    true    true

19. My stepfather has taken over this family.

A    B    C    D
true    often    rarely    not
true    true    true    true

20. My stepfather respects my authority in this family.

A    B    C    D    E
almost    often    rarely    practically    I have no
always    often    rarely    practically    never    authority

21. My stepfather makes my position in this family less important.

A    B    C    D
true    often    rarely    not
true    true    true    true
22. My stepfather tries to do the things in the family that are OR were my jobs, (like: telling younger brothers or sisters what to do, making decisions about how things are done, etc.)

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Questions #23 to #28 relate to the time period(s) prior to your 19th birthday, when you lived in a single-parent family. This refers to the period(s) of time when your mother was separated from her partner(s) and NOT remarried/committed to a common-law relationship.

23. My mother looked to me to help her get things done in this family.

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<td>often</td>
<td>rarely</td>
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<td>never</td>
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24. My mother talked with me about her ups and downs

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<td>once a</td>
<td>twice</td>
<td>once</td>
<td>once a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>day or</td>
<td>a week</td>
<td>a week</td>
<td>month or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>more</td>
<td>less</td>
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25. My mother told me about her problems with my (future) stepfather.

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26. My mother asked my opinion on her new male friends.

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<td>true</td>
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</table>
27. My relationship with my mother was typified by the phrase...
"We're in this together kid".

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<td>often</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>not true true true</td>
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28. My mother expressed her frustrations to me about her life.
(i.e., social isolation, her job, her friends, money, etc. but
not including her relationship with my biological father)

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<td>true</td>
<td>often</td>
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<td>not true true true</td>
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</table>

Answer the following questions according to your perceptions of how your family is now. By family, we are referring to your mother, her spouse (if applicable), your biological siblings, and any siblings that your mother's spouse(s) brought to the family (if applicable).

29. Rate the closeness of my family.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>Close</td>
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30. When all the members of this household are available to do something everyone likes to do, and we plan to do it together as a family, usually

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least one family member doesn't want to go along.</td>
<td>Everyone looks forward</td>
<td>We never do things all forward to it. together.</td>
<td></td>
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31. There are feelings of trust when the members of this household are together.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>true</td>
<td>often</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>not true true true</td>
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</table>
32. This family gives me what a family should.

A  B  C  D
true  often  rarely  not
true  true  true  true

33. When it comes to things that go on in this family, I am usually

A  B  C  D
not happy  happy
about them  about them

34. Our home is...

A  B  C  D
not a happy  a happy
place  place

35. I feel upset, worried, or anxious about family things

A  B  C  D
once a  once  once  almost
day or  a week  a month  never or
more  never

36. How happy am I with my family life?

A  B  C  D
I am  I am
NOT happy  happy

37. How much say do I have about family decisions?

A  B  C  D
No one asks  I have the
me or listens  final say.
to me.
38. I know how to get what I want from my family.

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<td>true</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39. I feel like I can't change things that I don't like in this family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>true</td>
<td>often</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
<td>true</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

MODIFICATIONS TO THE STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE (SAS)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohesion Subscale</th>
<th>29. Rate the closeness of my stepfamily:</th>
<th>30. Rate the closeness of my stepfamily:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Happiness Subscale</th>
<th>31. When it comes to things that go on in this family, I:</th>
<th>32. This family gives me what a family should:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>33. There are feelings of trust when the members of this household are together:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currrent Study</th>
<th>87. Rate the closeness of my stepfamily:</th>
<th>88. No modifications:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currrent Study</th>
<th>89. There are feelings of:</th>
<th>90. This family gives me what a family should:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currrent Study</th>
<th>91. When it comes to:</th>
<th>92. I am usually:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currrent Study</th>
<th>93. About:</th>
<th>94. About:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MODEXCATIONS TO THE STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE (SAS)

Our home is...

A B C D
Not a Happy Place

I feel upset, worried, or anxious about...

A B C D
Almost a Never

How happy am I with my family life?

A B C D
I Am Not Happy

Self Efficacy Subscale

Lily things

Current Study

SAS MODIFICATIONS TO THE STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE (SAS)
CURRENT STUDY

MODIFICATIONS TO THE STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE (SAS)
MODIFICATIONS TO THE STEPFOAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE (SAS)

S A S

CURRENT STUDY

Since my stepfather has been with my mother, she...

65. Since my stepfather has been with my mother, she...

66. Since my mother's remarriage, I feel...

67. Since my mother's remarriage, my mother and I are...

15. Since we have become a stepfamily, my mother...

16. Since my mother's remarriage, my mother and I are...

19. My stepfather has taken over this family.

27. I have to try to keep my stepfather from taking over...

This family is too much.

Still in Parental Control - Stepparent Subscale

Not as close Same Closer

Frequently Less Freq.

Less Good Good

Attention Attention

More Secure About My Love For Me.

More Secure Same About My Love For Me.

Greater than or equal to 3 points on the Stepfather scale indicates a shift in parental control from the mother to the stepfather. This shift is significant and suggests that the stepfather has taken on a more dominant role in the family.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepfather</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>This Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**21. My stepfather has made my position in this family less important.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepfather</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>This Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**22. My stepfather tries to do the things in the family that are OR were my jobs, (like: telling younger brothers or sisters what to do, making decisions about how things are done, etc.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepfather</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>This Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**23. My mother looks to me to help her get things done in this family.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepfather</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>This Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**24. When my stepfather tries to do the things in the family that are OR were my jobs, (like: telling younger brothers or sisters what to do, making decisions about how things are done, etc.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepfather</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>This Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**25. My stepfather has made my position in this family less important.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepfather</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>This Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**26. No Modifications**

---

**MODIFICATIONS TO THE STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE (SAS)**

**CURRENT STUDY**

SA S
24. My mother talks with me about her ups and downs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>Partial</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. My mother tells me about her problems with my future stepfather.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Not True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My mother tells me about her problems with my future stepfather.
APPENDIX C
DEFINITIONS
The transition that we are studying is from a single-parent family to a stepfamily. Sometimes this transition is marked by a formal wedding ceremony and sometimes it is a function of a more informal common-law agreement. This raises five important points for the vocabulary in this questionnaire.

1. **Remarriage** The word 'remarriage' is used in this study to indicate the event that divides the single-parent family from the stepfamily. In this questionnaire, this includes situations where the new couple is not legally married but has made a common-law commitment to each other. If this happened in your family, please read the word 'remarried' to mean the common-law commitment made by your mother and her partner.

2. **Stepfamily** For the purposes of this questionnaire, 'stepfamily' describes the new family whether or not the single-parent family ended because of a legal marriage or a common-law agreement.

3. **Stepfather** The term 'stepfather' is defined very broadly in this questionnaire. It includes your mother's current partner in a committed long-term live-in relationship whether that union has been defined formally or informally. If your mother is NOT now in a common-law relationship or has separated from her second (or subsequent) husband, 'stepfather' then applies to her most recent husband/common-law partner.

4. **Common-Law Relationships** If your situation is one in which the single-parent family period ended by a common-law arrangement, defining just when it began may be difficult. If this applies to you, consider the time when you began sharing a residence with your mother's new partner as the date of their commitment.

5. **Common-Law Relationships Followed by Marriage** Still others of you may feel that the commitment to a long term committed relationship occurred a long time before the actual marriage ceremony, perhaps many years. If your mother and stepfather lived in a common-law relationship for more than two years before marrying, consider the 'remarriage' to be the time
when, in your view, the relationship between your mother and her partner took on a permanent quality.
APPENDIX D

NOTICES
IF YOU BECAME A STEPCHILD IN YOUR TEENS
(by marriage or common-law, happily or unhappily),

WE ARE LOOKING FOR YOU

Your participation in this stepfamily study will consist of completing an anonymous questionnaire at a time and in a location that are convenient to you. It will take about 1/2 hour and you will receive an honorarium of $5.

PLEASE CALL
SUSAN GAMACHE AT 685-1932 or

LEAVE A MESSAGE AT THE SFU EDUCATION RECEPTION DESK (291-3395)
STUDENTS WANTED
(18 - 29 yrs.)
$5 FOR 20 MINUTES
ANONYMOUS QUESTIONNAIRE
(completed at a time and in a location that is convenient for you)
NO INTERVIEW

IF YOU BECAME A STEPCHILD IN YOUR TEENS
(by marriage or common-law, happily or unhappily),
WE ARE LOOKING FOR YOU

PLEASE CALL 685-1932 or
SFU EDUCATION RECEPTION DESK
(291-3395)
APPENDIX R

PARTICIPANT CHECK LIST
CHECK LIST

There are many different types of stepfamilies. Unfortunately, we cannot study all possible stepfamily structures at the same time. The following questions define the particular type of stepfamily we are interested in studying. In order to participate in this study, please ensure that you can answer YES to the following questions. If you require more information or if your situation makes answering a question difficult, please don't hesitate to discuss this with me.

HAS YOUR BIOLOGICAL MOTHER SEPARATED FROM YOUR BIOLOGICAL FATHER?

HAS YOUR MOTHER REMARRIED OR ESTABLISHED A COMMON-LAW RELATIONSHIP?

DID YOUR MOTHER'S MOST RECENT REMARRIAGE/COMMITMENT TO A COMMON-LAW RELATIONSHIP OCCUR WHILE YOU WERE A TEENAGER?

BETWEEN THE FINAL SEPARATION OF YOUR BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND YOUR MOTHER'S MOST RECENT REMARRIAGE OR COMMITMENT TO A COMMON-LAW RELATIONSHIP, DID YOU CONSIDER YOUR PRIMARY RESIDENCE TO BE WITH YOUR MOTHER AT LEAST 50% OF THE TIME?
References


Statistics Canada. (1990b). *Health reports, 2*(1), (Catalogue 82-003S), Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Statistics Canada. (1990c). *Health reports supplement number 16, 2*(1), (Catalogue 82-003S). Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.


