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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

BECOMING A STEPFATHER IN THE PERIOD BEFORE MARRIAGE

BY

SANDRA JANE MCNAUGHTON

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

IN FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF HOME ECONOMICS

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1987

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled BECOMING A STEPFATHER IN THE PERIOD BEFORE MARRIAGE submitted by Sandra J. McNaughton in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Family Life Education.

Supervisor

Date: April 15, 1987

ABSTRACT

It has been predicted that by 199[illegible], remarried families will become the most prevalent family form. Remarried families experience a high divorce rate attributed in part to the difficulties in establishing relationships between stepparents and children. Information about the development of the stepfather-child relationship in its early stages is an important factor in understanding later stepfamily functioning.

An inductive inquiry using qualitative methods was undertaken to explore and describe the experiences of childless men who were prospective stepfathers to children aged three to ten years. A sample of nine men volunteered to participate and data was collected in unstructured interviews and by participant observation. The constant comparative method of data analysis, a feature of grounded theory, resulted in the discovery of concepts and their relationships.

The transition to stepfathering was accomplished by stepfathers engaging in behavior in four broad domains, namely, building a relationship with the child, taking on parenting, building a family, and forming an identity. Their behavior resolved the basic social problem of "finding a way to count" with the children. Stepfathers' goals and their behavior to reach those goals in the four domains are presented. The results are integrated in a model.

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Karen Argento, who cheerfully turned my bits and pieces into a professional product.

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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been an increasing interest in stepfamilies as their numbers have grown. In the United States, statistics indicate that for every one million divorces, slightly more than one million children are involved (Bernstein & Collins, 1985). Most divorced people remarry and consequently about one child in ten lives in a stepfamily (Glick, 1979). Of families with children living in the home, remarried families are the third most prevalent family form after intact nuclear families and single parent families (Bachrach, 1983). If the present divorce rate remains constant and divorced people continue to remarry at the same rate, the remarried family will become the most predominant family form by 1990 (Robinson, 1984).

The divorce rate among remarried couples is higher than the divorce rate for first marrieds and redivorce is higher among couples with children from a first marriage than among couples with no children (Cherlin, 1980). There are competing explanations for this phenomenon. Cherlin's (1980) hypothesis of "incomplete institutionalization" posits that norms involving rights and duties of stepparents are not clear, and the role of parent must somehow be shared between the stepparent and the noncustodial same-sex biological parent.

Redivorce has been attributed in part to the problems involved in developing relations between children and stepparents (Messinger,

1976). Cultural myths of "wicked stepmother" or "uninvolved stepfather" may contribute to expectations stepparents, children and parents have about the stepparent role, creating difficulties in developing well-functioning stepfamily relations. In a study of 70 remarried couples, Messinger found that dealing with children was the most frequent source of conflict for the couples.

Fast and Cain (1966) were among the first to discuss the unclear expectations of the stepparent role. They observed that the role of stepparent was socially disapproved, and that the stepparent was encouraged to assume the role of parent. However, the stepparent is biologically a non-parent. The stepparent might interweave all roles, parent, stepparent and non-parent, in their relationship with the child, or adopt only one of them. While the discussion has continued over the years, there are still no detailed descriptions of the roles to further our understanding of them (Cherlin, 1978; Walker & Messinger, 1979).

On a societal level, there is no clear normative content for the role of stepparent (Aldous, 1974; Roberts, 1980). On a personal level, there are conflicting expectations of the stepparent's role held by the incumbent, the stepchildren and the natural parent. Stepparents need to make decisions about such things as the degree of authority they will assume, the amount of affection to give, and the degree of financial responsibility to assume, but these decisions are not made alone. The stepparent role is developed in conjunction with the stepchild and the role partner, the natural parent, through a process of negotiation and trial-and-error.

Mills (1984) suggests that many stepfamilies make inappropriate decisions about how they should function when the members attempt to reproduce the original biological family. These two families' structures are different and he advocates that stepparents take a stepparent role, taking a parental role with its wide nurturing and limit setting functions only under certain circumstances. The circumstances which affect the decision about which role to adopt are the age of the child at marriage, the availability of the child's same sex biological parent, and the wishes of the stepparent.

Models of Stepfamily Development

With the increasing interest in stepfamilies, several models of stepfamily development have been proposed. Most models describe the development of the stepfamily beginning with the marriage of the couple, not accounting for the period prior to marriage (Goetting, 1982; Mills, 1984; Papernow, 1984). Some models take into account the period before marriage, and include as an integral feature, issues of reconstructing relationships between the divorced partners from the first marriages (Kleinman, Rosenberg & Whiteside, 1979; McGoldrick & Carter, 1980; & Ransom, Schlesinger, & Derdeyn, 1979).

Mills' model presents developmental tasks but does not specify whether any of them are accomplished before marriage. A model developed by Whiteside (1982) has seven stages beginning with the first family, moving through separation, divorce, separate parenting, courting and a second wedding, early marriage, and established marriage. Transition between stages is critical, marked by

disorganization as role complementarity is lost. All families experience disorganization during these transitions because they lack personal experience to guide them. Furthermore, there are no models in their social milieu, nor information about social norms to aid the transition.

Scholars viewing marriage as a developmental process consider engagement to be an important period for first marrieds (Rapoport, 1964). The first stage of the family is the "getting married" stage which is a critical normal transition with three subphases: the engagement period ending with the wedding; the honeymoon; and the first few months of marriage. This conceptualization proposes that a series of developmental tasks, both intrapersonal and interpersonal, must be successfully completed by both partners to accomplish the transition to marriage. The way the transition is made affects subsequent events. As tasks are completed, family structure is formed, and this structure crystalizes creating a steady state and the intimate environment for the members. If tasks in a given stage are not satisfactorily completed, task accomplishment in successive stages is compromised.

The period before remarriage is as important for scholars to study as the engagement period before first marriage. The number of relationships alone that need to be negotiated in the formation of the stepfamily make the period critical to later stepfamily functioning. Information about the development of the stepfather-child relationship is needed in order to further our understanding of later stepfamily functioning, particularly stepfather-child relationships that have been identified as a factor contributing to difficulties in stepfamily functioning.

Research Questions

This thesis was undertaken to begin a systematic inquiry into stepfamily development, in particular, how a stepfather becomes part of an already existing family in the period before marriage. The research questions are:

1. How do stepfathers perceive the task of becoming part of an already existing family?

2. What do stepfathers do to accomplish the task of becoming part of the family?

3. How are these actions integrated into a process by which stepfathers become part of the family before marriage?

Assumptions of the Research

This research is based on the following assumptions:

1. A developmental framework is a useful perspective to study the stepfamily because it is based on the premise that families change over time and that change occurs in discernible stages.

2. Individuals can provide an accurate description of their perception of reality including their beliefs, feelings and actions.

3. Relationships change over time and the changes are guided by the needs of individuals and their perceptions of behavior of others in the relationship.

4. Although only a partial picture of stepfamily development is afforded by gathering data from only one family member, and a more thorough examination of stepfamily development would involve all family members, the perspective of prospective stepfathers is a critical

source of information about the development of a stepfamily.

Definitions

A stepfamily is defined as a family formed by the marriage of two persons, at least one of whom is a parent to a dependent child at the time of marriage. It is assumed that qualitative differences in stepfamily functioning result from various structural characteristics of the family (Esses & Campbell, 1984). One of the characteristics identified is whether the family is simple, only one of the adults brings children from a previous marriage, or complex, both adults bring children to the second marriage. Another characteristic is which adult is the stepparent, the male or the female. Two other characteristics are the custody and living arrangements of children, two extreme variations of which are stepfamilies in which the children live with the custodial single parent and only visit the remarried parent, and stepfamilies in which the children live with the remarried parent and stepparent and only visit the single parent; and the marital status of the marrying parents, divorced, widowed or single (Esses & Campbell, 1984).

In this research, stepfather refers to a prospective stepfather, a man who plans to marry a previously married woman with one or more children. Family refers to the mother-child unit. Father refers to the child's natural father or adoptive father but not a foster or stepfather.

Delimitations of the Research

The following delimitations are noted for the present study. Research was conducted only with simple stepfather families. A second delimitation was that the researcher only studied families in which the children lived at least half the time with the mother and could reasonably be expected to interact frequently with the potential stepfather.

The research was further delimited in that it focused upon an investigation of how a stepfather becomes part of the family as a stepfather and not as a husband. The premarital relationship of the stepfather and mother was a concern only as it affected how the stepfather was becoming part of the family in relation to the children.

Conclusion

Theory about stepfamilies is accumulating through research in clinical settings with already married families who are experiencing difficulties, from a limited number of preventative programs with families either before or after marriage (Walker & Messinger, 1979), and from empirical research with already married families. Much of the previous research reported in the literature has failed to differentiate between different structural types of stepfamilies and has failed to account for stepfamily development before marriage. This thesis addresses a need to document the development of a particular structural variation of stepfamily at a designated period in the stepfamily's life course.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

"The changing of social structure means that a prime sociological task is the exploration - and even literal discovery - of emerging structures" (Glaser & Strauss, 1970, p. 300).

Introduction

The research questions that are posed determine the methods by which the investigation proceeds. In this thesis the questions addressed a need to collect information about a phenomena which had been studied relatively little. It required a detailed description of how men become stepfathers in an existing family in the period before marriage. As an exploration into a previously uncharted area, it supported the use of a qualitative methodology.

The intent of the research was to discover concepts and develop theory related to the question. The descriptive experience of the stepfathers became the data from which theory emerged. The method suitable to the question was "grounded theory", the goal of which is to generate theory "that accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Glaser, 1978, p. 92).

This chapter includes an overview of the grounded theory approach, its purposes and methods; a discussion of ethical issues in qualitative research; and finally, a detailed account of the methods used.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Working with grounded theory, the investigator explores the phenomenon in question using field methods. She goes beyond describing the phenomenon by analyzing the data generated, identifying concepts and constructs and working towards discovering relationships between the constructs. She searches in the data for a core variable central to the problem under inquiry. The core variable unifies the other concepts generated, and its variation is explained by the variation of the other concepts.

As a unifying concept, the core variable delimits the analysis and the resulting theory. Concepts which do not describe or contribute to the core variable are discarded for that research question; however, if another concept emerges of the calibre of a core variable, it may become the core variable and central focus for a subsequent re-analysis of the data. In her research with stepfather families, Stern discovered two core variables - affiliation (1982) and family culture (1986) both of which explained how integration occurs in stepfather families.

The core variable may be a process, a condition, two dimensions, or a consequence (Glaser, 1978). While conditions, dimensions and consequences are static, a process, termed "a basic social process" (BSP) in grounded theory terminology, has two or more clear emergent stages. The process implies change over time, and the changes create discrete demarcation points which separate stages. The stages may be apparent to the research participants involved and reported to the researcher, or they may be invented by the researcher and have

heuristic value only to her. The length of time for a stage varies depending on the conditions of the stages and how they are negotiated by the participants.

There are two types of BSP - a basic social psychological process (BSPP) and a basic social structural process (BSSP). The BSSP stages are established by the social structure and are readily apparent to the actors and others. In becoming a stepfather, the BSSP may reasonably be expected to comprise the stages of meeting the family, becoming engaged, moving in with the family, and getting married, stages which are culturally prescribed, taken for granted and observable, although not necessarily in that order. More subtle are the BSPP's which are psychologically oriented and explain the actor's behavior.

BSPP's are more frequently developed in using grounded theory because they more completely explain behavior, however, both BSSP's and BSPP's may be included in a grounded theory. The BSSP may facilitate the BSPP and they each may explain the movement of the other through the stages (Glaser, 1978).

A substantive theory with a core variable emerges which fits the real world to which it applies. The theory may lead to specifying hypotheses which can be tested quantitatively; it may be considered to be an end product in itself; or it may be incorporated into grounded formal theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1970).

Validity and Reliability

Scientific research is concerned with rigor which is demonstrated by the validity and reliability of findings. "In qualitative research,

validity refers to the extent to which the research findings represent reality" of the participants (Field & Morse, 1985, p. 139). Internal validity asks the question "is the interviewee telling the truth?" Alternatively, is he telling the interviewer what he thinks the interviewer wants to hear or is he unable or unwilling to describe his beliefs, feelings, attitudes, anticipations or plans. Self-reports as data are generally accepted at face value, that is, are valid and are the least fallible method of collecting data about the interviewee's inner experience. As the interviewer asks questions about the participant's experience regarding the general research topic, the interviewee, in reporting, begins to give structure to his inner experience. The interviewer's task is to focus on the participant's structure, and not to impose her own on the interviewee's reporting.

Because the qualitative researcher is immersed in the total research process including problem formulation, data collection and analysis, and report writing, a legitimate question is whether the theory generated from the data is objective and validly represents the experience of the research participants or whether the theory represents the subjective interpretation of the researcher. One method of assuring internal validity in rigorous qualitative research is to have participants confirm the researcher's conceptual organization of their experience. Another method is to submit the coding and analysis of data to a seminar of peers.

The challenge of assuring external validity or the generalizability of findings takes on different properties in qualitative research from quantitative research. In the latter, random sampling of a population

is the standard procedure used to assure the distribution of a property in the population. The qualitative researcher's purpose is to describe the phenomenon of the participants, and in doing so, to discover the diversity of experience and a sufficiently broad range of concepts to explain the basic social process of the research problem. The researcher therefore "theoretically samples", asking questions and gathering data of a purposive sample until no new concepts are discovered and a full theoretical explanation emerges. Sampling proceeds simultaneously with data coding to facilitate the development of theory.

Reliability is defined by Field and Morse (1985) as "the measure of the extent to which random variation may have influenced the stability and consistency of the results" (p. 139). A grounded theory study is not replicated to confirm results through repeated measures, however the concepts and theory which begin to emerge through immediate analysis of the data are confirmed by subsequent "testing" with further participants in the same study thus determining the reliability of the findings.

Replicability depends on the ability of one researcher to conduct subsequent research exactly the same as a previous researcher. However, no two researchers will structure data collection, interact with participants or analyze the data in the same way, so no two theories can be exactly alike. Rather than focusing on replicability as a criteria of reliability, grounded theory researchers are concerned with the credibility of the theory. The theory should be applicable in a similar situation allowing the researcher to interpret, understand

and predict phenomena in similar settings (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986).

Data Analysis

Grounded theory is used to type behavior, not people (Glaser, 1978). Analysis depends on the verbatim accounts of participants' experience. Analysis begins immediately as concepts that indicate action or behavior are located and named directly from the data. The coding process develops open codes generated from the data, and does not use preconceived codes developed from the literature.

As coding progresses, coded data are constantly compared to other pieces of coded data and in the process, patterns and categories are identified. There are two types of codes: substantive or conceptual codes which are generated from the data, and theoretical codes which are hypothesized relationships among the substantive codes. Substantive and theoretical coding occur for the most part simultaneously.

In the development of the theory, codes are reduced to higher-order concepts or categories. In order to refine concept formation, the researcher conducts a selective search of the literature, called theoretical sampling, to determine how these higher-order concepts have been viewed. She also selectively samples, collecting more data using the concepts and relationships identified, in order to discover missing pieces or components parts which are not judged to be lacking in the emerging theory. The theory is fully developed through the concurrent process of substantive and theoretical coding and theoretical sampling.

Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

In qualitative research, subjects are considered to be ends in themselves, as opposed to being means to the investigator's ends. It is the research participants' experience which must be documented, analyzed and reported. Several advantages of fieldwork research have been identified when compared to other methods of behavioral research with human subjects (Cassell, 1980). She suggests that investigator power, as experienced by the participant, is equal to his own power; the participant has control of the setting in which the research is conducted; and the participant interacts with the investigator to determine the direction of the material investigated.

There are several ethical dilemmas. First, due to the depth of inquiry into participants' experience, there is a real possibility that the investigator may become party to information about the participant which must be divulged to social authorities. For example, when inquiry is directed to parent-child relations, information about child abuse may be revealed. Ethical and legal guidelines dictate that child safety take priority over research needs. Should participants request information or advice on their developing relationships, appropriate referrals to psychotherapeutic or educational resources must be provided.

Secondly, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and their families must be assured. Not only must participants not be recognizable to others who read the research report, but potential harm may also result from participants identifying themselves in published reports. Because qualitative research illustrates concepts with

excerpts from the recorded data, the possibility exists that the researcher's analysis may expose the experiences of participants in such a way that they may suffer emotionally. Care in writing research reports dictates that descriptive but not perjorative language be used, so that the integrity of the individual and his family is maintained.

A third ethical concern is informed consent. The participant must retain the right to control his own contributions including the right to not answer questions and the right to withdraw from research at any time.

Data Collection Methods

The Sample

The literature indicates that the researcher is to sample new participants until no new further information emerges. The analysis of the data and the development of theory will indicate when sampling may cease. A convenience sample of nine participants was used. Two participants did not match the primary sample on two demographic criteria but they were interviewed to confirm the validity of several concepts identified in the analysis. The following description refers to the entire sample except where there is mention of the differences in demographic characteristics.

Three criteria delimited the research sample and included the following: the men were to be self-defined as a stepfather in a before-marriage period; they were not to have children of their own; and they were to anticipate living with their fiance's children at least half the time. The introduction letter inviting the men to

participate in the research did not specify whether they were planning to marry, only that they identified themselves as prospective stepfathers in the period before marriage. There were no assurances that the men would legally be stepfathers, only that they identified themselves as prospective stepfathers. Seven participants were engaged to be married. Two were not engaged but declared they were in a permanent relationship.

Participants were located through several intermediary sources - two clergyman, the director of a day care centre, and family life educators in two social service agencies which offer preparation for marriage workshops. The purposes of the research were explained to them and they were asked to briefly explain the research to men who they believed would fit the parameters. In the day care setting, the director approached the mothers of children in their centre and they in turn were asked to approach the stepfather. A short explanatory letter (see Appendix) was provided to the contact person. It was to be given to the man and if he was willing to participate, the consent portion of the letter was to be signed by him and the form returned to the contact person. Then the consent portion was returned to the researcher. Of the men approached to participate by the contact person and who agreed to participate in the research, one participant was rejected by the researcher because he was the father of three adult children and therefore did not satisfy the condition of not previously fathering children.

Of the nine participants, seven were living with the women and children. One was not and would not be until they were married. The

other had been living with the mother but when interviewed had moved out for an unspecified period. Marriage dates at the time of the first interview were within one week, two weeks, three weeks, two months, seven months, and one year. The length of time the men had been in a relationship with the women ranged from eighteen months to three years. The length of time the men lived with the women and children ranged from four months to two and one-half years.

The men ranged in age from twenty-three to thirty-eight, with an average of twenty-nine. None had children from a previous relationship, but one participant had fathered a child with the women he was marrying. One man was divorced, the remainder were single.

Six of the mothers had been married to the children's natural fathers. Two mothers had been single parents and then married and divorced. One mother was a never-married women and the child's natural father was deceased. Seven mothers were divorced, one was separated, and one was single.

There were six girls and six boys among the children (three families of two children, and six families of one child each). One child was three years old, all the rest were between five and ten years of age at the first interview.

In all families but one the children were living full-time with their mothers and had done so since the separation. In the family which was the exception, the child had lived with the natural father for the year previous to the research but had lived with the mother and stepfather for a year prior to that. In two families the children lived at a considerable geographical distance from their fathers and

visited the fathers twice-yearly; in one family the children had had no contact with their father; one child had had no contact with the father for three years; two children had had no contact with their fathers for one year; one child had sporadic visits approaching a monthly rate with the father; one child visited the father on alternate weekends; and in the last family, the children visited the father twice weekly.

Data Collection and Recording

The primary method of data collection was unstructured interviews using open-ended questions. An interview schedule of general questions (see Appendix) was developed by the researcher and used to determine general directions, however the purpose of the research, to "discover" the experience of participants, required that the interviewer be responsive to the issues and concerns raised by participants. Research focused on the experiences of the stepfathers and interviews were held only with them, except in one instance in which the participant and the mother were both present.

A secondary and supplemental method of data collection was participant observation and field notes. Participant observation consisted of a record of perceptions made by the researcher to compare and contrast what was said and recorded with what was seen and experienced by the observer. Field notes were completed immediately following the interview by dictating perceptions and questions into the tape recorder as the researcher was leaving the interview scene.

Data was collected over a five month period. The original intent was to conduct all interviews in the before marriage period. However

four interviews were conducted between one and five weeks after marriage. These were either second or third interviews.

Interviews were conducted in face-to-face sessions in settings of the participants' choice. Two participants were interviewed three times, four were interviewed twice, and three were interviewed once. Five interviews were held in the participants' offices, one in the staff cafeteria at the participants' workplace, five in participants' homes, two in the researcher's home, three in restaurants, and one was held in a seminar room at the university.

Most of the first interviews were sixty minutes long and consisted of two stages. The first stage was about fifteen minutes long and included becoming acquainted with the participant, explaining in general terms the purposes and format of the research, answering any questions he had, completing consent forms, collecting demographic data (see Appendix) and offering him a summary of results after completion of the research. Participants' questions related to practical details such as how many interviews would be held.

The second stage of the first interview was an unstructured questioning process. The first question asked was "How did you meet this family?" Phrased in general terms, a stepfather might answer how he met the children's mother or how he met both the mother and children. If the former answer was given, the researcher prompted him to recount how he had met the children as well.

The second interview lasted a minimum of twenty and a maximum of ninety minutes. Most were about sixty minutes long. It was held at a minimum of one week and a maximum of two months after the first

interview. The longer time between first and second interviews was necessary to cope with holidays and cancelled appointments. Questions for the second interview were developed prior to the interview in part from a careful scrutiny of the first transcript to clarify areas that appeared confusing or contradictory to the researcher, and to expand on issues introduced by the participant in the first interview but which were not followed up on at the time. As well, concerns and issues discussed by one participant were raised in interviews with other participants. Third interviews were about ten minutes to half an hour long and were used to confirm concepts and relationships in the analysis.

The central problem facing prospective stepfathers was identified during analysis of three first interviews. Once identified, it became the focus of the research. In order to facilitate discussion of one aspect of the process of resolving the problem, participants were asked to take part in a paper-and-pencil task. The task was adapted from The Symbolic Drawing of the Family Life Space (Geddes & Medway, 1977). Structured tasks such as this can add an additional dimension to the investigation of a phenomenon in that they provide a stimulus to focus discussion and make the phenomenon more explicit.

Participants were given a standard sheet of paper upon which was drawn a circle five inches in diameter. Each participant was given the same initial instructions (see Appendix): to consider the circle as the boundaries of their family; to draw the members of the family as smaller circles and label them; and to draw people inside the circle who they considered to be immediate family, people outside the circle

who were not family, and people on the boundary if they so chose. The drawing was to represent how they viewed their family at the time of the interview.

After the circle was drawn, participants were asked to discuss and describe any desired or anticipated changes in the location of any members in the future, or to describe how it might have looked earlier in their relationship. Rather than the researcher assuming that any one condition such as a certain time limit or an event like marriage would bring about the change, participants were asked what they considered would bring about or had brought about changes. Answers were recorded on tape and became part of the data for analysis.

All interviews except one were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim immediately following the interview. In the one exception, the tape recorder failed and the researcher made notes during the interview for later recall. Names of participants and references to family members were altered during transcription to preserve the anonymity of participants. Tape recording is the most common means of data gathering and is preferred in that it collects, or aims to collect, everything that is said and the manner in which it is said. In this way, meaningful information such as reactions to questions, vocal qualities and other communication nuances can be captured.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher using a word processor and three copies were produced. The transcriptions were initially read to locate the beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, needs,

and reports of behaviors of the participants integral to his becoming a stepfather and part of the family. These factors and the context in which they were embedded in the interviews became the coding units or incidents for further analysis. The incidents were coded in the margins of the transcripts using codes which described the substance of what was occurring. The following example illustrates the preliminary coding of incidents.

> Not only did I date mommy, but I dated her as well and she liked that. I'd say, "Let's leave mommy at home, let's you and I go out."

This incident was originally coded as "courting the child" and later integrated into a larger category of strategies intended to build a relationship between the stepfather and the child. Incidents and the context in which they were embedded in the interview, and the initial codes were physically cut from the manuscripts and sorted according to conceptual categories identified simultaneously. Categories were developed by the constant comparative method which is integral to the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, each incident was compared to other incidents to identify conceptual properties and the relationships underlying the incident. Conceptual categories began to emerge. Comparisions continued with incident being compared to incident, and incident to category.

The three copies of the manuscripts were necessary because each coding unit, which contained the target incident and the context, might also contain other incidents which referred to another conceptual category. Coding units could be several lines, several sentences, or

several paragraphs because the target concept might be intermingled among other concepts.

Incidents, while descriptive, do not make the theory. They serve to illustrate the theory. If an incident contributed a new property of a category, or signified a new category of the emerging theory, it was retained and integrated. Not all raw data was incorporated into the theory. Incidents which did not contribute to the emerging theory were discarded.

Core variable. Early in the analysis, the core variable "finding a way to count" was identified. As each coding unit was analyzed, the question was posed "How does this illustrate the stepfather finding a way to count?" If the unit did not illustrate finding a way to count, it was discarded. If it did illustrate finding a way to count, it was retained, and questions like "How is his finding a way to count being affected?", "How is finding a way to count occurring?" were asked. This process yielded additional conceptual codes which explained the process of finding a way to count.

The final conceptual categories were then fractured and re-grouped until four domains through which stepfathers found a way to count were identified. The domains are discussed in Chapter Three. Figure 2.1 illustrates the data analysis procedure.

Ethical Concerns

Standardized procedures for guaranteeing anonymity were followed including tape erasure following completion of the research project,

storage of consent forms in secure cabinets; the destruction of all material upon completion of the study, renaming participants and their family members during transcription, and the alteration of characterological details in the research report to ensure that participants and their family members were not identifiable.

Informed consent was assured by using a consent form (see Appendix) which was discussed and signed during the initial interview. The form briefly outlined the intent of the research, the format of the interviews and the participant's rights including the right to control his own contributions, to not answer questions and to withdraw from research if he chose.

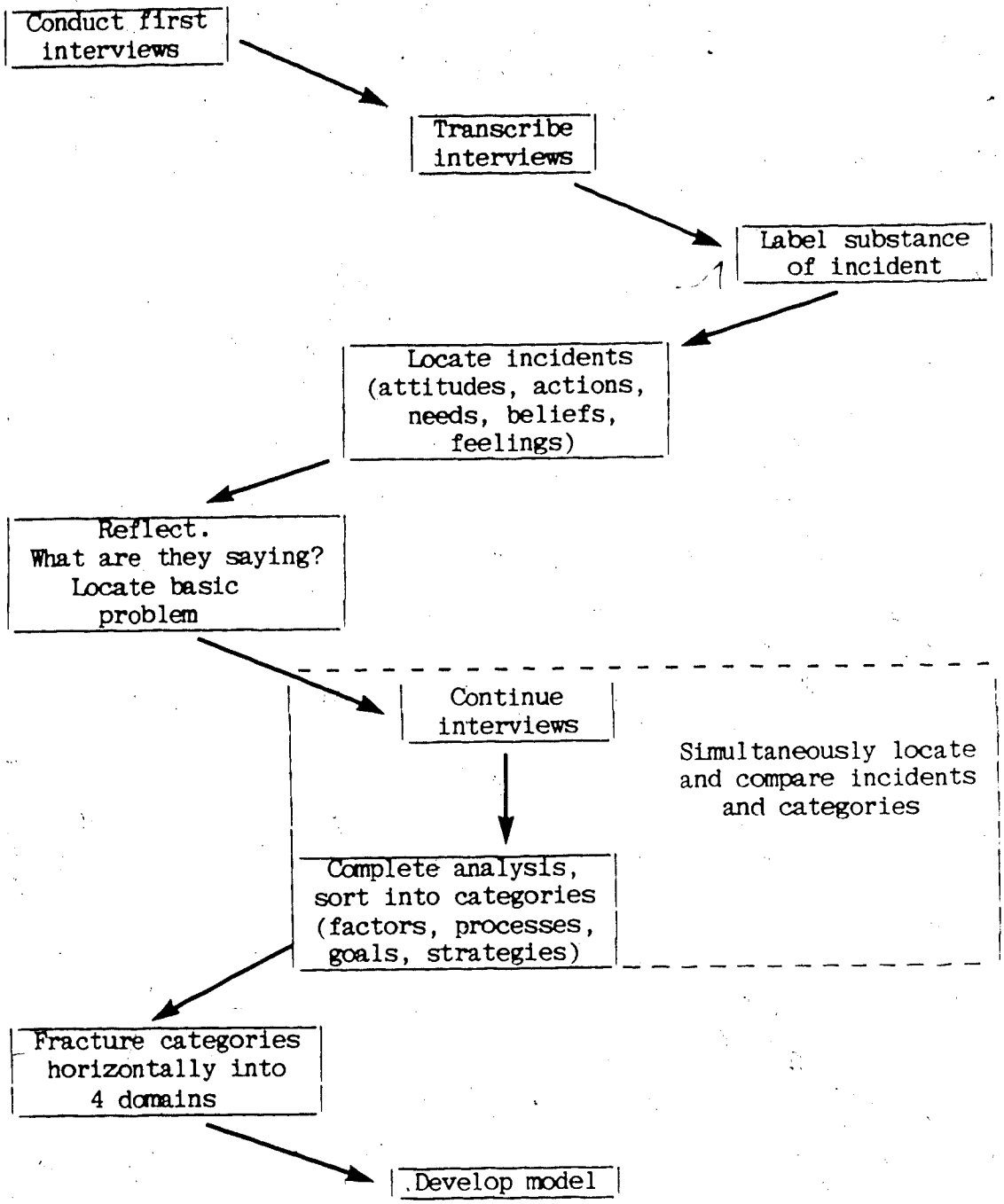


Fig. 2.1 Flow Chart Illustrating Data Collection, Analysis and Theory Building

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

As indicated in the discussion of methodology in Chapter Two, the data were analyzed to accomplish several goals. The purpose of the research was to describe how stepfathers became part of the family in relation to the children. As such, the couple relationship as it was constituted in husband-and-wife-like behaviors was not under scrutiny. The first goal therefore, was to locate and name conceptual elements which would describe the process of becoming part of the family. What emerged from the analysis were four domains or spheres of influence and activity central to stepfathers becoming part of the family. The domains are: building a relationship with the child, parenting, building a family, and forming an identity.

The second goal of the data analysis was to locate and name the basic social psychological process (BSPP) by which the central problem facing prospective stepfathers was addressed. The BSPP "finding a way to count" was identified through an intuitive analysis of the whole of the first three interviews and was confirmed and refined in the analysis of the remainder of the interviews.

In this chapter, the results are presented in five sections. The four domains are presented in the first four sections. Each domain is defined and evidence for the domain is provided from the transcripts. Categories such as the stepfathers' early experiences and change in the

domain, goals and expectations regarding the domain, factors that influenced change and the accomplishment of goals, and strategies stepfathers used to institute change and meet their goals in the domain are presented. In the fifth section, the BSPP, finding a way to count is presented.

Excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate the variety of experiences among the participants in the four domains and the BSPP. The experiences include the attitudes, feelings, and overt actions relevant to the category. Finally, the pervasiveness of patterns across the sample is indicated.

Stepfathers', mothers' and children's names and family circumstances and characteristics are changed to provide anonymity to the participants and their families. In order to differentiate between adults and children, diminutive or shortened name forms are used for children. For example, Terry is a child's name and Terrence is an adult's name.

Building a Relationship

Definition

Building a relationship refers to the development of affectional bonds between the stepfather and the child. It includes the expression of feelings for each other and mutual activities. It excludes instrumental aspects of the parenting domain comprised of limit setting, control, discipline, and physical care. Analysis of the data revealed a number of aspects of building a relationship including early experiences and strategies that assisted the development of the

relationship, goals for the relationship, and factors affecting the relationship. The following illustrates the need to build the relationship over time.

> I still have the problems of being resented by Jim, so those things were still there at first. They did bother me more. You just can't jump into a relationship, you have to work on it, build it up.

Early Experiences in Relationship Building

Relationship building between the stepfather and the child began when the stepfather met the child. This occurred either within a few days of the stepfather meeting the mother, or several months later. Four stepfathers met the child or children soon after meeting the mother while two stepfathers met the child about two months after meeting the mother. In the latter cases, the couple relationship was more serious when the stepfathers met the children. One stepfather thought the delayed meeting was deliberate, for the other, delayed meeting allowed the relationship to develop.

> I didn't have any kind of rapport with her child at all at first. I think she was hesitant to expose him to me, because what if we didn't hit it off. It might have an effect on him, especially as he was only three years old at the time... Later when we got more serious about our relationship, I began to spend more time with the child.

> Before I met Rachael, with any women before, if they had children, I would see the women after the children went to bed or if the babysitter was there, I'd just pick them up. I've never been around children. Children never bothered a friend of mine, with any woman he went out with, but with me, it did. I was here today, gone tomorrow. With Rachael, I knew the child was there, but he wasn't around for the first couple of months, and the relationship started to mold a bit.

Meeting the children was a topic discussed by the stepfathers in the interviews, but it did not appear to be very important to most of them initially. Two stepfathers said that the children behaved in an antagonistic manner towards them, another said that the child was wary of him although he knew this only because the mother told him much later, one said that meeting the children was generally friendly and a playful adult-child relationship began between them, and one said that the child, to him, was "just another little kid". The stepfathers either made favorable descriptions of the children or gave qualified descriptions of the children as "good" regardless of the behavior of the children. If the children were antagonistic, stepfathers justified the childrens' behavior. One stepfather described how he waited it out, watching for the antagonism to abate. Another attempted to convince the then three year old child that his intentions were honorable. The following excerpts illustrate the variety in the nature of the relationships at early stages and how the stepfathers accounted for the children's behavior.

> Sometimes when Rob would do something aggravating to me to the point where I could give him a backhand, because he didn't have a man around the house for two and a half years. Then, all of a sudden, there's one, and he has to try to share his love with his mother, to split his love between his mother and this man. You know, when you first get into a relationship, there's only two people involved, you and her, and the kids come in second, but you know they're there.
>
> I don't understand it and I felt bad about it. I felt resentful because I thought I was pretty good with kids and they usually like me... But I think it was because of his mom and everything... I thought it would be the same with her boy, but it's not. He's jealous of me because I'm a new person that's come in the picture. You see, he had time to be with his mom for about two years, and at that young developing age where he's getting, and I don't want to say spoiled, but okay, he's getting all her attention.

> At first when we started dating, there was alot of resentment from her, resentment because I was taking her mommy away. And she was causing alot of fuss. "Don't touch my mommy. Don't hug my mommy."

Some stepfathers had favorable first meetings with the children.

> They both took to me fairly easily, too. No problem at all. In fact, they liked the attention of having another adult male around.

> I didn't know what to think of her, and Theresa said she was ten. But you don't really think, she's just a kid. And she came over and she was quite big, kind of a bit of a surprise... she seemed quite nice, so it wasn't any big deal.

One stepfather was initially very attracted to the children and immediately began spending time with them. In retrospect he said that perhaps he had fallen in love with the children before he had with their mother. He enjoyed doing all sorts of things with them - playing with, teaching and talking to them.

Stepfathers brought with them their expectations for a relationship with the children based on their previous experience with children. When the children in some families behaved in a manner they described as hostile, the stepfathers were surprised.

> I have a niece and in some ways she'd be like my own child in that she responds positively to me. There's no "You're the stepfather". She's like a baby that opens it's arms and is receptive to you, and it's reciprocal. With the children, I find that they hold back a little, and sometimes maybe they feel that they're betraying their father.

> At the time I kept feeling, like how can I get through to this kid? Why doesn't he listen to me? Plus my resources weren't the best in the world either. I've never been a parent, my experience is that most kids like me and this kid doesn't.

Strategies to Build a Relationship

Stepfathers reported using a variety of strategies to build affectional ties with the child. Among the strategies stepfathers talked about were courting the child, sharing activities, demonstrating his intentions, accepting the child's childfulness, accepting this child, developing meaningful routines, and waiting for the child to return affection and trust. Some stepfathers appeared to implement more strategies than others. Two talked about the importance of demonstrating affection for the child to the child even though none or little was being returned.

The strategies are presented in a temporal order. Not all the strategies occurred in this sequence, but different participants stressed the importance of one or two at particular times. This reflects a composite of the strategies observed.

Courting the child. Courting the child is illustrated by these quotations showing how some stepfathers ingratiated themselves with the children, so the children would look forward to them coming over. Courting was an important behavior at first, but one stepfather planned to continue it.

> What I found by going to Bullwinkle's, going to things that they really like, that they're not able to be with their mom as much, if you take them there alot by yourself, they really look forward to you coming over, rather than just talking to the mom all the time. When you take the mother out, they feel rejected, you're taking a part of them away. But if you fulfill their needs as well as their mom's needs, there's a good bond.
>
> I explained to her that I wasn't only going out with her mom but I was going out with her, too. I would take Becky along too, and I'd hug her and try to give her as much attention as I'd give Barbara. But Becky, being the lone girl in the

family, her mom there and her grandmother so available, she got a great deal of attention and with me coming in and giving alot of attention to her mom, it triggered alot of resentment there because she wasn't the focal point anymore, her mom was.

I'm probably holding back more with her than with him because with him it's a little easier. He's six and seems to respond well to having a father in his life, to having somebody there consistently doing things together. With Ellie, who's 9, what I'd like to do is spend more time alone with her and do things with her because she really likes that.

Sharing activities. Most stepfathers reported taking part in numerous joint activities with the children. They started with such activities as board games, riding bikes, fishing, playing catch, helping them with their homework, taking them roller skating or out to McDonald's, and reading stories. Some of the stepfather had taken on or were planning to take on long-term commitments with the children such as coaching sports and leading youth groups. A few stepfathers weren't as involved. One stepfather reported that he had engaged in only one one-to-one activity with the child in the eighteen months he had known her saying "I don't know what a father's supposed to do with a daughter".

Demonstrating his affections and intentions. By demonstrating affection and their intent stepfathers were proving their trustworthiness sometimes quite explicitly.

I'm trying. If Rob asks me to do something for him, I'll try my hardest to do it, and I feel that if I show him I'm trying, then maybe he'll try a little harder, too.
I feel that in my situation, Rob's dad walked out on him when he was two years old, and he was very rough on him right from when he was born. Because his dad left, maybe subconsciously he's thinking that's what I'm going to do, too, is walk out on him. Rachael told me that his dad never from the day Rob was born showed him any love, so that's why I show Rob that I love

> him so much, plus it makes me understand him and him understand me.
>
> I went in with my eyes wide open. It took alot of time to break through, getting him to listen to me in the same way; saying "I'm a loving, caring adult just like your mom is". I've got a right attitude but he doesn't believe it. He thinks I'm there for some other reason. Of course he can't formulate in his mind because he's only three years old. To a child, it's just "my mom". "Don't touch mommy".

Accepting this child. In the early stages of getting to know the children, most stepfathers appeared to be developing ties with the children secondarily to their ties with the mother. One stepfather began actively courting an antagonistic child from the beginning and so developed a relationship with mother and child simultaneously. Another stepfather established a close relationship with the children very early on, "falling in love with them" and accepting them along with their mother from "day one". As time progressed, most of the other stepfathers began to see the importance of developing a relationship with the children.

> If you want one, you have to take the other one... Like, you can love the woman and hate the child, and what are you going to get in the end? In the end, you're going to be back out because there's no way the woman's going to give up the child. I would have been the one that lost, so I had to accept that I had to learn to love him. And you know, to love them, that's still coming.
>
> It's not a spontaneous kind of love that we have for each other. It's one we have to build up over time... As we spend more together, live together and things like that, that our relationship will grow.

Accepting the child's childlike qualities. This strategy required that stepfathers not take children's negative behavior personally. It means that they were able to appreciate the developmental

characteristics of the child, and a child's way of doing things.

> If a little child comes up to you and says "I hate you", at that particular moment, he does. He hates you. But give him five minutes and he'll come back and say "I'm sorry dad, I don't hate you, I really love you."

Routines. The following quotations illustrate routines which were meaningful to the stepfathers and by which they measured the depth of their relationship with the children.

> I always say "good night", go up to their rooms, lie on the bed with both of them and talk for a little bit, get a hug...
>
> We sit down alot, and I'll get in my recliner and he'll come and sit with me. As soon as I get home, he comes over and gives me a big hug, and he's got to sit with me. And if I'm having a drink, I give him a little shot.
>
> Every time I come to the apartment, she comes running down the hallway to meet me. I can hear her running, and if I go there and don't hear the titter tatter on the floor above me, I miss that now.
>
> "Oh, come and measure me again dad;" so [redacted] put a little mark over by the fridge. It's fun watching him grow.

Waiting it out. Stepfathers waited for the children to show their acceptance of them. One stepfather reported that his previous efforts paid off when the child behaved in a manner which indicated to him that he was accepted. It occurred within days of the stepfather and mother marrying. The child was upset and cried because he could not change his last name to the stepfather's, as his mother was doing.

> I feel that Cam and I are getting closer. It's just one long steady uphill thing, but it's kind of hard to read him. I really have to look between the lines.
>
> I felt bad about it, I'd get upset about it, too, and try to explain to him on his own terms saying, "This is why I'm here, I'm not going anywhere. You'll have to get used to it

> one way or another. You might love it or you might hate it, hopefully you'll love it." And he was slow to come around, but of course, I don't consider it slow now, after him being six years old and having known him for three years.
>
> Charlotte is definitely reassuring that it takes three years for kids to accept another adult close to a father, or get close to them anyway. So I guess it's not something that happens quickly.
>
> I'm getting to know him and his habits more. I get along better with him and he's getting along with the way I am more, too. We're finding out more about each other. After three of four years, it's starting to get into knowing each other's character alot better.

What one stepfather percieved as the child rejecting him prompted him to discontinue making overtures to the child, although he continued to wait for the child to demonstrate acceptance of him.

> What I've found myself doing is reaching out to her, stuff like that, but she would always pull back. So I've just given up, more or less, and am waiting until she gets the idea that I'm there and I'm there to stay, and I'm going to be one of her fathers.

Goals for Their Relationship with the Children

There was a variation in the importance stepfathers appeared to place on developing a relationship with the children. Most stepfathers talked spontaneously about the kind of relationship they had and hoped to have in the future with the children; two stepfathers were either unable to articulate goals or had not formulated any. The kind of relationship they hoped to have is expressed in the following quotations.

> I want to be close to Rob. He and I can have a relationship together. That's what I'm trying to work at. You should be able to see the feelings that Rob and I have for each other. I try to be close with Rob because I'm not close with my own

family, and I don't want Rob to feel like he's left out like I was left out when I was a child.

I expect it'll be easier to hug and express affection. It's fairly easy now but Chrissy is very sporadic. I guess it will get better as she's more confident that I'm going to stay, and that I love her. And the feeling for me as much as for them, that I'll feel like I'm really involved with the kids.

When she's a little older and starts getting into competitive sports, starts to enjoy hiking more, things like that, that not only do I become a father, but I become a supporter, a coach, and our relationship will change that way. Right now, she's a daughter and it will change from father-daughter to mentor-child or something like that as she moves out of being a kid into other things.

It's hard to develop a relationship, to know where to fit in. I have responsibilities and permission and things like that. As far as the relationship side, that's not developing as fast... It has something to do with my interest which is an interest to a degree. I'll be more interested when they get a little older, when they can start doing things. I see us developing a relationship by doing things together like hiking, them getting into sports.

As we spend more time together, it would seem to be the natural thing to happen, that if he's involved in their life, sees them at holidays and such, that he may be their father and they'll work out a thing where they can relate to and love me, and love him at the same time.

Factors that Affected their Anticipated Relationship with the Children

Stepfathers talked about both enhancers and impediments they perceived affected the relationship they could develop with the children. Among them were the presence of the children's father and the degree of contact between the father and child; a hypothesized disloyalty the children might have between the father and stepfather which might preclude the child engaging in a relationship with the stepfather; the nature of the mother-child relationship which could preclude the possibility of him being able to develop a relationship

with the child; the stepfather-child relationship being thrust on them; and the lack of history together from birth. These were threats to relationship building as currently perceived by stepfathers.

The natural father. For most stepfathers, the presence of the children's father affected the relationship they believed they could have.

> I've seen stepchildren who have no fathers and they really adapt well to a father-figure. When they have a father there, there's a conflict of interest for them. If he's going to be their father, what does that make me? Sometimes I feel like I can be a father, but not a real father, and I can develop a relationship with them, but I won't get the real fatherly type of gratification that I would out of parenting children who would respond to me at THE father.

> The kids' relationship with Charlotte, and the kids' relationship with me, I don't feel that I'll achieve that parity, so I think that there'll always be that feeling that they're more hers than mine... my relationship with them will never be as close as if they were my kids, especially with their father being in the picture so much, so that there's always the reminder that he's their father and I'm stepfathering. I don't think I'll have the same satisfaction that I would have had if I had my own kids, raising my own.

A forced relationship. The relationship with the children thrust on them because of their relationship with the mother created mixed feelings on the part of two stepfathers.

> As far as my feelings right now, I enjoy spending time with them but I can't say I love them. I have alot of mixed feelings. At times I love them, at times I hate them. At times I resent the fact that they're so difficult and make things so hard. Sometimes I just compare it to how much easier it would be to have my own children and just raise them from day one.

Lack of history together. Several stepfathers talked about how not

being involved with the children from birth affected the relationship they could have with the children. Sharing their life together would make parenting easier because expectations would be known.

The mothers' relationship with the children. A few stepfathers talked about how the mothers' relationship with the children, begun at birth, would affect the relationship they could have with the children. They wouldn't be able to achieve the kind of relationship the mother had. Stepfathers also talked about how their efforts to build a relationship with the child had unintended effects on other relationships in the family.

> Rachael has sometimes said "I think you love Rob more than you love me" because I show him alot more affection for a period of time, and one time when she mentioned it again, I said "It may APPEAR that I love him more than you, but I don't. He has to know that I love him before he's going to give his love to me".
>
> I think she's jealous of my relationship with them. I have more respect, and they mind me better. She wants a father for them but I think it scares her they won't be mommy's kids anymore, they'll be mommy's and daddy's kids.

Another stepfather anticipated that his efforts to build a relationship with the child would stand him in good stead in his relationship with the mother.

> If you fulfill their needs as well as their mom's needs, there's a good bond. It works both ways, too. When you're trying to gain a relationship with the mother, she looks at you helping her kids alot, she feels more towards you, too.

Parenting

Definition of the Domain

Parenting in this section is limited to interaction between the stepfather and child in instrumental areas. It is concerned with setting limits, disciplining, being an authority, and the tasks related to providing care for the dependent children. A narrow definition of parenting is used here, which reflects the way stepfathers conceived of parenting in early stages. The nurturing aspects of parenting are included under the domain relationship building. While an arbitrary division, it reflects the stepfathers' perceptions, and simplifies the complexity in early stages of becoming a stepfather. Later, the two components are integrated.

All the stepfathers expressed an interest and a need to take on parenting responsibilities but the rate at which they did it, the comfort they felt about taking it on, their beliefs about their right to parent, and the degree to which they achieved parenting responsibilities prior to marriage varied. There are four topic areas in this domain: stages of becoming a parent, reaching parenting goals, gaining the right to parent, and sharing parenting with the father.

Stages of Becoming a Parent

Two words stand out in stepfathers descriptions of their experiences in becoming a parent and they are "difficult" and "awkward". They stand out because of the frequency with which they were used. Becoming a significant and contributing parent in an already existing family was not easy.

While all parents learn on the job, the participants in this research described the additional problems of deciding when they should start actively parenting, how they should start, what the children's reactions would be when they did and the difficulties they had experienced or anticipated they would experience with the mother when they did begin. Most rated their knowledge and skill level as limited or lacking, and one stepfather talked about his lack of awareness of the children's needs.

> When I think about doing things, I don't always automatically think of including the kids as part of the family. I still think of doing something with Charlotte and getting the kids babysat. It's the little things, like parents think first of the kids. Charlotte does anyway. She thinks first of the kids and I don't.
>
> He comes to me for alot of things but I don't know how to deal with them because I've never had to deal with a child.
>
> From the basics, I didn't know a thing about raising kids. When Rachael said "We have to get him registered in school", I said "What do you want me to do? ... How did you know that?"

Four stages of taking on parenting tasks were identified in the analysis. These stages represent the behaviors of most of the stepfathers displayed and their rationale for the behaviors. The stages are holding back, starting tentatively, getting involved and co-parenting. A few stepfathers short-circuited the stages and began disciplining unexpectedly.

Holding back. Early in their relationship with the children, most stepfathers held back or hesitated to carry out any parenting functions, partly because they said they didn't know what to do,

because they didn't believe they had a right to parent, and because they didn't want to jeopardize the developing relationship with the child.

> I haven't really got into doing very much because it's kind of awkward. She's only known me for eighteen months and she's just started to know me quite well. So it's kind of hard to tell her what to do, and I'm sure she doesn't like it when I do.

Hesitating or holding back in parenting had in some cases negative consequences, as illustrated in the following incident in which the mother attempted to help the stepfather and child stop playing.

> Theresa can kinda tell when I don't want to play anymore and so she kinda jumps in now and again and says "That's enough, Tammy" which I feel badly about because then Tammy's mad at her mom for something that I wanted to say.

Stepfathers hesitated to discipline or set limits with the children believing that their relationship with the children might be compromised by authoritative actions.

> I know I've got to be aware of being manipulated by Chrissy because she has that way of just teasing a little bit. It is fairly important for me to be liked by the kids and I want to get the good feedback, because when she does say nice things it just feels great. It's difficult because I want to be a firm father when I have to be.

One stepfather who hesitated to discipline experienced an opposite and unanticipated effect in his relationship with the child when he did begin.

> It seems the firmer I am with Becky, the more respect I get from her. If I discipline harder, she loves me more, she hangs on to me stronger. I figured it would be the other way around, that as soon as I gave her a spanking, she'd have nothing else to do with me for a week or so.

Starting tentatively. Most participants described how they held back initially and then began parenting tentatively, backing up the mothers' parenting, and finally gradually working into areas of their own concern.

> I do speak for myself more than I did. I'll say what to do and what not to do. So I suppose I'm getting used to being around and I've got to start somewhere. So just small things like leaving things laying around, things that kids always do. Instead of just leaving it for Theresa to deal with, I'll tell her to put it away, or clean her room.

Getting involved. Later, stepfathers began to participate in decision making with the mother about the children. Part of being involved was looking after the children for extended periods of time. Several talked about taking care of the children for a weekend, others began caring for the children while the mother worked and they were off. For some stepfathers, taking care of the children successfully represented passing a test. When stepfathers began getting involved in these ways, they still expressed that they weren't comfortable disciplining.

> I'm certainly more involved in the decisions of whether they take a course or play soccer or take something after school, or go with their grandmother for the weekend if we're going away. The decisions around the kids, new clothes, we're discussing all those things.
>
> I have taken the kids for some periods, like one whole weekend I looked after them and that felt really good and it felt like I was capable of doing it, and we got along okay. And a couple of other times I've had them for the evening or for the day and that's worked out fine but in general I haven't taken on alot.

Co-parenting. Several participants had reached the stage of co-parenting with the childrens' mothers. This is further explained

and examples given from the transcripts in the following section "Reaching Parenting Goals" under the sub-section "Accomplished goals".

Beginning unexpectedly. There were variations in getting started parenting. A few participants began disciplining unexpectedly. The children behaved in a manner that was unacceptable to them and for which they felt compelled to respond. These disciplining incidents were remembered as important milestones in taking on disciplining responsibilities.

> Just after Rachael and I moved in together, we'd catch him in little white lies and we'd sit down and talk to him about it. I said "This is one guy you don't lie to. You don't lie to your mother and the next time I catch you in a lie, I'm going to lick you." I said it more as a threat, but I wasn't going to carry it out. A couple of days later, he lied to me again, and I couldn't back down. I had to stick to my word. He's never lied again, and he doesn't lie to anybody... So that's basically how it started.

Starting too soon. A few stepfathers talked about their lack of success in disciplining in early stages. One stepfather began to discipline early in the relationship and in a vigorous manner. He reported that the tactic was ineffective, so he changed techniques as the following illustrates.

> Elizabeth's parenting values and my parenting values started to clash. I'd try something, and it didn't work. Then I'd be a little more forceful and spank them. I got out of that kind of discipline because it wasn't working. It was more frustration. Then I recognized that a combination of things like spending time with them and a certain kind of discipline worked.

Another stepfather who began disciplining very early in his relationship with the mother, before moving in, did so because he

thought he, as an adult, had a right to discipline any child who was "misbehaving". He found out that his disciplining wasn't welcome.

> It's not so much now, but it was before, I'd tell Sue something, and Sharon would turn around and let her do it. She contradicted everything I did. Everytime I started to say something, I caught more heck than Sue got. I said, "The heck with it, you do it". I quit for quite a long time. Then Sharon got mad because she didn't think it should be all her responsibility. So then I started again.

Reaching Parenting Goals

Need to parent. Stepfathers saw or felt a need to parent in the family. They talked about their "felt" need to parent, to respond to children's behavior in a manner which reflected their sense of order, creating change which satisfied their own needs. Most felt a need for things to be different in the family but some said it felt difficult to act on those needs especially when they thought the mother would remain parent in charge, precluding their involvement. Part of the need related to being seen as a father by the child.

> You kind of have to put in the father's image, or I do anyhow. So far it's worked out okay. There's problems about how to deal with Tammy. She has been brought up for ten years by her mom alone and she's learned to deal with Theresa's rules. So you feel awkward telling her what to do.

> Typically you get your ideas of how to look after kids from the way you were treated by your parents, so there's always going to be those differences. I see some of the things she does with the kids and they don't feel right. It's kind of been agreed by Charlotte and I without ever talking about it that she basically continues as the main parenting person... I hardly do anything. On the weekends if we're both around, Charlotte is still making most of the decisions and actions.

> When one of the kids is pretty sick and I think we should go to a doctor and check it out. I guess Charlotte's father never saw a doctor. You had to be on your death bed before he'd ever think of seeing a doctor and I know that that's

pretty firmly ingrained. It has irritated me a few times. When I suggest we take them to a doctor she says "No, let's see what happens first." We get into fights about it.

With her grandmother right next door, Becky got quite spoiled and then I came along. I could see that she always got her way. She'd start crying and bingo, she got her way. They both rushed to pick her up when she'd throw a tantrum. I'm much firmer than that. It took a little while to change that.

On occasion, I've told Theresa that she has to bear down on Tammy a little more than she does, and it took me awhile to say that because Theresa has brought her up for ten years and she's turned out so well, so she's obviously doing something right.

At the time of the interviews, a few of the stepfathers said they weren't parenting enough yet, one was parenting too much, but most were satisfied with the amount they parented, and had reached their goals.

Not enough parenting. Two stepfathers were not satisfied because they wanted to take on more parenting. They wanted to be able to have more influence over the children's physical care, daily actions, and discipline and to be in the position of responding to the children. They needed the mother to provide room for their involvement, in some cases to quit being so competent. They also weren't sure of how much parenting they could achieve, and were not confident about their abilities as a parent yet.

When the kids ask questions and I'll be sitting at the dining room table with them, and Charlotte'll be in the kitchen, and one of them will ask, I think it's almost to me but maybe it's almost more random, "How do you spell, whatever' and I'll just begin to say... and Charlotte will yell the answer from the kitchen. She's been used to doing it. I've told her I feel really slighted sometimes, like I can handle this, giving answers and stuff.

I don't feel like I have the right yet to enforce my opinion on theirs. They are always going to be more her kids than

> mine and so she'll have more say in what they do. It's difficult when I have some strong feelings about how we should do some things with the kids and I don't feel like I'm being heard.

Accomplished goals. Six participants talked about concerns they previously had, but the transition to parenting, to them, was mostly accomplished. They appeared to have more comfort parenting, and their right to parent was established with the child and the mother. One stepfather said he was learning on the job, much like any parent who is continually faced with new concerns as children grow.

> There's hard times for sure with any parent. It's not unique to my situation, every parent or couple has the same thing. They have to decide how they're going to work it. You have to talk about it and decide what are we going to do with this child.

Parenting was facilitated by success in previous instances and by accumulating time together.

> You've got history and you can say "Remember what happened a year ago, or two years' when before you can't. There's no reference point in your life, in his life which you get as you've gone along. It's history being made.

The stepfathers who were satisfied with the discipline and parenting responsibilities they had achieved also said they had achieved parity with the mother in responsibilities. The stepfather and mother were able to support each other's methods even when they did not entirely agree with each other, or they were able to openly discuss parenting when there was disagreement.

> You have disagreements. Sometimes I think the way she handles things, I think I don't understand it. But then it's

the same way with her. There's some things the way I handle situations, which she says she can't understand.

Too much. One stepfather reported that it seemed to him that he was the primary disciplinarian in the family which was a source of dissatisfaction to him. Parenting, to him, was a time-consuming job with little let-up, compounded by the particular nature of stepparenting.

Gaining the Right to Parent

The stepfather's perception of his right to parent was important in reaching parenting goals. Stepfathers talked about a critical event or a condition which would give them the right to parent. The conditions or events identified were when he moved in, when the children showed a sign of accepting him, when the mother openly gave her permission to parent, or upon marriage.

> I want to be a firm father when I have to be... I'm still gaining acceptance into the family, and I don't really have the right as a father to discipline.

> I didn't feel that I had the right to discipline before Rachael and I started living together. After we started living together, we would discuss things I felt that Rob should do, and what she thought he should do, and we kind of compromised.

> Now that we're married, I feel more comfortable putting my foot down. We're making decisions together.

There is evidence in the transcripts that some mothers actively gave permission to the stepfather to parent the children. The following illustrates how permission was given.

> It was like before she was giving her permission. It was

alot of "Now you can, now you can't" sort of thing... I get alot more license now.

Barbara has always indicated to me that if I felt like disciplining her, I had her permission.

When I first spanked Rob, she said it really hurt her an awful lot. She said she literally had to sit on her hands. She knew I was right and she said it bothered her.

Mother's support in parenting. Stepfathers said they needed mothers to support them in their efforts at parenting, to allow them to respond to matters in which they were directly involved, and to acknowledge and accept the different ways they had of parenting.

As far as taking explanations from me, they don't really respond. Sometimes I'll say something and Ed will check it out with his mother and she'll just say "You already heard what he said."

When I first started taking those kinds of stands... Elizabeth said she knew that this was going to be the big power struggle. She sat back and watched, knowing that it was between Ellie and me. That was really important. Elizabeth said that Ellie would have to accept that, and she backed me up.

Sometimes I have to sit back when she does something and later I'll discuss it with her and she'll say "It's none of your business. I'm doing it this way and that's it." On the other hand, so will I. I say "I handled it that way. Maybe it was wrong, maybe it was right, that's the way I did it."

She gives in alot more, and I'm alot firmer. Sometimes she doesn't like that but we talk about it and we've never had a problem with it... But she also says it's good to have somebody firmer in the family.

One stepfather talked about how the mother asked for his help in disciplining. When he complied, she didn't accept his efforts.

She's not quite ready to let me share one hundred percent in bringing up the children, I think because she was first on the scene. If one of them has done something wrong, I'll start giving them heck for it and instead of supporting my

argument even though she was the one who brought the problem to my attention, she'll turn around and support whoever is in trouble.

Sharing Parenting with the Father

A few stepfathers perceived that one additional factor affected their ability to parent and that was the child's father and his parenting of the children. Of the nine participants in this study, half the stepchildren saw their fathers. Several stepfathers believed that their effectiveness in parenting was affected by the father's involvement with the children.

> I would like to be a stronger influence, a stronger role model than I feel like I'm going to be able to be since their own father is in the picture so much... If I was their only father, I could feel more satisfied in being a good role model towards the kids. There's definitely a conflict between what we're trying to instill, show the kids and what he is.

Conclusion

Stepfathers took on responsibility for discipline, limit setting and physical care of the children at various rates. As indicated, not all stepfathers were satisfied with the amount they had taken on, and had goals or hopes for the future to be more involved in all aspects of parenting. Most were satisfied in their ability to respond as a parent. There was no longer tension and worry about "what if" I do it wrong, "what if" the child resents me if I discipline or set limits. Stepfathers felt a need to integrate parenting into the relationship, to be comfortable and confident at setting limits, and to be able to move freely from disciplinarian to nurturer and back again without

their disciplining efforts affecting their relationship with the children or the mother. For some stepfathers that was already a reality. The ability to do that is best summed up in the words of one stepfather who imagined how it would work sometime in the future.

> I guess they will come to me more with their problems, maybe turn to me more often for reassurance, or comfort, or skinned their knee or whatever. They will accept my decisions more readily, my rules and my discipline. Not that they'll ever want to accept discipline, but at least if I say they can't go out, they'll accept that because they've done something else wrong. It's not quite like that yet.

Building a Family

Definition

Family building is the third domain emerging from the data. It is comprised of the feelings and activities which represent the stepfathers relationship to the existing family, and how he becomes a part of it. There is evidence in the transcripts that the stepfathers have a growing sense of belonging to the family as a group. Most stepfathers begin to see themselves as family men, and the family to be their family.

Initial Family Experiences

Participants were asked how they became part of the family. While some stepfathers described the development of the couple relationship, others referred to feelings of being part of a family and incidents which promted those feelings. The following quotations illustrate feelings the stepfathers experienced which related to them becoming part of the family in the initial stages. It appeared that some

stepfathers experienced a strong attraction to the family and that these initial feelings were instrumental in keeping them involved. For example, one stepfather was attracted to the family because it provided him with children without having to have babies.

> I'd wake up and it's going to be fun. The fun things, you have the company, the entire family. You can go out and do things, go see a Walt Disney movie that you can't do when you're an adult.
>
> It wasn't that I had to find someone with a family to settle down with, I've felt like this is where I belong.

Some stepfathers didn't talk about initial attractions to taking part in family life, but they described later feelings they had about being with the family.

> It felt fairly natural, it's even more than natural. It feels good, driving down to Calgary as a family. The kids playing in the back seat and laughing, giggling. Charlotte and I talking, she kind of leaning over and talking to the kids. And then just driving around and doing things, going tobogganing and all, doing things together as a family. It feels really good. I've definitely had that high sometimes about being part of a family.

Steps in Building a Family

The analysis revealed a number of events or conditions which helped stepfathers become part of the family and build a sense of this family as their family. Among the building factors were accepting the family, moving in, making a commitment to the children, changing their lifestyle, noticing a change in the children's attitude towards them, accepting the children's mother, and adopting the child and changing the child's surname to the stepfathers'.

Accepting the family. Most stepfathers talked about how becoming part of a stepfamily required them to weigh advantages and disadvantages of accepting this family. The decision making process occured early on and helped build a sense of family for them. Two stepfathers reported that a major disadvantage in marrying into an already existing family was that they would not father their own children. This was because the mothers indicated that they did not want to have more children. These men wouldn't experience the feelings that natural fathers have towards their own offspring, and parenting would be more difficult because they were parenting stepchildren. For one, the opposite was true, he didn't want to have babies and preferred a ready-made family.

Another disadvantage was that one could not make decisions on a whim, always having to consider the implications of one's actions for others. This might apply to simple decisions like going to a movie to changing jobs. Two stepfathers talked about immediate pressures they felt when they moved into the family and the difficulty they had in arranging couple time. One stepfather said there was no in-between time, that period between first meeting and being a couple and being a family.

Advantages were that one would not have to go through the intense period of parenting infants, could pursue career interests, and could participate in family activities without waiting for infants to grow up.

> Why would I suddenly want to make a jump from being a bachelor or being single to being in a relationship, to being a father, and I guess alot of the positive things that come of it, the company, being part of a family, doing things

> together, watching them grow up, things like that. I didn't have to go through that really intense stage when you're tied to your home, things like that. When you move in, they're already walking and talking... so we could do things together as a family.

Accepting the family had implications for the future for some participants. When stepfathers were relatively young in comparison to the children, they wondered if the children would respect them when they became teenagers. One wondered if he would be a grandfather to his stepchildren's children.

Moving in. Moving in with the family was an event which contributed to some stepfathers sense of building family. All but one participant had moved in with the family at the time of the interviews, and he was planning to move in after their marriage which was two months hence. One stepfather moved in with the family in order to put living with a woman and her children on trial. The trial was a success in that he deemed that he could handle living with the family and they decided to marry as a result.

> Just living with someone and having to change my life to accommodate those other people. For thirty-five years I've always done just what I've wanted to do and I was very concerned that it work out. It would have been very difficult for me to get married or even to propose to get married without having experienced living with Charlotte and the kids for awhile to see what it was like.

One participant had lived with the family for over a year but had moved out two days before the interview was held. He had been engaged for nine months and still was. He and the mother were experiencing

difficulty in their relationship and living together compounded their difficulty in problem solving.

One participant moved in when he and the mother decided that their relationship was permanent, although they had not decided to marry at that time. For one stepfather, moving in appeared to be more of a convenience to him financially when his roommate moved out.

Lifestyle changes. Two participants talked about the importance of changing their lifestyle as a necessary part of becoming part of the family and the difficulty they experienced in altering their lifestyle. Becoming part of the family required that they alter their personal behavior in favor of developing skills and attitudes conducive to living in a family. One participant felt it was relatively easy for him to change his lifestyle and thought he handled family responsibility very well.

> I was accountable to three other people, not just one. So I couldn't come and go as I pleased, do what I wanted. So I had to accept that, and that's a major acceptance.

One participant told how the child occasionally reminded him that he was part of a family.

> Rob's only six years old and he's telling me to slow down a little bit and spend some time with the family... He gets upset with me because I work such long shifts, and calls me a workaholic.

Supporting the family. One stepfather reported that financially supporting the children helped create a feeling of family for him. In this case, the behavior of the children's father indirectly contributed

to the stepfathers feelings of family. One participant who had always considered himself to be foot-loose in his work now saw the need to maintain steady employment because of family responsibilities. Another participant had turned down career alternatives because of time commitments to the family he perceived he had.

> The childrens' father does all sorts of things rather than support his kids. In a way it makes me feel better in that Charlotte and I are responsible for the kids, so it's more like they're our kids. If we were receiving so much a month from him, then it's like we're not fully supporting the kids so they're not as much ours.

Making a commitment. One participant reported that his commitment to the mother required that he make a commitment to the children as well.

> In any relationship with a woman who has children, it becomes a bit more complex. In a relationship like that, you can't just leave. There seems to be more cohesion. You're more responsible, not just to her, but also to the children. So you're not just a mate, you're also a father. So that if you decide to break up, then you not only end the relationship, you end some children's fatherhood... So it's not as easy to split up.

Working and playing together. For some stepfathers, taking a family holiday was an important way to test and solidify a strong sense of family for them. All stepfathers reported taking part in joint family outings, but for some, the family holiday served the important function of creating a sense that they could work and play together as a unit, and that this was a significant test. One couple set a wedding date after a week-long camping trip.

> I think subconsciously he still thinks I'm going to walk out

> on him. This holiday that we're going on, with both of us relaxing, I think it's going to change alot of things for both of us, to make me understand him a little more, and he'll understand a little more, and I think things will work out alot better.

Adopting. Three stepfathers thought that the children might feel separate and not part of the family if they did not have the same surname as the stepfather and mother. These stepfathers planned to adopt the child in order to confer their surname. A common family name would contribute to family unity, both for the children and for the stepfather.

> You start to have different names, there's that sense of separation. Having the same family name would bring us closer together.
>
> If I get married into the family, there would have to be one subject-to in a sense. I would want to be her father, because if we have our own children, I don't want her with one last name, and me and the kids with another last name. I don't think that would be right.

Children's accepting him. The children's acceptance of the stepfather contributed to the sense of family building for several stepfathers. This was part of the final stages of counting.

> All of a sudden, out of the blue, she called me "daddy". Nobody said anything about it. She started to call me "daddy" and that totally changed things around. Like I am her daddy, it's all right now to hug her. "When are you going to get married? When am I going to have a brother and sister?" Just a total switch!

Marrying. Three participants were married by the time the last interviews were held with them. (Interviews with one were held over four months, with the others, over six and four weeks respectively). One had not planned to marry when he first volunteered for the research

although he had considered his relationship to be permanent. It was the researcher's observation that marriage occurred at various points on the path to stepfathers becoming part of the family. Some stepfathers appeared to be integrated with the family prior to marriage, some had barely begun to feel integrated, and others were somewhere in the middle.

Goals for Building a Family

Except for one family where the children had lived first with the mother and stepfather, then with the father for a year and were again living with the mother and stepfather, the established pattern was that children lived with their mothers. Furthermore, for the foreseeable future, the participants in this research were going to be the primary male caregiver with whom the children lived on a daily basis. No stepfathers were interviewed who expected that the children would live primarily with their father.

This family characteristic, that the stepfather would be the primary caregiver to the child, was associated with most stepfathers stating their belief that this family would be the primary family for the children. As well, several stepfathers talked about this family being the nuclear family for them.

> If we were really going to have a compact nuclear family, I think they would still have to acknowledge the past and their father but because of the difference between my values and their father's, they would sort of have to join me, and the positive side of that was that they were younger and that would be possible. When their mother and I got together, we would sort of go through together the whole process of developing our own family with our own values.

The children's father. For one stepfather, the fact of the existence of the children's father was a detractor from the goal of family cohesion, especially because of differences in the two family lifestyles the children would experience.

> I feel that our ability to function as a family and to get things done would definitely be undermined, because it assumes that we all have to be... To give you an example, we all have to be up at six o'clock because I have to go swimming and so do the children. And when they go to their father's for a week or a weekend where they don't do that, or if they have to do dishes at our home, but don't do them at his, then our ability to function as a cohesive family and make things work is undermined.

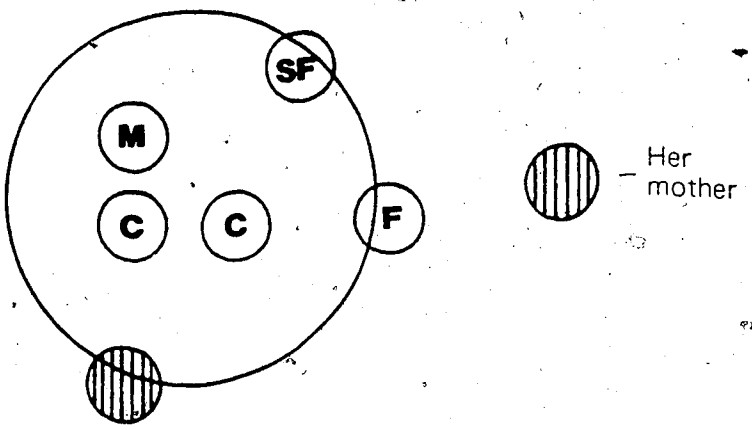
Family Map

A structured paper and pencil exercise was instituted to render more concretely stepfather's perceptions of themselves becoming part of the family in the period before marriage. Four participants completed the task. Five did not because the task was instituted after data collection had begun and the researcher was unable to contact them to complete the task.

These family maps represent stepfather's perceptions at the time of the interviews. They are labeled according to the amount of time from the interview in which they were taken to the date of the marriage ceremony. Comments stepfathers made about how the family map might have looked previously, or how they hope it will look in the future are given beside the map.

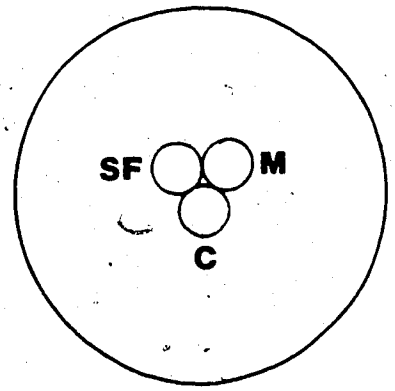
Stepfather's are indicated by SF in the drawing, mothers by M, children by C, and the children's father by F. Directions for the exercise are included in the Appendix.

Fig. 3.1 Family Map: Two weeks after marrying.



I'd feel that within a couple of years anyways, that I'd be completely in the circle, and their father will be touching or slightly in. I think he has to because of the kids.

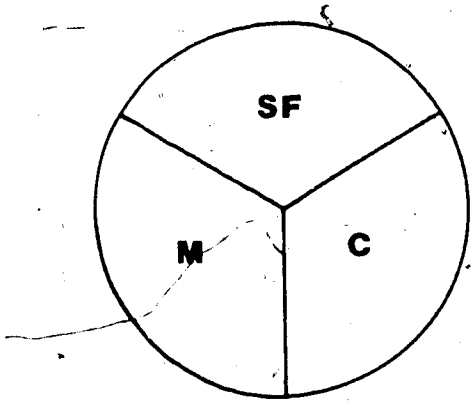
Fig. 3.2 Family Map: Six weeks prior to marrying.



The stepfather said that he has been inside the family, as drawn, for fourteen months. For four months prior to that he had been outside the family boundary. The shift was dramatic.

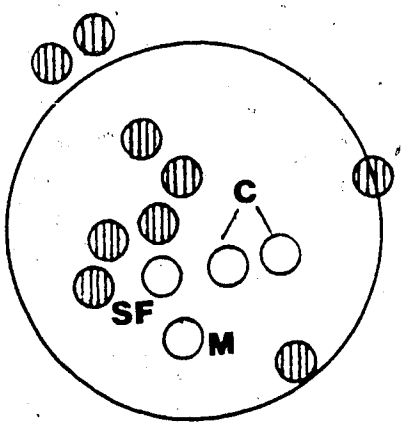
Fig. 3.3 Family Map: Twelve days after marrying.

Everyone in our family is equal... The only way it would have been different is that Rob's slice would have been



smaller because I've never been around children that much. And when Rachael and I first met, it was Rachael and I all the time, and Rob wasn't included in alot of things. And he had to learn to love me as well as I had to learn to love him, and respect each other. So his slice of the pie, at the beginning, would not have been as big.

Fig. 3.4 Family Map: Six months prior to marrying.



This stepfather was part of the family for some time. He indicated that he had accepted, and began to love the children when he began to love the mother.

— His parents and siblings, her parents and siblings

Identity Formation

Definition

The fourth domain identified in the analysis was stepfather's identity. Identity is defined as and limited to the name he called himself in relation to the children.

Identity is discussed as a separate domain, but it is related to the other three domains. What a stepfather called himself influenced his behaviors in the other three domains, and both his and the children's behavior in them influenced what he called himself.

The temporal sequencing of identity formation is presented from two perspectives: first, the stepfathers' descriptions of what the children called them; and second, the stepfathers' perspective, what they called themselves. The identities identified in the analysis are presented along with the factors that influence the name stepfathers called themselves and the names they wanted to be called.

Evidence of Identity Formation

It was evident in the analysis of the first interviews that identity was important for most participants. Therefore, questions related to identity were introduced in subsequent interviews. Evidence for the domain was observed in two ways, the first of which was participants' responses to the questions: "What do you call yourself?", "What do the children call you?" and "What would you like to be called?" The second way evidence was observed was in the words stepfathers used when they recreated conversations they had with the children. The following quotation is from a stepfather who stated that

the child usually called him by his first name, however the quotation is similar to many conversations the stepfather recreated during the interviews in which the child called him dad.

> He phoned me at work in the morning before he went to grandma's for a couple of days, and he said "Well, see you, dad, sure love you" and I said "I love you, too, son, and I'm going to miss you while you're gone."

Beginning to Develop an Identity

The analysis indicated that identity was an issue for stepfathers and children before marriage, sometimes very early in the couple's relationship.

> Theresa told me one day that Tammy had said that she didn't know what to call me, whether to call me dad or not, and this was just before we were engaged... I told her it didn't matter, whatever she wanted.

Children Initiate Calling Stepfathers "Dad"

The analysis indicated that children often initiate the practise of calling the stepfather dad. None of the men said they had asked the children to call them dad. One participant said he didn't like to be called dad initially.

> Chrissy has said, "Yeh, I have 2 dads" and in fact, that was a big deal at school. Just after we decided, we told the kids that we were going to get married, she went and told all her little friends at school that she was going to have two dads.
>
> She started calling me daddy in front of everybody, and she never did it before, right out of the blue and out loud, you know, it sent me back about three or four feet... All of a sudden she comes right from the bedroom and calls "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy"... Where she got it from is a good question.

> He asked if he could call me dad. I said "Yes, fine, if you feel like it" but he still doesn't, but I think he knows in his mind that he could. but that's good enough for him, and it's fine with me.

Stepfathers talked about the fact that it was often the social situations the children were in where the idea of dad or stepfather originated.

> She never even heard the word stepfather until two other children, friends of hers, asked why. They went home and asked their parents why Sue called me "her Paul", why doesn't she call me dad and their parents explained "stepfather" and then they came over and said "This is your stepfather". So she said "What's a stepfather?" She always called me "my Paul", like "my mom and my Paul".
>
> Sometimes I go and pick him up at day care, and the kids call out "Your dad's here! Your dad's here!" So you've got to be dad, you can't be anything else.

Mother calls him dad. The mothers initiated calling some stepfathers dad. For one couple it happened after they had a child of their own. As the child grew, the mother began to refer to the stepfather as dad to both children. In the other family, the mom and stepfather taught the child to call him dad when she was learning how to talk which occurred about the time the couple became engaged.

The present. On the trajectory toward becoming a member of the family as stepfather, at the time of the interviews, almost all of the children usually called their stepfathers by their name.

> They've had little bouts of calling me "dad", you know, it slips. And then sometimes deliberately Chrissy will say "I'm going to call you dad" and then it's back to David.
>
> She does call me dad now and again, and gives me a big smile when she does it.

> She used to call me Gil all the time after she basically forgot about her father, just kind of started calling me dad now and then, half and half, that's how it is now... depends on what kind of mood she's in. She doesn't even think about it, sometimes she'll call me Gil, and the next time she'll call me dad.
>
> She calls me daddy everywhere, she doesn't call me by my name anymore, it's strictly daddy.

Some participants said that what the child called them did not affect their parenting, while others thought that the children calling them dad was a sign of acceptance and it enabled them, as stepfathers, to be more of a parent.

The future. About half of the stepfathers hoped or expected that the children would eventually call them dad. Two thought the children would call them by their first name (but one of the two indicated that the child often called him dad). Those who hoped to be called dad thought the change to dad would come when the children realized that they were going to stay, that their parents were not going to reunite, and the transition to a stable family would be accomplished.

The Stepfather's Identity for Himself

At the time of the interviews, four participants called themselves father or dad, and one called himself stepfather. The identity of these men appeared to be established. The identity of the other participants was undergoing change. One was currently changing from stepfather to father, one called himself friend with parental influence and one participant did not give any information about an identity for himself in the interviews.

What the stepfathers called themselves or how they thought about themselves, was not always the same as what they were called or wanted to be called by the children. There was a lack of congruence for most stepfathers but not all.

Father. One condition was evident among the four stepfathers who called themselves father. All had a considerable amount of influence in the child's daily life and development. The identity was chosen regardless of whether the father was available to the child or not. It appeared that participants believed that a child could have two fathers, and that a stepfather calling himself a father was not an indication that he thought that the child's father should not be important to the child. That is, there was no sense of competition between the father and the stepfather in the analysis.

One participant who called himself father said it was made on the belief that the key work in stepparent is PARENT. He further said "Your dad is the person who's the adult male who looks after you the majority of the time". Another stepfather appeared to think that his act of designating himself as father to the child would be important to her.

> I want everybody to know, especially Becky, that she's my daughter, even though it's not physically, she still would be my daughter, and I'm her dad.
>
> As a stepparent, this would be something for anybody to learn, that as a stepparent, you are a PARENT, the key word there is parent. Stepparent is a legal term. If you become the caregiver over the given amount of time, you are a parent.
>
> I had to consider what the differences would be between having my own children versus being a stepfather. One

> ways that I got around that was I wanted to develop a family where they become my own children, where they still have contact with their father, but OUR family is THE family... I would become like a father, teach them my values, things like that. If they weren't really my children, then I'd feel more like a caretaker.

The participants who called themselves father were also situation specific, calling themselves stepfather too, particularly when an occasion for a more complete description of their relationship to the child was required. For instance, one thought that because he and the child were very unlike physically, he would need to describe his relationship to others, for example to the child's sports coach.

A few participants were comfortable calling themselves father because the children had no contact with or knowledge about their fathers. One participant said a stepfather was someone who came in when the child is aware there was a father before.

Stepfather. Two participants called themselves stepfather. One believed that he couldn't be a father because the child already had a father available to him who he visited twice a year. The other participant's identity was changing from stepfather to father as the child saw her father less and less frequently.

> I feel like a stepfather because Rob knows that his real father is in Montreal, and that I'm his stepfather here. I want Rob to know that Walter is his real father, and not to forget him.
>
> Right now, it's half way in-between stepfather and father because she's coming to accept me as her dad. I don't know what I was to her before... And her dad never comes around anyhow.

Both participants were the primary male adult available to the child

and a considerable influence on the child's daily life and development. They were involved in parenting the children about the same amount as the mother. Participants who did not call themselves stepfather indicated that it was a legal term and a convention, a name that other people applied to them, and one that held negative social connotations, that is, evil stepfather. It was also an awkward term to use socially because they believed the word required an explanation on their part.

Neither of these participants were concerned that the children call them dad, although the children called them dad about half the time.

Friend with parental influence. One participant called himself friend with parental influence. He appeared to do this more as a matter of elimination than choice. The father was active in the child's life and so the stepfather believed he could not be a father. He rejected the identity label stepfather for its negative connotations. The participant appeared to assume that he would have a relatively low level of influence on the child's life because of the presence of the natural father and because he also assumed that the mother would continue to be the primary parent to the child. However, he hoped the child would call him dad in the future.

> I feel I can't replace him as her father. I'll never be her father, so it's more like a friendship relationship. I see myself being a friend and an influence. I feel like I have a positive influence, a positive contribution to make to her development. Stepfather seems like an awkward expression, out of a fairy story - the evil stepmother and stepfather. I'm aware that's what I am but I never think of myself in that term. With Chrissy, it's like being friends with a little kid but parental influence, but without being a real parent.

No identity label. One participant had apparently not chosen an identity label for himself, however he hoped that the child would eventually call him dad. Being called dad by the child would indicate that he was accepted by her. He hoped that she would not continue to see her father which she did during short monthly visits, that he could adopt her and change her last name to his.

Counting

Two participants recounted the children's descriptions of them and how they came to terms with having two fathers, explaining who was a dad and why. For both of these men, it was a sign of acceptance. The following quotation illustrates the child's view.

> She'll say "I have two dads, well, I don't really. I have my dad and my real dad, well, my stepdad, I guess. Victor's my stepdad and my dad. My real dad and my stepdad. But Victor's my real dad now, isn't he, cuz he's here and he loves me, and my real dad doesn't".

Developing an Identity Over Time

Developing an identity is a gradual process begun before marriage. Choosing an identity label is part of the process. For most of the participants, the identity label chosen reflected the parental behaviors they felt comfortable engaging in.

Some participants talked about how marriage would add another dimension to their identity. Although they described themselves as fathers, were called dad by the children, and behaved like fathers, marriage would make them more of a father. It was a situation of

saying "I am a father/stepfather" and "I am going to be a father/stepfather".

> I don't mind being a father right off the bat... I'm mature enough to accept the responsibility right off the bat without having to grow into it, or maybe it's not a new responsibility that's going to come with marriage. It's something I've adapted to already.

Finding a Way to Count:

The Basic Social Psychological Process

Grounded theory requires the researcher to phrase the research questions from the participants' perspective. This was done by identifying the problem which all stepfathers faced. The problem was not articulated directly by the participants but was derived from an analysis of the initial data collected. The problem common to all was needing to "count". Stepfathers needed to count in two ways, to be accepted by the children in a taken-for-granted manner, and to be valued.

The basic social psychological process (BSPP) by which they managed the problem was "finding a way to count". They found a way to count by building a relationship, parenting, building a family for themselves, and developing an identity.

The Problem

To be taken for granted means that one is a part of the natural order of things. The condition is characterized by familiarity and trust. One does not have to think about how one is to behave towards

another, it is automatic and comfortable. The following quotations illustrate this taken for granted_quality.

> We're finding out more about each other, but after three or four years, it's starting to get into knowing each other's characters alot better.
>
> Before, he couldn't play the game unless mom was watching, or he'd keep running over to her. I could say "This is how you play the game, you move this little token here, like this". He just wouldn't understand it, but if mom told him, it was find.
>
> I'm sure it would be alot easier being a natural father and growing up, because the kid knows what you expect of him as he grows up with you.
>
> I'm trying to show him that I really do care and I'm not going to go away on him. Maybe subconsciously, why he and I have such a hard time is because he's expecting me to leave.

To be valued is to be needed and to be held in positive regard. Stepfathers expressed the need to feel that they were important and significant to the children and that the children cared for them. The participants expressed their desire to be valued in various ways.

> I expect to have a very close loving relationship with them and they will get to the point where they will love and respect me, maybe not quite as much as their natural father.
>
> It was important to win respect from her... for her to respect my word not only as a stepfather but as a male.
>
> I want to be close to Rob. He and I can at least have a relationship together.
>
> I told her that if she ever had any problems, she could come and tell me about them, but I don't know how many problems she would tell me about because she's had her mom for the last ten years and she can tell her just about anything.

Indications of children's acceptance are that the children will relate to the stepfather readily and automatically, they may call him

dad, they will accept his authority, and they will trust his permanence. At the time of the interviews, most stepfathers hadn't achieved the acceptance they hoped for.

> If she called me Dad, it'd make more of a family kind of atmosphere... it would mean she'd accepted me totally.
>
> I haven't really gotten into disciplining very much, because she's only known me for eighteen months, and she's just started knowing me quite well, so it's kinda hard to tell her what to do.
>
> They will come to me more with their problems, maybe turn to me more often for reassurance... they will accept my decisions more readily... it's not quite like that yet.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Grounded theory methodology reviews the literature for several purposes. First, it is briefly reviewed to locate the problems and deficiencies with what is known about the phenemonon being studied, and to develop a rationale for conducting the research. Gaps identified in the existing literature justified an exploration of how a particular group of stepfathers become part of a single-parent family in the period before marriage.

The literature is also reviewed as a source of data in grounded theory. The coding of incoming data identifies concepts, and the literature is explored for an elaboration of those concepts. This is one form of "theoretical sampling" (Glaser, 1978). Sampling the literature is not restricted to the substantive area in question. It can also include additional topics which can help explain the main topic and assist in the development of a grounded theory. Glaser cautions the researcher to sample the theoretical literature after the discovered framework is stabilized.

Literature reviews precede the results in the writing of a research report. However, in this study, the analysis of the data indicated the topics and concepts to be reviewed. It was therefore appropriate to position the review of literature after the results. In this way, the concepts identified and their relationships are more fully developed.

Several bodies of literature relevant to the four domains identified in the analysis (building a relationship, parenting, building a family, and forming an identity) were sampled. The stepfamily literature was reviewed including topics on stepfamily organization and member adjustment, developmental tasks, the stepparent-child relationship and stepparent roles. The stepfamily research in this area was limited, so several theories explaining the process of relationship development were sampled as well. These theories more fully explain the process of the development of stepfather-child relationship. Theory on identity formation was sampled to draw concepts from it about how, over time, people develop an identity for themselves in their relations with others. Finally, a theory describing the process of how members join a small group was sampled.

Stepfamily Literature

The stepfamily has been a popular research subject for some time. The topics have been diverse depending upon the time frame and the researchers conducting the investigation. Early research investigated the effects of living in a stepfamily on children's psychological development. Much of this research was conducted with children in clinical treatment (Ganong & Coleman, 1984). Child behavior was believed to be predicted by family structure. Later research turned away from detailing family structure as a predictor toward a focus on family processes in order to explain variations in family and dyadic functioning. Looking at the past research results, several researchers

suggested that the detailed examination of process, i.e. interactional dynamics, holds the most promise for explaining differences in family functioning (Marotz-Baden, Adams, Bueche, Munro & Munro, 1979).

The Stepparent-child Relationship

Researchers and clinical writers alike underscore the importance of stepparents developing an emotional relationship with the children before undertaking discipline and limit setting roles as parents. Messinger (1976) gives first priority to stepparents developing a relationship with the child, and even suggests that stepparents might not function as disciplinarians at all. The problem for stepparents is that they are "supposed" to love their spouses' children as a parent, yet not possess full disciplinary/control powers.

Stepparents have not always been expected to bond with children first. Fast and Cain (1966) investigated the clinical records of fifty children who were living in stepfamilies and in treatment at a child guidance clinic. They concluded:

> It was our impression that the premarital relationship of the stepparent to the family members as acquaintance, friend and fiance of the natural parent interfered with his establishing appropriate differential relationships as spouse and parent, and with his function as authority figure (p. 489).

Fast and Cain apparently believed the stepparent was to assume an disciplinary role upon marriage which would be undermined by his developing a friendly relationship with the child first, and especially before marriage.

Qualitative research conducted with thirty stepfather families

determined that the basic problem for stepfathers was establishing discipline and control (Stern, 1982). She found that it was accomplished by stepfathers "affiliating" or befriending children which demonstrated to the children and their mother that they, the stepfathers, were acting in the best interests of the children. Abrupt, forceful and rigid rule-making and enforcement led to estrangement. Stern identified ten strategies stepfathers used for affiliating. They were accepting the child as he or she is, trusting, spending money on, spending time with, and teaching skills to the children, saying or doing the right thing at the right time, providing good role modeling, coming through (being reliable), and leveling or speaking the truth. These were skills, she said, which were teachable to stepfathers.

Expectations for the relationship. Several studies have reported that stepparents often hold unrealistic expectations of themselves to instantly love the children (Pink & Wampler, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1983). Pink and Wampler (1985) found that stepfathers rated the amount of regard and unconditionality they felt towards adolescents significantly less than the ideal levels they aspired to. When the researchers compared results from stepfather families and natural father families, they found that both stepfathers' and fathers' ideal levels for regard and unconditionality were similar but stepfathers were lower than fathers in the actual levels they reported feeling.

Bohannon and Erickson (cited in Yahraes, 1979), in a door-to-door survey of family in San Diego, concluded that stepfathers, on the whole, pay more attention to being fathers than natural fathers do,

worry about it, but also work harder at it because, the authors surmise, becoming a stepfather is a conscious step. The stepfathers in their study, like the ones in Pink and Wampler's research (1985) thought of themselves as significantly worse fathers than natural fathers did.

Sources of difficulties in establishing relationships. Many sources of difficulties in establishing relationships have been identified. These include loyalty conflicts, previous marital status of the stepparents, and the inappropriate shifting of parental limit setting functions.

Both stepparents and stepchildren experience loyalty conflicts. Children experience conflicts of loyalty between the stepparent and their natural parent; and the stepparents' conflicts of loyalty are between the stepchildren with whom they live and devote attention to, and their own children whom they often do not live with (Nelson & Nelson, 1982).

Duberman (1975) in her study of 88 complex and simple stepmother and stepfather families found that stepfathers who were not previously married formed better relationships with stepchildren than stepfathers who were either divorced or widowed. Bowerman and Irish (1962) concluded that children's adjustment to stepparents was better when their remarrying parent was divorced rather than widowed.

Mills (1984), based on clinical work with stepfamilies, has argued that they experienced difficulties when the parent and stepparent ignored the unique nature of their family form and inappropriately shifted parental limit-setting functions to the stepparent. He said

the child's mother would either not agree that the child's behavior needed changing or disapprove of the stepfather's approach to changing the behavior. Conflicts about discipline would encompass all three family members, blocking the development of intimacy between the stepfather and child, when intimacy is the requisite ingredient to resolve conflict.

The initial developmental task of the stepfamily is to begin relationships (Mills, 1984). The second task is to set goals for the role between the stepparent and child. Establishing inappropriate goals can become a source of difficulty (Walker & Messinger, 1979; Fast & Cain, 1966). A role approximating that of the biological parent with wide nurturing and limit setting functions is more likely possible when the "child is young, lives with the stepfamily most of the time, the stepparent wants the experience of being a parent to the child, the child is willing, and the parent wants help" (Mills, 1984, p. 368).

Time as a factor in relationship development. The question of time appears to be an important factor in establishing stepparent-child relationships, but researchers have failed to determine what it is about time which is critical. The first year or more should be for the stepparent to bond, and not to take on responsibility for disciplining or limit setting (Mills, 1984).

One clinician suggests that the amount of time for the stepparent to achieve a role approximating that of the natural parent is equal to the age of the child at the time the stepfamily forms (Mills, 1984). For example, if the stepfamily forms when the child is four, Mills suggests it will take four years for the stepparent to achieve the role

of parent similar to the natural parent.

Stern (1982), on the other hand, found it took eighteen to twenty-four months after marriage for the members of her sample to complete the process of affiliating. The parent could then begin disciplining and limit setting. The nature of interaction in the early stages is what appeared to be important to later relationship functioning, not the amount of time per se, although developing a relationship didn't happen quickly.

When to begin counting "time" in terms of the formation of the stepfamily has not been adequately addressed. Marriage establishes the legal formation of the family while living together may be considered to be a measure of the social formation of the family. For research purposes, marriage is often chosen as the time when the family is formed. (Stern, 1982; Pink & Wampler, 1985). Lutz (1983) suggested:

> Ideally, a plan for disciplinary actions would be agreed upon before the stepfather begins living together as a unit... After the stepfamily is formed these differences can become misunderstood (p. 374).

Some authors allude to an instant family or the "abruptness" of merging individuals (Nelson & Nelson, 1982). The concept of family formation has several meanings but these are usually not clearly stated and have not been adequately understood.

Stepparent roles. Roles for natural parents are ascribed, and while open to individual variations, are fairly clear in terms of rights and obligations including "a certain obligation to love, support and protect... offspring (Messinger, 1976, p. 187). Roles for stepparents are achieved and lack that clarity.

Society has been blamed for its failure to provide clear roles to stepparents but some authors (McGoldrick & Carter, 1979; Walker & Messinger, 1979) suggest that for a period of time, stepparents must be tolerant of role ambiguity and uncertainty. Only through a process of role making can satisfactory steprelations be worked out.

Theories of Relationship Development

There is little detailed information about how stepparents "emotionally bond" with children or even definitions of what that might mean. General theories of relationship development were sampled for what they could contribute to an understanding of the development of the stepparent-child relationship.

The stepfather-child relationship is a primary relationship according to the definition of primary relationship offered by Reiss (1971). It is close, intimate, face-to-face and durable. In the following review, Reiss' Wheel Theory of Love (1971), Turner's (1970) explication of bonding and Scanzoni's (1979) theory of social exchange and behavioral interdependence are examined because they offer concepts and conceptual frameworks which are important in expanding the empirical data, and contribute to the construction of theory about the development of stepparent-child relationships.

Wheel Theory of Love. Reiss (1971) explained the development of heterosexual love by formulating a model with four interrelated processes - rapport, self-revelation, mutual dependency, and need fulfillment. The initial stage, rapport, establishes the basis for an on-going relationship when two people feel at ease with each other.

Feeling rapport leads two people to want to share information about themselves with each other. Sharing information or revealing themselves to each other in the second stage creates an interdependent habit system, stage three, in which they each are willing to listen to and accept what the partner shares with them. This leads to the fourth stage, personality need fulfillment, through which one's basic interpersonal needs are met. One has basic needs to love and to confide in someone, and as one's needs are met, a love relationship develops.

Reiss determined that the four components are interdependent and in effect, exist in a circular arrangement. An increase in one component leads to engaging in the adjacent one which increases mutual dependency and so on. The motion can be reversed just as easily. If one decreases the amount of self-revelation, mutual dependency is decreased, then need fulfillment within the relationship, and around it goes the other way.

Bonding. Bonds bring people together, keep them together and cause them to interact within the group. "A bond, or tie, exists when some value on the individual - shared or unique - is felt to be fostered by association and interaction with some other person or group" (Turner, 1970, p. 41). The nature and number of bonds change throughout the duration of a relationship. The bonds which attract and link people together at the beginning of any relationship are not the ones which hold people together later. The following summarizes the types of bonds and how they develop.

There are bonds that a person has towards the group giving him a

sense of importance or prestige. A member's bonds to his family have traditionally conveyed to him and others that he is mature, normal and adequate. The tasks involved in day-to-day living which need to be accomplished with another create bonds between people. The positive emotional experience of accomplishing the end together forms additional bonds. The distinction is best shown through an example. Moving heavy furniture is easier for two and a bond develops because of their need for each other to complete the task. An emotional bond arises from the satisfaction of working together. Sharing one activity produces two bonds. The opportunity to collaborate on a number of bonds is always present and the resulting links are called latent bonds. The ease with which people can collaborate over the task determines whether the latent bond is developed. For instance, hanging wallpaper is a shared task and a source of latent bonds but is one which husbands and wives often prefer not to collaborate on.

Identity bonds and response bonds "link individuals because of certain key shared or complementary qualities" (p. 80). Identity bonds are established when one's self-concept is improved through interaction with another. For instance, one might become a Big Brother and improve his self-concept through interacting with a needing child. Response bonds result when one responds to the other person's actions in such a way that the latter experiences heightened gratification. If the Little Brother gives positive feedback to the Big Brother, he feels gratified for his involvement.

The last category of bonds is crescive bonds which form as a result of interaction with another. They develop gradually as a result of the

unique nature of the individual relationship, which cannot be replaced by another.

Social exchange and behavioral interdependence. Scanzoni (1979), using a social exchange framework, conceptualized the development of a relationship as comprised of three non-discrete stages: exploration, expansion and commitment. His formulation is intended to be general enough to explain the development of interdependence in husband-wife, lover, friend, and parent-child relationships. Interdependence is defined as "the reliance of actors... within any social system on other actors... within that system for valued rewards, benefits, gratifications." Reciprocity is central to social exchange and is the exchange of valued services or rewards, and the moral obligation to continue to reciprocate benefits when rewards have been exchanged.

The development of interdependence among two people occurs within a larger social system. The system affects and is affected by the ongoing relationship or association.

Attraction is the prime element in the exploration stage. Rewards will be exchanged through interaction with each other, but there is little behavioral interdependence. If both people profit at the same time, or if one profits now with the understanding that the other will profit in the future, then interdependence increases. Trust is established as each learnes that their interests can be maximized in the relationship, and with trust established, the next stage, expansion, is entered.

The expansion stage sets the foundation for risk-taking. Risks are bets on the future that one will be gratified for one's involvement.

Risks are undertaken in different areas of interaction and one has the sense that what one does not only benefits oneself but the dyad or group, too. The degree of interdependence increases in the second stage.

The last stage is commitment in which there are relatively high input levels over a relatively long time, with inputs of a relatively high consistency. In this final stage, interdependence is a permanent process, the relationship undergoing continual change, much of it in response to outside forces.

During the exploration stage, a relationship is easily given up. Later, it is more difficult because of the range of shared interests and because trust has been established. If one's risks do not result in present or future rewards, then one may relinquish the relationship, but one doesn't unless the balance of rewards and costs of maintaining that relationship do not compare favorably to the rewards and costs expected in an alternative relationship, even an imaginary one.

Discussion of theories. The theories of relationship development examined here are founded on the premise that relationships form based on initial rapport or attraction. In stepfather-child relationships this isn't always so. Stepfathers who establish rapport easily at first may find the relationship compromised later as discipline is undertaken.

Turner's bonding theory illustrates how a stepfather may feel bonded to the child and family. It can happen through association with the family and child, by performing tasks together, by developing an identity in the relationship, by receiving feedback from the child, and

by continued interaction over time which produces a relationship which can't be replaced by another.

The social exchange framework can be applied to the problems of a stepfamily formation (Nelson & Nelson, 1982). One application is in the comparison of the degree of interdependence developing between various dyads in a stepfamily. Likely the husband-wife pair will achieve a higher degree of interdependence sooner than the stepparent-child pair. If the stepparent-child relationship isn't very rewarding, the rewards of the husband-wife relationship are decreased. Scanzoni suggests there is no exploration stage for natural parent-child relationships because the usual ingredient of the first stage, attraction, is not a central issue. There may not be an exploration stage for the stepparent-child relationship either if there is not attraction between them and yet the stepfather may be expected to take risks with the hope of later reward. A stepfather may be surprised at the initial lack of mutual attraction especially if his previous experience is that children like him. Developing a relationship may require a considerable amount of risk-taking on the part of the stepfather before he experiences any rewards.

Family Building

The prospective stepfather becomes a husband, stepfather and member of a family. The questions posed for this research excluded the couple relationship, but the results indicated that becoming a member of a family was important to stepfathers. Topics of research have focused on family integration and organization and measures of stepfathers

integration in and their perceptions of living in stepfamilies. This researcher determined that stepfathers were becoming members of a group, therefore sampled a theory on small group formation to elaborate concepts.

Empirical Literature on Stepfamily Living

Several studies indicate that stepfathers have high ideals for the quality of stepfamily life (Perkins & Kahan, 1979; Pink & Wampler, 1985). Pink and Wampler (1985) found that stepfathers' ideals for family cohesion (feelings of emotional bonding members have for one another) and family adaptability (the family's ability to change roles and rules and to shift power in response to stress) were higher than what they had attained. Perkins and Kahan (1979) compared natural father families and stepfather families on family satisfaction and family adjustment, and found that stepfather family members were more dissatisfied with their family organization than natural father families. Stepfamily members' measures of actual family organization were lower than their ideal. Stepfamily members were also less well-adjusted than the matched intact family members. Both studies focused on families with adolescents and included measures from mothers, stepfathers and fathers, and adolescents.

Duberman (1973) measured stepfamily members' perception of family integration, the concept of themselves as one functioning unit, and combined it with observational rating and found integration in sixty-five percent of the stepfamilies to be excellent. Based on their work with couples who were planning to marry, or were already

remarried, Walker and Messinger (1979) observed that marriage helps to integrate the remarried family. The researchers had a strong impression that

> "couples living together but unmarried, appeared further advanced in integration... than couples living apart and those couples who were legally married appeared to have the most clearly defined and well-established boundaries of all" (p. 191).

Sources of difficulties. Difficulties in accomplishing integration in stepfamilies is attributed various sources. Some of the theories developed by clinicians (McGoldrick & Carter, 1980; and Sager, Brown, Crohn, Engel, Rodstein & Walker, 1983) attribute difficulties to unresolved conflicts between ex-spouses which they unwittingly bring to the second marriage; and to a series of developmental tasks related to giving up roles in, and aspirations for, the first marriage.

Stern (1986) explained difficulty in stepfamily integration from an anthropologist's perspective. She defined families as microcultural units comprised of rules with each family being culturally different than another. Rules determine what is proper and fitting behavior for all members, down to the most mundane behavior. A rule might dictate what is the proper way to answer the telephone or how to dress to go to the bath. Rules operate at an unconscious level and behavior is often reduced to an evaluation of right or wrong. It is usually when rules are broken that their presence is acknowledged, and children are taught the family's rules so early that they've forgotten the lesson.

Difficulties in stepfamily integration occur when two families come together because the rules that form the basis of their everyday

behavior clash. In stepfamily development the rules concerning child rearing and discipline are particularly important. Remarriage differs from first marriages by the number of mini-cultures (families) that children have been and continue to be a part of, all of which have different rules. The closer the rules of merging families, the less likely there will be conflict, but in all likelihood, different rules about a number of common concerns will create conflict.

Stepfamilies need to formulate their own sets of rules. There may even be different sets of rules for the two sets of children making up the stepfamily. Children need to adapt to, and parents need to be sensitive to, the different rules established by custodial and non-custodial parents (Stern, 1986).

A final source of difficulties are the ones associated with being a unique family form with its own set of problems. Visitation between parents, child support and more than one surname in the family are among the problems (Visher & Visher, 1983).

Group Formation

The small group literature can contribute as well to an understanding of how stepfathers become part of a group. The theory of group formation explains how individuals join groups based on an examination of their interpersonal needs. This author determined there was a parallel between how individuals join a group and stepfathers join a family.

According to Schutz (1958), an early small group theorist, there are three stages to group development based on the interpersonal needs

of inclusion, control, and affection. In the first stage, inclusion is the need that is met. Inclusion answers the questions "Who am I with these other members?" "Do I belong?" and "Do we let him belong?" The individual has a need to belong to the group and take part in its activities and the need ranges from high to low. The group's willingness to include members varies too, some groups being more willing than others to include new members. The two components interact to determine how much a part of the group a new member may be. Membership issues may be resolved quickly or be prolonged. When one has a sense of identification with the group, membership issues have been resolved and issues of control can be addressed.

Control refers to the degree of influence or power one has over one's environment and others. One needs to have influence in order that the environment can be more predictable. The degree to which one wants to control others, the variation in one's willingness to be controlled, the group's willingness to be controlled, and the group's need to control its members all interact. Control becomes variously distributed among members in group.

Affection, the third interpersonal need, is the issue in the last phase of group development. If the group is to continue, ties of affection must be formed between group members. Each member must determine the amount of affection to give others and the amount he wants to be given to him. Feelings of affection arise through the accomplishment of shared tasks and from more ephemeral "being together" situations.

Schutz's (1958) theory of interpersonal needs in small groups

assumes that one is first attracted to the group for his own reasons. Attraction is not the same as liking. The review of the stepfamily literature has indicated that stepfathers must emotionally bond with children first, then issues of discipline (control) can be achieved. However, Schutz's small group theory suggests the opposite - that power or control must be established before affectional ties can be formed. In this study, it was found that stepfathers had to learn to love the children, and that love wasn't established early in the relationship. Perhaps part of the problem is in the terms used. As indicated earlier, emotionally bonding isn't defined in the literature. Stern (1982) found that if stepfathers befriended the children, which included liking them but not loving them, then they were more able to discipline successfully. Her results did not indicate if there was a subsequent stage to the stepfather-child relationship.

Identity Formation

Researchers have attempted to develop names for stepparents to replace the negatively connoted labels stepfather and stepmother. The difficulty researchers have had reflects the difficulty family members experience. No research was located which dealt with the stepfather identity from his perspective. The studies previously reviewed in this chapter discuss expectations stepfathers have for themselves in their relationship with the children.

Two reviews of stepfather literature (Rallings, 1976; Robinson, 1984) shed no light on stepfather identity although Robinson called him an "instant" father and a "naive male". Rallings discussed the importance of society defining the stepfather role. Fast and Cain

(1966) wrote of the complexity of the stepparent role comprising elements of parent, stepparent and non-parent, but roles don't describe identity.

The following is a brief summary of theory on identity and identity formation derived from symbolic interactionism. "One's self is the way one describes to himself his relationship to others in a social process" (Stryker, 1972, p. 22) and self is made up of a set of discrete identities. Identity is a process which is structured through interaction with others. First, identities are "internalized positional designations, claimed and validated in social interaction" (Stryker, 1972, p. 24). An identity is what one announces to others what one is, and refers to a position in a social organization. It is a name one gives oneself that says where one is situated in relation to others. An identity is a motivational force carrying an imperative to act in a way that symbolizes the identity. When one names oneself he creates internalized expectations about his own behavior.

The actor in the social structure is named by the others and they invoke expectations about the other's behavior. One attaches meaning to the other's behavior and thereby changes identity in subsequent behaviors. One comes to know oneself by seeing oneself mirrored in the other, that is through others responses. Others give one a name and they provide the meaning attached to the name.

Using the theory summarized above, it is concluded that the identity stepfather develops is based partly on the name he gives himself and partly on the name others in the family give him, especially the child. As a stepfather is named by himself and others,

expectations about his behavior are invoked. The behavior of others in the family towards him also contribute to his identity. For example, when children acted with apparent hostility toward stepfathers, they attached a meaning to the children's behavior which formed the basis for their subsequent behavior. In this research, some stepfathers justified initial hostility and several of them tried harder to overcome the perceived hostility.

There is a power of precedent, one becomes bound by the establishing relationship. One has an obligation to be a father once one has acted in a father-like manner. Stepfathers waited for the children to demonstrate their acceptance of them. For some stepfathers, being called dad was a sign of acceptance. The criteria indicated in "finding a way to count" are behavioral responses of the children that stepfathers looked for.

Summary

This literature review has included a discussion of reseach on stepfamilies from empirical and clinical sources including topics on stepparent-child relationship and stepfamily organization. Theories on relationship development, group formation and identity formation were also reviewed. Topics for review were selected on the basis of the four domains of becoming a stepfather identified in the analysis.

Historically, stepfamily research has focused on structural differences in stepfamilies to predict family and individual functioning. Research has also focused on the established stepfamily and has failed to examine stepfamily development from early stages.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The results of this study indicate that the process of becoming a stepfather in the period before marriage is comprised of activity in four domains: building a relationship, parenting, building a family, and forming an identity. The activity assists the stepfather in fulfilling his need to count in the family, the problem common to all men marrying into a family with children.

Counting is characterized by being valued by the children, and by being accepted in a taken-for-granted manner. Stepfathers find a way to count by building a relationship, taking on parenting, building a sense of family for themselves, and developing their identity in relation to the children.

Building a relationship is the first task stepfathers need to do. There are various ways to build a relationship and different stages of doing it. This research supports the work of others who have demonstrated that stepfathers need to emotionally bond, affiliate or befriend a child to demonstrate his trustworthiness and to take on parenting responsibilities.

It is important at first for a stepfather to court the child and demonstrate that his intentions are honorable. He may share one-to-one activities with the child, and come to know children. Eventually he

comes to realize that the child is a permanent part of his life and he must learn to love the child. Stepfathers acknowledged this to be a process that took time. They also realized that the affection, attention and acceptance they gave would not be reciprocated as soon as they would like, therefore they had to wait for the child to accept them.

Parenting, in this study, involves discipline and limit setting, as defined by the stepfathers who participated. Most stepfathers began parenting before the children showed acceptance of them. Stepfathers followed a sequence of taking on parenting. At first, they held back, thinking that disciplining would affect the relationship they had with the child, because they didn't know how to parent, or because they felt they had no right to discipline. Then they started tentatively, backing up mom's disciplinary efforts. Gradually stepfathers began to acknowledge their need to contribute their own ideas of how the children should be disciplined or how they should be cared for. Often these ideas were based on their own experiences growing up in their families. Their right to parent became an issue during this time, and was earned by them and granted by the mother. The mothers needed to support their efforts, and to begin to share decision making and to negotiate openly with stepfathers. Stepfathers who began to discipline too soon or authoritatively did not receive the mothers' support or had difficulty in building a relationship with the children.

Building a family refers to how stepfathers gained a sense that this family was their family, and that they were part of the group. For this group of stepfathers this family would be the primary family

for the children, and the only family for some of the stepfathers who would not be having children with the mother. Some stepfathers experienced difficulty in giving up their own dreams of what their family would be like.

Initially stepfathers played with the family and some experienced a sense of attraction about feeling part of the family group. Eventually they began a decision making process weighing advantages and disadvantages of joining the family. This followed with them changing their lifestyle and displaying behaviors conducive to living with others.

Almost all stepfathers were living with the family prior to marriage, having moved in anywhere from four months to twenty months after meeting the mother, and from four months to two years before the marriage. Moving in wasn't accomplished all at once, but began with the stepfather spending increasing amounts of time with the mother and children in their home.

Forming an identity refers to how stepfathers named themselves in relation to the children. Participants varied in the degree of resolution they reported about identity. Some had decided that they were a father and a stepfather, and one decided he was a stepfather. Both of these choices appeared to depend on the amount of time they would spend with the children and the amount of care and influence they would have. The children would have two fathers, or a father and a stepfather. One participant who hadn't resolved the identity issue for himself, appeared to believe the child could have only a father or a stepfather in her life.

Most participants looked for feedback from the children, feedback that would contribute to their sense of identity. Getting Father's day cards and being called dad by the children were among the indications of them being accepted as a father, and appeared to be important in forming their identity.

Having a label that they could use with others also contributed to their sense of being a father/stepfather. Most stepfathers described themselves first as the children's father but additionally as stepfathers when the occasion required. Socially, these men were fathers. For instance, the child's classmates on school field trips might refer to the stepfather as the child's dad.

A Model: Finding a Way to Count

The results were incorporated into a model (Fig. 5.1) illustrating the sequence over time of becoming a stepfather in the four domains. Not all stepfathers counted, those who didn't described their goals for counting similarly to the few who indicated that they did count.

The model hypothesizes an ideal progression and synthesizes and summarizes the results of this research. The categories are based on comparisons of stepfathers' behaviors, those that worked and those that didn't. The model was developed from data from a specific population, childless men who were prospective stepfathers of children aged five to ten years. It was also derived from data generated from only one family member. Both of these limit the model's generalizability and reliability. The model needs to be confirmed by other groups of stepfathers and children and their mothers. (See Fig. 5.1)

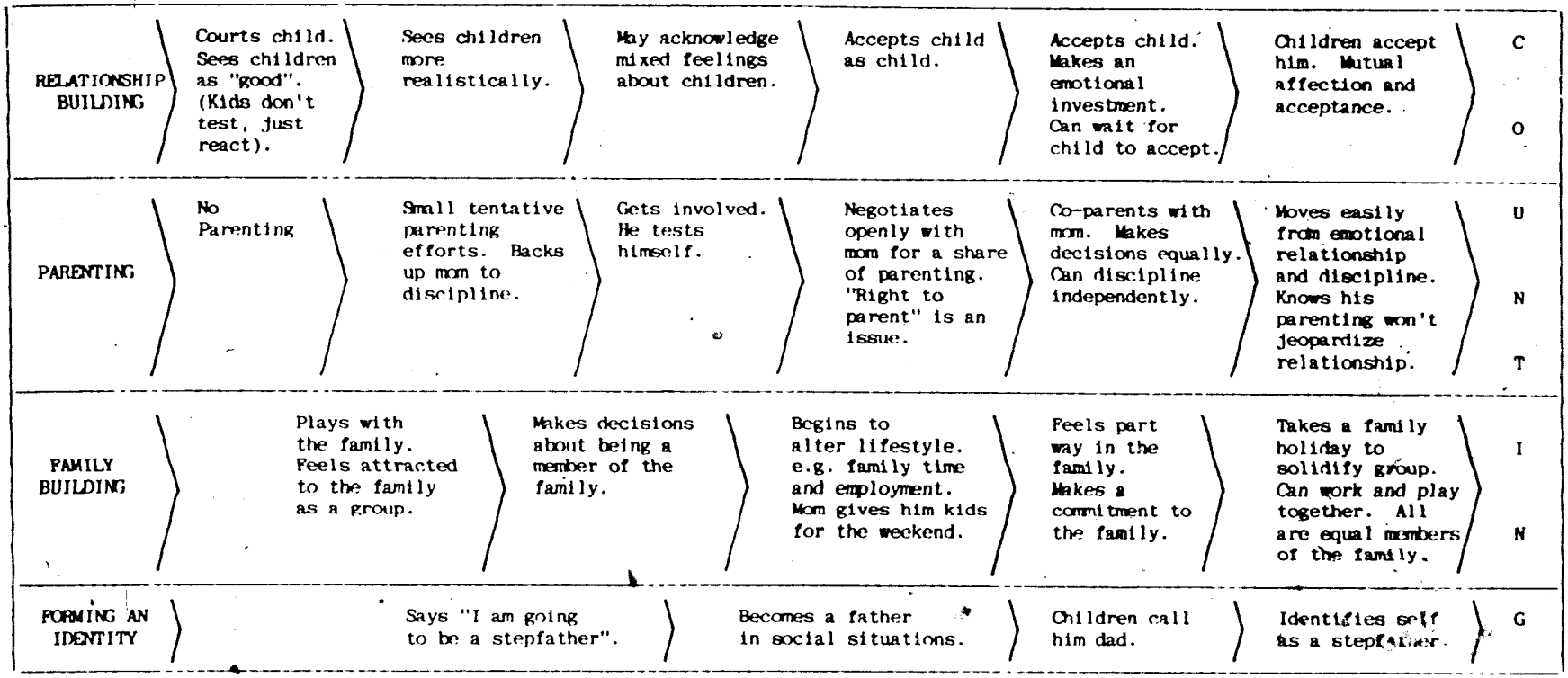


Figure 5.1 A Model: Finding a Way to Count

Contributions of this Research to Existing Literature

Analysis of the data revealed two new areas which help describe the process of stepfathers becoming part of the family. Those areas are building a family and forming an identity. Information gathered about relationship building and parenting confirmed results of existing research about the importance of stepfathers focusing on building a relationship before limit setting and disciplining with the children.

Within the broad category of instrumental behaviors which were termed parenting in this study, current concerns about stepfathers taking on discipline and limit setting functions identified in the clinical literature were confirmed. However, the importance of instrumental behaviors not previously discussed in the literature such as providing for physical care and decision making around daily activities were identified as parenting behaviors that stepfathers might institute before disciplining and limit setting. Taking on parenting responsibilities can be a gradual process beginning with lower risk behaviors before higher risk ones are taken on.

There are assumptions in the empirical and clinical literature that the stepfamily is formed upon marriage and most of the stepfamily's development occurs after that. The results of this study challenge that assumption indicating that there are differences in the rate and degree of family development and that much development occurs before marriage, at least from the stepfathers' perspective. More research needs to be done on the effects of structural changes such as moving in on stepfamily development.

Stern's (1982) analysis of stepfamily integration identified ten

strategies which stepfathers used to affiliate with children. It is those strategies which contribute to establishing structural patterns within the family. Most of the stepfathers in this study were using many of the strategies in the before-marriage period and some stepfathers appeared to institute more affiliating strategies over time. A change in the quality of the strategy was noted over time, too. For example, in the strategy of spending time with the children, a few stepfathers began to add, when the stepparent-child relationship was more permanent, activities that required their commitment over a longer period of time, such as leading groups or coaching sports. A strategy used later on by several stepfathers, reported in the results of this study and not reported by Stern, was waiting for the child to accept them. The model, finding a way to count, describes changes in the nature of the stepparent-child relationship over time and attempts to illustrate the temporal orderings of strategies identified by Stern and this author.

This study confirms that stepfathers have difficulty deciding what to call themselves, or who they are in relation to the children. For this group, it was evident, at least from the information provided by stepfathers, that children are often the instigators in calling them dad and do it of their own volition. The results show that identity forms over time and it's formation is dependent on individual needs, family characteristics, children's behavior, and the nature of the relationship that develops between the stepparent and child. In this study, it was found that the availability of the childrens' fathers

was, in the stepfathers' perception, a factor which affected the ease with which they became a stepfather and member of the family.

Propositions Generated

Grounded theory identifies concepts and relationships among concepts which explain how a particular group resolves a basic social problem. The relationships identified are stated in the form of hypotheses or propositions, and indicate directions for future research. The propositions generated from this study are:

1. The younger the child when the relationship begins, the easier it is for the stepfather to develop a relationship with the child.
2. Disciplining and limit setting tasks are more easily accomplished by stepfathers when preceded by other instrumental tasks such as providing physical care for the children.
3. Stepfathers who delay disciplining and limit setting until a relationship has begun to develop will experience more success when they do begin to discipline and set limits.
4. The more stepfathers perceive the mother as a competent parent; using the child's behavior as an index, the longer it will take them to begin the parenting tasks of discipline and limit setting.
5. The more agreement there is between stepfathers and mothers about what constitutes the "right to parent", the more success stepfathers will experience in disciplining and limit setting.
6. The more support the stepfathers receive from mothers in their efforts to take on parenting tasks, the more satisfaction they will report in taking on instrumental behaviors.

7. The more the stepfathers attempt to change the families' daily routines, the less satisfied they will be in stepfamily living.
8. The more visions or fantasies stepfathers have about relationships with their own hypothetical children, the less satisfied they will be as stepfathers.
9. The more risks a stepfather takes in building a relationship, the more satisfied he will be as a stepfather.
10. Stepfathers who alter their lifestyle from single person to family-man when they move in with the family will experience more acceptance from the children.
11. Stepfathers who do not consider there to be a competition between themselves and the children's fathers for the affections of the children will experience more satisfaction as stepfathers.

Limitations of the Research

The findings of this study have limitations related to the method and sample.

Method. This research was exploratory, therefore its format is one of description. It's purpose was to generate in-depth information from a limited number of subjects using a grounded theory approach to provide rich data to generate hypotheses or propositions about stepfamily development prior to marriage. Testing the hypotheses is a next step in validating the theory.

The research was concerned with the "emic" perspective, the point of view of the research participants. It's purpose was to explain their experience. The results are limited in that the theory developed

may not apply to others who were not part of the research.

Only stepfathers who volunteered to participate in the research were included. The willingness of a stepfather to participate in research may be a factor which biases findings, as it is assumed that people who do not volunteer may be qualitatively different from those who do. It is not known how many of the stepfathers who were approached to participate refused, nor their reasons for refusing, as intermediary sources were used to gain participants.

The study was not longitudinal, but gathered both current and retrospective data. However, two conditions of sample selection provided a longitudinal view of the process of becoming a stepfather. First, participants were followed for varying lengths of time. One participant was interviewed three times over a five month period, others were interviewed only once. Second, men who were at various points in the period before marriage ranging from less than a month to more than a year were included in the study.

It was not known whether, prior to their decision to marry, men would identify themselves as stepfathers. Two participants who didn't plan to marry, identified themselves as stepfathers and volunteered to participate in the research. These three conditions provide a cross-sectional view of the process.

The sample. The participants in this research were a convenience sample, therefore the findings lack generalizability. However, a number of demographic characteristics were noted in the collection of data which indicate a degree of representativeness. The participants varied in age and education. Most were middle-class and almost all

were employed. There was no obvious cultural or ethnic variation.

The sample represented a specific population in terms of age of children. All but one of the children were between five and ten years of age at the first interview. All but the three-year old child were in school. Most children lived with the mother. The study failed to include any stepfather families in which the children lived equal amounts of time with both parents, or stepfathers who had children of their own.

The sample was gathered through several community agencies and therefore they can be said to represent people who make use of available community resources. Research samples have been slotted into two categories: those "who are functioning well and have willingly volunteered their services, and/or stepfamilies under strain seeking therapeutic assistance" (Esses & Campbell, 1984, p. 415). Based on this researcher's observations, these are not discrete categories. None of the participants were identified from counseling sources. Yet in this volunteer sample, four of the nine couples had availed themselves of marriage counseling - three of them before they married.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for family life educators. The population has been described as invisible and hard to locate for the purposes of educational programs (Visher & Visher, 1979, cited in Esses & Campbell, 1984). In fact, they may be a population eager for programs and located through a variety of community agencies, as this researcher discovered. Many participants in this study volunteered readily when approached and most told the researcher they did so

because they wanted information from her about her results. Several commented that they had found it beneficial to talk to an interested outsider about their experiences.

Family life educators have provided educational programs for couples planning to remarry. Based on this research, there is some support for offering programs to prospective stepparents who may wish to participate in workshops or make use of information through a variety of venues especially if the programs or materials address their developmental concerns whether or not marriage is planned. There was difficulty scheduling appointments with some of the participants, partly because of workloads they carried, and because of family activities they were involved in. Educators need to develop innovative educational programs and materials to account for lifestyle priorities stepfathers have.

Therapists are involved with a population of stepfamilies who may be approaching them for assistance with problems other than those carried over from the first marriage. These professionals need to be sensitive to the difficulties inherent forming the new stepfamily. They are in a position to extend theory about stepfamily development.

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APPENDIX

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801 General Services Building, Telephone (403) 432-5771

May, 1986

Thank you for helping me locate prospective stepfathers for my research project.

There are some things that may be helpful for you to know when you approach a man to become involved in the project.

1. Signing the form indicates a WILLINGNESS to find out more and become involved. It is not a PROMISE to take part. During the first interview, once I've explained the research project and answered his questions, I'll ask for a commitment to participate.

2. Participation can be discontinued at any time if circumstances are such that he is no longer willing or able to continue. Of course, my hopes are that that won't happen.

Once the man has signed for form, I would appreciate it if you would:

1. Call me at my office (432-5141) or at home (481-0578). If I'm not available, please leave a message for me to call you back so that I can get the participant's name directly from you.

2. If there is no answer at either of those numbers, please leave me a message at 432-5771, the General Office of the Department of Family Studies for me to call you.

3. Or, drop the form in the mail as soon as it's signed. Envelopes and stamps are enclosed for you if you prefer that method.

When I complete my research, I'll send you a short summary of the results as my way of saying thanks.

Thanks again. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sandy McNaughton

University of Alberta
Edmonton
Canada T6G 2H1

Department of Family Studies
Faculty of Home Economics
801 General Services Building, Telephone (403) 432-5771 112.

May, 1986

More and more men are becoming stepfathers every year, but very little is known about what it's like for stepfathers before they get married. I am a student in the Master's program in Family Studies at the University of Alberta. I want to learn more about the process of becoming a stepfather from men who are having that experience.

If you are about to become a stepfather and do not have children of your own, but will be living with your fiance's children at least some of the time, I would like to talk to you about your experiences.

We will need to meet for 3 or 4 interviews. During the first interview, which will last about 1/2 hour, I will explain the research project further. The second and third interview will last about 1 hour each. The fourth interview, if needed, will also last 1 hour. Each interview will take place at a time and place convenient for you.

In the meantime, if you have any further questions about taking part in the research, please call me at 432-5141 during the day. My supervisor, Dr. Dianne Kieren, is also available to answer questions you may have.. Her phone number is 432-5770.

If you are willing to participate in this important study, please fill in the form below and leave it with the day care director. I will call you within 2 or 3 days to arrange a first interview.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Sandy McNaughton
Graduate Student

I, _____ agree to let _____
(day care director)
submit my name to Sandy McNaughton for the purpose of interviewing me in a study of stepfathers.

_____ _____
(signature) (date)

Preferred phone (day) _____ or (evening) _____

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

I have had the research study described to me by Sandy McNaughton, a student in the Master's program in Family Studies at the University of Alberta.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to gather information from men about their experiences of becoming stepfathers before marriage.

It is not the purpose of the study to provide education or counseling to me, but if the need arises, I understand that referrals can be made.

I consent to be interviewed and have the interviews audiotaped. I am aware that observations will be made throughout the interview.

I further understand that:

a. I am free to not answer specific questions during the interview.

b. I do not have to talk about any subject I do not wish to discuss.

c. The interviews will be held in confidence and will only be used for the research purpose stated above.

d. My name and the names of any of my family members will not be disclosed at any time.

e. I am free to terminate any interview at any time with no consequence.

f. I am free to ask questions at any time.

Participant _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

Demographic Data

Participant's first name _____

I would appreciate it if you would provide me with some general information about yourself and your future family.

1. What is your current marital status?

   single _____
   married _____
   separated _____
   divorced _____
   widowed _____

2. Are you presently responsible for the care of any children, not including your future wife's children?

   yes _____
   no _____

3. If yes, how many? _____

   What are their ages? _____

4. What is your future wife's current marital status?

   single _____
   married _____
   separated _____
   divorced _____
   widowed _____

5. How many children does she have? _____

   What are their ages? _____

6. How much of the time do they spend with her in her home?

   _____

7. When are you getting married?

   _____

Guiding Questions

1. Tell my how you met this family?
2. Tell me about your future stepchildren?
3. How long have you known them?
4. What was your relationship with them like when you first met them?
5. What is your relationship with them like now?
6. What do you think about stepfathers?
7. What do you think about you as a stepfather?
8. What do other people think about you as a stepfather?
9. What do you think it will be like to be a stepfather after you're married?
10. What kinds of things stand out for you as turning points in your becoming a stepfather.

Instructions for Family Map

(Read the following instructions to participants as you hand them the circle.)

Draw your family as you see it today.

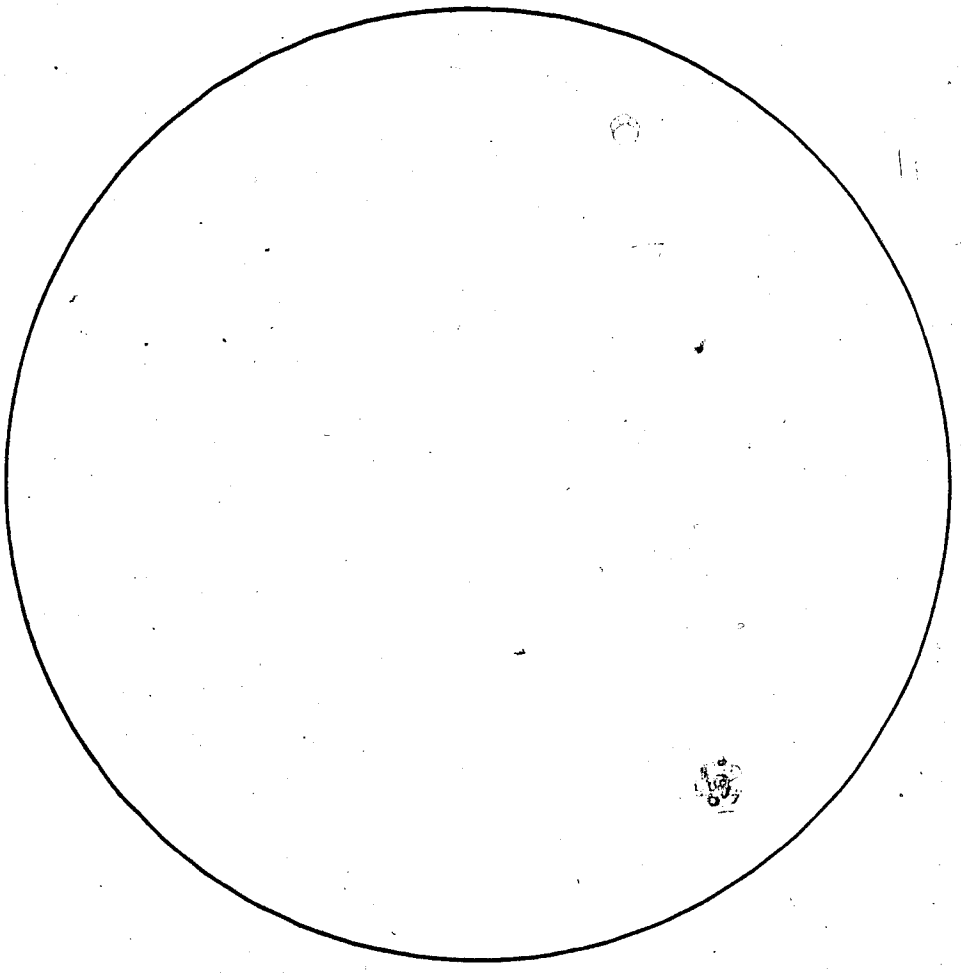
There is no trick or test to this. It will say the same thing to you as it does to me.

The circle represents the boundaries of the family. Anyone that you choose to place within the circle is considered immediate family. Anyone beyond the circle is not immediate family.

It's OK to place people on the boundary.

Please make sure you include all members. Label the people.
(Allow time to draw.)

Are there any other people you feel are important enough to be included in this drawing?
(Allow time to draw if needed.)

What would the drawing have looked like earlier in your relationship?

What will the drawing look like after you're married, a year from now, in the future?