

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA

UMI[®]
800-521-0600

STEP/MOTHER RESPONSES TO STEPSIBLING CONFLICTS:
MATERNAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND
ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME

BY

ALES B. MORGA-HASKIEWICZ

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Science

Department of Family Studies

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

© May, 1999



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-41747-6

Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION PAGE

STEP/MOTHER RESPONSES TO STEPSIBLING CONFLICTS:
MATERNAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND
ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME

By

ALES B. MORGA-HASKIEWICZ

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of

Master of Science

Ales B. Morga-Haskiewicz ©1999

Permission has been granted to the Library of The University of Manitoba to lend or sell copies of this thesis/practicum, to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and to Dissertations Abstracts International to publish an abstract of this thesis/practicum.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither this thesis/practicum nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

Abstract

The present study investigated links between stepsibling relationships and parental management of stepsibling conflict, including styles of maternal intervention strategies and attribution of blame. Thirty step/mothers and their biological children completed standardized questionnaires to assess the quality of the stepsibling relationship. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with both participants to assess maternal intervention into stepsibling conflicts and patterns of blame. Findings did not yield conclusive evidence concerning associations between the quality of stepsibling relationships and step/mother management of stepsibling conflicts; however, kinship ties were found to play a significant role. A significant relationship was found between biological relatedness and children's expected support from parents, highlighting the importance of loyalty issues in stepsibling conflict situations. Results are discussed using a normative-adaptive framework (Ganong & Coleman, 1994). Further, the role of differing perspectives within stepfamily relationships is emphasized and findings are interpreted in accordance with the "Stepfamily Cycle" (Papernow, 1984) for stepfamily development.

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by a University of Manitoba/Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant (329-2815-03) to Caroline Piotrowski, Ph.D., principal investigator.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported me in the fulfillment of my academic goal. To my thesis advisor, Dr. Caroline Piotrowski, I would like to express eternal gratitude for your dedication and support. On our journey together, your wisdom, patience and positive disposition has provided me with the courage to carry on and achieve my goal. To my thesis committee members, Dr. Carol Harvey and Dr. John Whiteley, your words of encouragement and guidance have greatly contributed to the success of this project. I would also like to express gratitude to my research assistant, Ewa Flisak (Morphy), who constantly altered her busy schedule to accommodate me in assisting with data collection.

To my beloved husband Mark, who was a pillar of strength during times when I lacked energy and needed comfort. Your contributions to our marriage and confidence in my abilities have kept me on track and have been greatly appreciated. Your experience with stepfamily life has inspired me to dedicate my research to an area that is in desperate need of our understanding, and I am certain that the lives of many stepfamilies will benefit from the pursuit of this project.

I also owe a special thank you to my wonderful parents, Stanley and Teresa Morga, and my dear sister, Kristine. My family has provided me with a solid foundation to which I aspire my dreams. Each one of you has given me love and respect that I needed over the years to overcome obstacles and complete this intense project. Throughout my life, you have struggled with me during difficult times while at the same time celebrating my accomplishments.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables.	vii
List of Figures	viii
 CHAPTER I	
Introduction	1
 CHAPTER II	
Review of Literature.	4
What is a Stepfamily?	4
Demographic Trends	5
The Stepfamily Cycle	9
Special Challenges for Stepfamilies	11
The “Incomplete Institutionalization”	14
Normative-Adaptive Perspective	17
The Role of the Siblings	18
Siblings in Childhood	19
Sibling Conflicts	21
The Stepsibling Relationship	24
Rivalry	24
Stepsibling Alliances	25
Age	26
Sexuality	27
Siblings and their Parents	27
Linking Stepsiblings and Stepparents	29
Parental Involvement in Sibling Conflicts	31
Summary	33
Operational Definition of Variables.	34

Hypotheses	35
Hypothesis 1: Step/mother	35
Hypothesis 2: Child	35
Hypothesis 3: Kinship	36
CHAPTER III	
Methods	37
Subjects	37
Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria	37
Demographic Characteristics	37
Parents	39
Children	39
Procedure	44
Recruitment	44
Home Visit	45
Measures	47
Family Demographic Questionnaire	47
Step/mother Measures	
Step/parent Stepsibling Conflict Interview	47
Parental Expectations and Perceptions of Children's Sibling Relationship Questionnaire	49
Child Measures	
Sibling Relationship Interview	51
Stepsibling Conflict Interview	52
CHAPTER IV	
Data Analysis	55
Hypothesis 1: Step/mother	56
Hypothesis 2: Child	57
Hypothesis 3: Kinship	58
Results	58
Test of Hypothesis 1	58

Test of Hypothesis 2	.	.	.	.	.	.	62
Test of Hypothesis 3	.	.	.	.	.	.	64
Discussion	.	.	.	.	.	.	65
Step/mother Perceptions	.	.	.	.	.	.	66
Children Perceptions	.	.	.	.	.	.	74
Kinship Ties	.	.	.	.	.	.	77
 CHAPTER V							
Contributions.	.	.	.	.	.	.	80
Limitations and Directions of Future Research	.	.	.	.	.	.	82
Conclusions	.	.	.	.	.	.	85
References	.	.	.	.	.	.	88
Appendix A	.	.	.	.	.	.	97
Appendix B	.	.	.	.	.	.	98
Appendix C	.	.	.	.	.	.	99
Appendix D	.	.	.	.	.	.	100
Appendix E	.	.	.	.	.	.	101
Appendix F	.	.	.	.	.	.	103
Appendix G	.	.	.	.	.	.	105
Appendix H	.	.	.	.	.	.	106
Appendix I	.	.	.	.	.	.	107
Appendix J	.	.	.	.	.	.	109

List of Tables

<u>Table</u>	Page
1. Demographic Characteristics of Stepfamilies and Children	41
2. Demographic Characteristics of Step/mothers	42
3. Demographic Characteristic of Step/fathers	43
4. Descriptive Statistics on Quality of Stepsibling Relationship.	56
5. Results of Logistic Regression for Step/mother Reports Predicting the Likelihood of Maternal Intervention Strategies and Patterns of Blame	59
6. Correlations Between Quality of Stepsibling Relationship and Number of Intervention Strategies for Step/mothers and Target Children	62
7. Results of Logistic Regression for Target Children Reports Predicting the Likelihood of Maternal Intervention Strategies and Patterns of Blame	64

List of Figures

<u>Figure</u>	Page
1. Absolute frequency scores for type of step/mother intervention strategies (SSCI)	48
2. Absolute frequency scores for step/mother attribution of blame (SSCI)	49
3. Absolute frequency scores for target child reports of maternal intervention strategies (SCI).	53
4. Absolute frequency scores for target child perceptions of maternal attribution of blame (SCI)	54
5. Step/mother (SSCI) and child (SCI) reports of maternal intervention into stepsibling conflicts	61
7. Absolute frequency scores for children reports of expected support in stepsibling conflicts (SCI)	65

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Once upon a time there was a beautiful little girl named Cinderella who was loved by everyone... She and her widowed father lived happily together. But her father worried that Cinderella needed a mother. So, he married again, to a widow who had two daughters of her own. Then Cinderella's father died, leaving his daughter with her new family. With her husband gone, Cinderella's stepmother revealed herself for who she really was: a mean and spiteful woman who was jealous of Cinderella's charm and beauty. She cared only for her daughters, Drizella and Anastasia. They were no better than their mother. (The Walt Disney Company, 1994, p.3).

So begins the classic tale of Cinderella, the quintessential caricature of bitterness and rivalry among stepsiblings. But the world of stepsiblings is not fiction; it is a reality that millions of Canadian children live in and it is in desperate need of our understanding (Zeppa & Norem, 1993).

A stepfamily is created when a remarriage occurs following dissolution of a marriage by divorce or death, or when a single parent marries. Stepfamilies include a wide variety of family relationships and structures. Every stepfamily has its own evolution; each has qualities different from all others. According to Spanier (1988), what each stepfamily has in common "is the challenge of working as a social system, sometimes against difficult odds, often in the wake of decidedly unpleasant remnants of a previous relationship, usually within a

framework of relocation, and almost always without an accepted vocabulary for describing the participants in relation to each other" (p.IX).

Unfortunately, most of the studies on stepfamily relationships have focused on the stepparent-stepchild dyad and how the marital relationship of parents influences a child's adjustment into the stepfamily (e.g., Brock, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1993b; Gold, Bubenzer, & West, 1993; Hobart, 1991; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995; Mandell & Birenzweig, 1990; Pruett, Calsyn & Jensen, 1993; Skopin, Newman & McKenry, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1990). Consequently, the nature of relationships among children has been lost in the shuffle. Seldom have stepchildren themselves been studied as sentient beings living in a world not of their making, with people who were once strangers and are now relatives. In fact, Beer (1989) called stepsiblings the "neglected dimension" in stepfamily research. From the outset, stepsibling relationships can be ambivalent and insecure. However, rivalry and jealousy are only half the story. Kindness, affection, and friendship can also develop over time among stepsiblings.

Indeed, the role of a parent changes when a stepfamily is created. Adults are faced with establishing relationships with their partner's children, which takes time, compromise and a lot of patience. However, when both adults bring children into a stepfamily then the dynamics of the stepsibling relationship create unique opportunities for parents to make decisions regarding discipline issues.

Accordingly, the general purpose of the present study was to examine the nature of stepsibling relationships, and the role of step/parents in these

relationships. Parents manage their children's relationships in a variety of ways; intervention into sibling conflicts is, perhaps, one of the most common and most challenging aspects of dealing with siblings. For the purposes of the present study, the following research questions were identified:

- 1) How do step/parents perceive the quality of the stepsibling relationship?
- 2) What intervention strategies do parents employ when dealing with stepsibling conflicts?
- 3) What role do alliances play in step/parent interventions and the quality of the stepsibling relationship?
- 4) How do children perceive step/parent intervention into stepsibling conflict, and how are these perceptions linked to the quality of the stepsibling relationship?

Therefore, the present study examines perspectives of both adults and children in stepfamilies. To this end, several areas of the research literature is reviewed in the following chapter. First, a general description of the stepfamily literature is provided. Second, the nature of sibling relationships, and stepsibling relationships in particular, is discussed. Last, the research literature on parental intervention strategies into both sibling and stepsibling conflict is reviewed.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

What is a Stepfamily?

Beer (1989) defined a stepfamily as "a family in which at least one member of the adult couple is a stepparent" (p.7). Many researchers have utilized this simple definition (e.g., Popenoe, 1994; Skopin, Newman, & McKenry, 1993; Visser & Visser, 1990). However, the present study adopts the recently embellished definition of stepfamily as "a family in which at least one of the re-coupling adults has one or more children from a prior relationship, and the children spend time in the adult's household" (Crosbie-Burnett, 1994, p.221).

Although the concept of a stepfamily can be defined fairly easily, researchers can not agree on what to call it. For example, some researchers prefer the term "blended" family because it implies a closer integration of members (e.g., Brock, 1994; Gold, Bubenzer, & West, 1993; Neumann-Clubb, 1988). Papernow (1988) argued that "blended" or "reconstituted" family propagates the hopes of "an instant new biological-like family" (p.61). Additionally, Brock (1994) maintained that "restructured" family merely implies a rearrangement of roles. While some of these terms may be preferable, the term "step" will be used in this study simply because it has been the most widely accepted term by researchers (e.g., Beer, 1989; Bernstein, 1989; Crosbie-Burnett, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1993a; Ganong & Coleman, 1993b; Mandell & Birenzweig, 1990; Visser & Visser, 1990).

Demographic Trends

Beer (1989) declared stepfamilies to be the "families of the future" (p.1). In fact, it has been estimated that by the year 2000 stepfamilies will become the predominant family structure in North America (Bloomfield, 1993; Gold, Bubenzer & West, 1993; Pruett, Calsyn, & Jensen, 1993; Skopin, Newman & McKenry, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1990). Despite the predictions that stepfamilies will soon outnumber single-parent and first-married families, Mills (1988) argued that stepfamilies are not a new invention. Stepfamilies have been a part of our culture from the beginning of time, but the context has changed dramatically. The occasion that created stepfamilies have shifted from death of a partner due to shorter life expectancy to the current situation of remarriage following divorce (Mills, 1988). Yet despite their historical longevity, it is only in the last twenty-five years that studies of stepfamilies have become popular (Bernstein, 1989).

Currently, there are no direct estimates of the number of stepfamilies in Canada. However, a recent report compiled by The Vanier Institute of the Family (1994) estimated roughly 343,400 stepfamilies, which represented about 7 percent of all families raising children in Canada. Unfortunately, such a number is inaccurate as it fails to include children that grew up in stepfamilies but were no longer living at home.

There are a number of factors which need to be considered when estimating the prevalence of stepfamilies in Canada. For instance, given the longer life expectancy of Canadians, the number of stepfamilies that are formed following the death of a spouse has declined. To date, there are no available

Canadian statistics on the prevalence of stepfamilies formed following the death of a spouse, although according to recent surveys, widowhood as a reason for marital dissolution has become fairly uncommon. Not surprisingly, widowhood accounted for more dissolution at older ages. Since women generally have longer life spans, they (20%) were more likely than men (12%) to report death of a spouse as a reason for marital dissolution. The GSS reported that among women aged 50-64 years, 41% reported death of a spouse as a reason for marital dissolution, while for men, the comparable proportion was 23%.

Another type of stepfamily is created when a single parent marries. This sample consists of two main groups. The first group is composed of never-married mothers whose first marriage is to a man who is not the biological father of her children. The second group consists of previously married mothers in second marriages, which may or may not be the father of some of her children but not others. Unfortunately, there are no current estimates available on the prevalence of these types of stepfamilies in Canada. Although American statistics are not equivalent to Canadian statistics, American studies estimated that the prevalence of stepfamilies involving never-married mothers is quite high and similar to the number of divorced stepfamilies (e.g., Mills, 1988). Nonetheless these estimates are ambiguous because most studies have not differentiated between remarriages to biological fathers or stepfathers.

The fact that the number of stepfamilies has risen is not surprising given the increase in the number of divorces and remarriages. Changes in the Divorce Act in 1968 and 1985 have expanded the grounds for divorce in Canada.

According to a special report which summarized Canadian family trends in 1990 (McDaniel & Strike, 1994), the number of divorces granted escalated from 11,000 in 1968 to approximately 78,000 in 1990. In addition, the changes to the divorce laws have also affected the length of marriage. The median duration of marriages ending in divorce has declined from 15 years in 1969 to only 9.1 years in 1986. By 1991, the age group that is most likely to be divorced is between 35 to 44 years. Children, too, were affected by divorce. More than half of the divorces in 1985 involved dependent children. It was estimated by The Vanier Institute of the Family (1994) that by 1990 approximately 34,000 children were involved in ensuing custody petitions. In the majority of cases, custody of dependent children was granted to the mother rather than the father.

The Vanier Institute of the Family (1994) also compared first marriages to remarriages, as percentages of all Canadian marriages. They estimated that in 1967 only 1 in 10 marriages had at least one partner from a previous marriage; however, by 1989 this number increased to 1 in 3. Further, the age that most Canadians are likely to remarry is akin to related divorce findings. In 1990, the average age at remarriage for divorced men was 41.1 years, and for divorced women, 37.5 years. Not surprisingly, widowed persons were generally older when they remarried. In 1990, widowed men remarried at an average age of 60.8, and for women, 54.1 years.

While Canada and the United States have similar marriage rates, the divorce rates differ. However, much of the stepfamily literature has been based on American statistics and these trends must not be generalized to include

Canadian stepfamilies. The Vanier Institute of the Family (1994) reported that 28% of Canadian first-marriages ended in divorce, compared with 44% of American marriages. In fact, other research has cited the American statistics on divorce to be greater than 50% of first-marriages ending in divorce (e.g., Beer, 1989; Visser & Visser, 1990). Thus, it is important when analyzing stepfamily literature to be sensitive to these cross-cultural differences.

The precise number of Canadian divorced single-parents that remarry to form a stepfamily is not known. However, Ram (1990) estimated through statistical modelling that 76% of divorced men and 44% of divorced women will remarry. Furthermore, stepfamilies tend to be larger than other family structures as they tend to unite children from previous relationships (The Vanier Institute of the Family, 1994). On average, the majority of stepfamilies have at least two children, which is comparable to other family structures. However, stepfamily households were much more likely to have more than three children. For example, 12.2% of stepfamilies had more than three children, compared to only 4.3% of all other family structures. Therefore, given that stepfamilies are often bigger, the formation of stepsibling relationships is likely. American statisticians have estimated that nearly 50% of children in stepfamilies have at least one stepsibling (Ganong & Coleman, 1993a), however comparable Canadian data are not yet available.

Some stepfamilies are composed of a relatively simple network, while others are more complex (Mills, 1988). For example, the simplest type of stepfamily structure is composed of a remarried adult with one child and a never-

married, childless adult. However, the number of roles that adults and children acquire increases when both partners bring in children from previous marriages and then have mutual children. Additionally, if remarriages are followed by death, divorce and further remarriages, then the complexity of the stepfamily increases geometrically (Beer, 1989). Despite these differences, all stepfamilies share the basic task of accomplishing a satisfactory transition from previous family cultures into a stepfamily culture (Visher & Visher, 1990).

The Stepfamily Cycle

The process of becoming a stepfamily begins at the time of re-coupling. The stages by which new members begin to feel like a family and establish their own culture has initially been described by Papernow (1984). The stepfamily cycle describes the normal developmental shifts that move a stepfamily system from biological parent-child subsystems with a stepparent periphery to an integrated family unit.

The 'early stages' of stepfamily life are a period of individual development. Frequently, parents and stepparents try to enact the myth of an instant family, which is full of love and will heal all wounds. For children, on the other hand, the fantasy of their previous family structure tends to be most salient. According to Papernow (1988) "most stepparents feel very alone during this time. The family remains biologically organized as interactive cycle completion continues within biological parent-child relationships, while it is continually interrupted in step-relationships" (p.60). The results of Papernow's study and subsequent data

indicated that average stepfamilies take 2 to 3 years to complete the 'early stages'.

In the 'middle stages' of the stepfamily cycle, stepparents begin to take on a more active role in the stepfamily. Their roles have shifted to bring about changes that hopefully lead to their inclusion in the family unit. In these middle stages, the stepparent has been viewed as the "family change agent", as the stage is marked by stepparents' increasing ability to state their differing perspective to achieve some middle ground. As in all stages, the changes in the middle stages gradually take place with some overlap with earlier stages. Nonetheless, Papernow (1984) found that movement through this phase takes approximately one to three years, but the third and fourth year of stepfamily living seems to be a 'critical period' in which the stepfamily "either makes it or breaks up" (p. 360). If negotiations are successful then a stepfamily moves towards the 'later stages' where clear step-relationships have emerged, and the stepfamily "operates easily with enough 'thick' middle ground so that ongoing step issues no longer threaten to crack the stepfamily foundation" (Papernow, 1988, p.60).

With a lot of courage, understanding and acceptance of each other, Papernow (1984) estimated that it takes approximately five to seven years for families to negotiate the entire stepfamily cycle. Unfortunately, empirical studies have not examined the dynamics of stepsibling relationships through a developmental approach. But indeed, aspects of these step-relationships would be affected by current levels of stepfamily function and would be especially relevant to how parents and children perceive parental responses to stepsibling

conflicts. Accordingly, the stepfamily cycle can provide a useful framework when considering stepsibling relationships.

Special Challenges for Stepfamilies

Recent research has identified a number of issues that are common to stepfamilies in Western society. A summary of some of the most significant challenges that are faced by stepfamilies can be stated in the following ways:

1. The structure of the stepfamily is complex. First-married families typically consist of a mother, father, and dependent children (Beer, 1989). By contrast, the patterns of relationships in stepfamilies are more complex and often include more people (Brock, 1994). When both partners of a remarriage bring in their own children, then the stepfamily includes two sets of stepchildren. Moreover, some stepsiblings may live together permanently, some may visit regularly, and others may be absent. Other complications are added by varying numbers, sexes, and age of biological siblings, stepsiblings, and half-siblings. Additionally, the constellation of a stepfamily becomes even more elaborate when in-laws, step-grandparents, and ex-spouses are considered (Brock, 1994).

2. The stepfamily is a process. First-married families are commonly thought of as relatively static, with "a set number of players acting within fairly clear roles" (Beer, 1989, p.9). But the composition of stepfamilies can change, and at any point the number of people living in a household can vary. Beer (1989) expressed that "stepfamilies are like a trolley car that rolls along the tracks, with people getting on and off. The family continues, but the characters who make it up constantly change" (p.9).

3. Membership is unclear. Although there are degrees of relationship, the memberships of first-married families are relatively clear. Boss (1988) labelled this phenomenon as "boundary ambiguity" which essentially means "not knowing who is in and who is out of the family" (p. 73). Often the boundaries in stepfamilies are not clear. The answer to "Who is in your family?" may depend on a given period of time and the perception of the individual (Brock, 1994). Currently, there are generally no accepted expectations of people within stepfamilies, as roles and relationships are relatively undefined (Beer, 1989; Crosbie-Burnett, 1994). The stepfamily, as a family structure, is poorly understood in society at large. Thus, explicit norms concerning how people are supposed to act in stepfamilies are ambiguous and may create ambivalence for family members (Beer, 1989; Boss, 1988). According to Crosbie-Burnett (1994), stepfamily "role flexibility may be a crucial factor in the stepfamily's adjustment when there are a variety of roles to be filled, a variety of adults to fill them, and no clear role prescriptions delineating the division of labour" (p.244).

4. Effects of earlier marriages. First-married families are formed gradually over time, thus members have time to get used to it and each other. However, the adjustment of a stepfamily must come after it is formed (Beer, 1989; Brock, 1994). Moreover, most or all of the members in a stepfamily have undergone a "loss" of someone, either through separation, divorce or death. In either case, both parents and children are grieving missing family members.

The emotional world of the stepfamily encompasses a variety of emotions remnant of previous family situations. For example, at the outset there may be

hope, while feelings of guilt may also be present. Additionally, the members of a stepfamily must overcome two fallacies; the myth of 'instant love' and the myth of 'the recreated nuclear family' (Beer, 1989; Brock, 1994). These two myths are particularly dangerous because they create unrealistic expectations. Additionally they tend to idealize what occurs in a biological family, thus impeding the formation of a cohesive stepfamily. Visher and Visher (1990) argued that in successful stepfamilies, members have accepted stepfamily complexity. Further, these members have gained an "appreciation of the diversity, the different models available in remarried families, an awareness of relationships, and of what is involved in forming and maintaining them" (Visher & Visher, 1990, p.7).

5. No clear guidelines. Although there are few guidelines for first-married families, the role of a stepfamily is even more ambiguous (Brock, 1994; Crosbie-Burnett, 1994). The legal obligation of biological family members toward one another are fairly well recognized, even for a lay person; however, these obligations are obscured with regard to stepfamilies (Beer, 1989; Zeppa & Norem, 1993). To some extent laws may be a reflection of, but not identical with, social norms. As society transforms the laws tend to be modified, although more slowly and with their own logic. While some researchers have noted that the laws about stepfamilies are confused, laws may be a reflection of the prevailing social confusion (e.g., Beer, 1989; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995; Mandell & Birenzweig, 1990; Visher & Visher, 1990; Zeppa & Norem, 1993).

The "Incomplete Institutionalization" Hypothesis

The nature of difficulties and stresses affecting stepfamilies has been analyzed from a variety of perspectives. For example, Visser and Visser (1990) concluded that stepfamilies were found to be less cohesive than first-married families due to shifting and changing step-relationships. Additionally, Hobart (1991) found that remarried families reported elevated levels of stress, tension and disagreement.

However, MacDonald and DeMaris (1995) argued that much of the earlier research on stepfamilies has derived from Cherlin's sociological theory, known as the "incomplete institutionalization" hypothesis. Although Cherlin's hypothesis was based on data from surveys in the United States, his theory has also been applied as a normative framework when researching Canadian stepfamilies (e.g., Mandell & Birenzweig, 1990).

According to Cherlin (1978), the degree to which the family is "institutionalized" varies across family types. Families are institutionalized to the extent that well-established norms and rituals structure interaction between family members. Cherlin's "incomplete institutionalization" hypothesis postulated that stepfamilies are relatively lacking in the kinds of norms that guide more traditional (e.g., nuclear) families in dealing with particularly complex family relations, such as "step" and "half" relations. Consequently, the greater structural complexity of the stepfamily could explain the higher probability of divorce and separation in remarriages.

Furthermore, Cherlin (1978) argued that a lack of institutional guidelines was more problematic for remarriages with stepchildren. While he agreed that remarriages without stepchildren are complex, he argued that they are generally guided by the social norms of first marriages and consequently may experience the same levels of conflict. Hence, stepfamilies without stepsibling subsystems resemble a 'recreated' nuclear family. Norms which structure traditional families would serve to guide interactions among family members in remarriages without stepchildren.

Additionally, Cherlin (1978) hypothesized that the greater the frequency of contact between remarried persons and their stepchildren, the higher the probability of marital dissolution. Cherlin's rationale was that institutionalized solutions affect family unity by narrowing the choices family members may make in responding to problems. However, when institutionalized solutions do not exist, families must begin to create their own solutions. Thus, the greater freedom to make choices increases the potential for conflict. Assuming that increased frequency of conflict is destructive to a relationship, one would expect a higher likelihood of marital disharmony.

Although the "incomplete institutionalization" hypothesis has been widely cited in the stepfamily research literature (e.g., Mandell & Birenzweig, 1990; Skopin, Newman, & McKenry, 1993), it has received little direct empirical support. For example, Pruett et al. (1993) found that children in stepfamilies did not perceive the current family as significantly more conflicted or less cohesive than children in first-married families. Others have not supported the commonly

accepted notion that stepfamilies in general experience more stressors and negative manifestations of stress than do first-married families (Zeppa & Norem, 1993).

Recently MacDonald and DeMaris (1995) challenged the "incomplete institutionalization" hypothesis. They outlined several limitations of studies which supported Cherlin's broadly accepted theory. Among them were small sample sizes, samples limited to single remarriages, and samples with limited information distinguishing the types of children in the home (e.g., biological, stepchild, mutual child). Further, few researchers have considered the possibility that the effects of remarriage and stepchildren on marital conflict might vary by childbearing stage. Thus, the developmental stage of children may effect marital conflict differently. Additional findings cast doubt on Cherlin's hypothesis that remarriages with children run greater risk of separation and divorce. Stepfamilies characterized by stepchildren did not report a significant pattern of increased conflict (e.g., Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995).

Another limitation of the "institutionalization hypothesis" and many of the studies outlined above is the exclusion of the stepsibling relationship in understanding the dynamics of the stepfamily. According to Ganong and Coleman (1993a) the underlying assumption of many stepfamily studies was that childrens' emotional and behavioral adjustment to stepfamily living is "a function of marital conflict or other marital problems" (p.126), and "it is a direct effect of the stepparent-stepchild relationship" (p.126).

Towards a normative-adaptive perspective. Zeppa and Norem (1993)

argued that research which compares stepfamilies to biological families implies that one family structure is better than the other. They argued that "stepfamilies are only different from first families, perhaps not in ways in which we have been conditioned to believe, but different nevertheless" (p.21). Thus, such a comparison may not be valid.

Ganong and Coleman (1987) reviewed and compared the research literature to clinical work on stepfamilies and stepchildren. They found that social scientists have predominantly utilized the "deficit-comparison paradigm" when studying stepfamilies. In the deficit-comparison approach "stepchildren are compared to children living in a nuclear family, with the expectation that stepchildren will be living in a deficit environment" (Ganong & Coleman, 1987, p. 96). The underlying assumption behind this model is that variations from first-married families produces undesirable effects on children.

However, because of basic structural and developmental differences social scientists are turning to the "normative-adaptive perspective" in approaching the study of stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 1994). Social scientists who adopt the normative-adaptive perspective focus on making within-group comparisons. They try to understand why some stepfamilies function adequately while others fall apart. Ganong and Coleman (1994) argued that the main emphasis of the normative-adaptive perspective "is not on the problems or deficits, nor are comparisons with nuclear families the predominant research design" (p. xii). Hence, considering the limitations of Cherlin's (1978) incomplete

institutionalization hypothesis and the deficit-comparison paradigm, the normative-adoptive perspective is adopted for purposes of the present study. The following section will briefly discuss the importance of understanding the sibling relationship as a starting point for exploration of the stepsibling relationship.

The Role of Siblings

The sibling relationship is one of the "longest-lasting and potentially most intimate relationships, beginning at the birth of the second child and often continuing until the death of one sibling" (Stoneman & Brody, 1993, p. 1786). Sibling connections are relevant to the development of a sense of self, and have considerable potential for affecting children's well-being (Boer & Dunn, 1992). Interactions between siblings are reciprocal and more egalitarian than parent-child relationships (Dunn, 1993). Researchers are realizing that siblings impact each other through mutual socialization, helping behaviors, cooperative tasks and activities, as well as through aggressive and various other negative behaviors (Cicirelli, 1995). Within the family, siblings help to establish and maintain family norms. Ihinger-Tallman (1987) described siblings as "key contributors to the development of a family culture, and they help write family 'history'" (p.165). However, even though it is known that siblings have a profound influence on each other, the progress of research in this area has been relatively slow compared to that of research on spousal and parent-child relationships (Cicirelli, 1995; Ganong & Coleman, 1993).

Children's sibling relationships are complex and multifarious. Sibling relationships contain unique properties that distinguish them from other interpersonal relationships. As discussed by Cicirelli (1995), the status of the sibling relationship is ascribed by birth or legal actions rather than earned. Further, siblings usually have a common or a relatively long history of shared, and some nonshared, experiences. Nevertheless, the quality of a sibling relationship varies widely across families, and the experiences may be even quite different for children in the same family. Recently, researchers have acknowledged the effect of individual differences in almost every aspect of the sibling relationship (e.g., Dunn, 1993; Ganong & Coleman, 1993a; McHale & Crouter, 1996; Vandell & Bailey, 1992).

Despite the apparent variability of sibling relationships, siblings can learn many valuable skills through their interactions. For example, children can learn patterns of loyalty, helpfulness, and protection as well as rivalry, domination, and competition (e.g., Dunn, 1993; Piotrowski, 1995; McHale & Crouter, 1996; Vandell & Bailey, 1992). As the focus of the present study is on stepfamilies with school-age children, the following section will briefly address the nature and development of sibling relationships in middle childhood, including sibling conflicts.

Siblings in Childhood

When investigating the nature of relationships between siblings, it is important to take into account the age and developmental level of the children. It is clear that during the early years, there are marked changes in the nature of

this relationship. As the siblings get older, the younger sibling becomes a more active participant in the relationship (Munn & Dunn, 1988). When the younger sibling is about three or four years old, it has been reported that sibling relationships become more important in children's sociocognitive development (Boer & Dunn, 1992; Cicirelli, 1995). Essentially, children become more effective companions and antagonists.

The transition from early childhood to middle childhood is also a period of marked changes for the sibling relationship. Generally, it has been argued that the sibling relationship becomes more egalitarian during middle childhood, although there has been some disagreement about whether the change reflects a decrease in the dominance both siblings exert (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987) or an increase in the power exerted by the younger sibling on the older sibling (Boer & Dunn, 1992).

A longitudinal study Dunn, Slomkowski, Beardsall and Rende (1994) found a positive correlation between the quality of sibling relationships in preschool years and their adjustment seven years later based on maternal and sibling interviews and observations. These researchers examined both externalizing and internalizing behavior, and found that higher levels of internalizing behavior, or lack of friendly or warm behavior among siblings in middle childhood rather than high levels of externalizing, conflict behavior were more strongly associated with later adjustment difficulties. Their results suggested that "differences in the affection expressed between siblings may well be of developmental significance, not just for the relationship between siblings

themselves but for children's adjustment more broadly considered" (Dunn et al., 1994, p.502). They noted, however, that most researchers have paid attention to the shaping role of externalizing, aggressive behavior when studying conflicts among siblings.

Sibling Conflicts

Conflicts among siblings is a recurring theme in the research literature. According to Vandell and Bailey (1992), conflict is marked behaviorally by actions such as quarrelling, fighting, resisting, opposing, refusing, denying, objecting, and protesting; interpersonal conflict occurs when two individuals engage in mutual oppositional behavior. Aggression, on the other hand, is often confused with conflict. However, aggression is most often defined as behavior intended to harm someone, verbally or physically (Shantz & Hobart, 1989). Although aggression may be a component of conflict, it may be entirely absent as well. Whereas aggression can be unidirectional, conflict involves mutual opposition (Cicirelli, 1995; Shantz & Hobart, 1989; Vandell & Bailey, 1992). Further, Cicirelli (1995) argued that conflict may be expressed either verbally or physically, but when the behavior becomes extreme, the aggression should be distinguished from conflict.

Previous work on sibling relationships has summarized the research findings on normative patterns of sibling conflict. For instance, Shantz and Hobart (1989) referred to issues of control, facts and rules as "manifest" issues, that is how the behavior of the children is expressed tends to define the issue of conflict. Typically, the majority conflicts between toddlers and preschool-age

siblings were found to be centred around object control. To a lesser extent, social control issues were also present. For example, such matters as a child "refusing to adopt a particular fantasy role, or not enacting the role correctly" (Shantz & Hobart, 1989, p.77) illustrate social control issues. During middle childhood, conflicts between siblings tend to shift to equal proportions of object control and social control. Additionally, older children became more verbal; however, other common tactics included physical force, bullying, and harassing. Older children most commonly attributed their own "bad moods" as reasons for conflict. Further, bids for parental attention as a source of conflict were reported to decrease as children got older (Shantz & Hobart, 1989).

Although the strategies and outcomes of sibling conflict are influenced by the setting in which they occur, it has been found that most conflicts are settled by the children themselves (Shantz & Hobart, 1989). According to Vandell and Bailey (1992), siblings do not actively resolve their conflicts. Instead, the most frequent resolution tactic was to withdraw or simply to ignore each other (Shantz & Hobart, 1989; Vandell & Bailey, 1992). At the conclusion of conflicts siblings in preschool and middle childhood showed little negative affect. For example, siblings in these age groups were observed continue to playing together a short while later, oblivious to their earlier strife (Kramer & Baron, 1995).

Deutsch (1973) distinguished between destructive and constructive conflict between siblings. He characterized destructive conflict by a "highly negative affect; they spread beyond the initial issue to other issues, and they escalate to intrusive and insistent coercion" (p.351), and often both parties are

left feeling dissatisfied. In contrast, constructive conflicts were characterized as "focusing on the issue at hand, and the affective intensity is not very high" (p. 359). Finally, constructive conflicts were usually resolved by a negotiation that is acceptable by both parties (Vandell & Bailey, 1992).

Both constructive and destructive conflicts occur within sibling relationships of all developmental stages. Thus, the effort to eliminate all types of sibling conflict is misguided given the significance of non-destructive conflict for children's social development (Kramer & Baron, 1995). Recent emphasis on the reduction of sibling conflict and rivalry may be inappropriate given the most recent empirical evidence that experiences with nonaggressive sibling conflict is a process that promotes reasoning, perspective taking and other social skills (e.g., Perlman & Ross, 1997; Shantz & Hobart, 1989; Vandell & Bailey, 1992).

Conflicts between siblings are important for a number of reasons. As expressed by Vandell and Bailey (1992), "these conflicts often grow out of the children's need to share common resources including household possessions as well as the love and attention of their parents. The conflicts reflect the children's immediate emotional states as well as their needs to establish separate and individual identities within the family" (p.264). While sibling relationships, and rivalry in particular, have been widely studied much less is known about the role of stepsibling rivalry. The following section will summarize what is currently understood about stepsibling relationships, including issues that are characteristically different from biological sibling relationships.

The Stepsibling Relationship

Most of the research on stepfamilies has focused on problems faced by stepparents. As mentioned earlier, when children themselves are considered, the focus has primarily been on the stepparent-stepchild dyad (e.g., Brock, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1993b; Gold, Bubenzer, & West, 1993; Hobart, 1991; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995; Mandell & Birenzweig, 1990; Pruett, Calsyn, & Jensen, 1993; Skopin, Newman, & McKenry, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1990). Consequently, the focus of relationships among children has been minimized. Although the research has been limited in examining the stepsibling relationship, a number of important issues have been identified.

Rivalry

Rivalry among siblings is a common feature of family life, and it is a dimension which has historically received the most attention (e.g., Dunn, 1993; Piotrowski, Morga, Keast & Arnould, 1996). Stepsiblings share many of the same issues as biological siblings, such as property, possessions, sharing space, and above all, parents. Sharing the love, attention, and approval of parents is never easy and consequently may create deep and lasting competition among brothers and sisters. However, when stepsiblings are competing, issues of loyalty to biological children may certainly arise (Beer, 1989; Ganong & Coleman, 1993a). Thus, the characteristics of stepsibling rivalry are unique.

As reported by Beer (1989), there is usually no instant love among stepsiblings. At the outset, there can be a perception of "us" against "them". Parents may enforce different rules, and passing from one set of rules to another

can produce a culture shock. One of the ways that stepparents attempt to deal with these differences is to impose all the rules impartially, yet they do not always succeed. Adapting to the parenting style of a "new" parent might mean more negotiation, more challenges, and therefore more parent involvement in stepsibling conflict.

Another crucial issue is that of space. The children who have lived in the home tend to feel "invaded" and the children who move in tend to feel like "invaders" (Beer, 1989; Ganong & Coleman, 1993a). Closely related to living space is that of possessions. Objects acquire meaning when seen as personal possessions, symbols of territory, or personal boundaries, and they have even more significance when they are bones of stepsibling contention.

Stepsibling Alliances

Beer (1989) argued that even less attention has been given to the equally important dimension of stepsibling camaraderie. Stepsibling networks can be nourishing and supportive. Powerful alliances between youngsters can emerge on the basis of loyalties. Beer (1989) found that age and sex are two particularly strong bases of stepsibling alliance. However, young children of the same age and sex were found to be less likely to form coalitions and more likely to compete. In contrast, during late adolescence and early adulthood the findings were less likely to be significant. Thus, age and sex differences may become less important during later developmental stages.

Beer (1989) reported that stepsiblings present expanded opportunities for children including a larger range of choices to imitate or differentiate from

biological siblings. Since there is less of a family tie, the relationship can be viewed as less pressured or encumbered by feelings of obligations because of blood relations. In short, warm and supportive coalitions can form between stepsiblings. As expressed by Beer (1989):

As time passes, don't be surprised to discover new alliances being formed between stepsiblings. Some may actually seem to exclude natural brothers and sisters. In one instance I observed a thirteen-year-old girl who was always in relentless competition with her sixteen-year-old sister, whom she believed her mother favoured. When her mother remarried, she quickly developed a strong friendship with her eighteen-year-old stepsister. They had more in common than she had with her own sister. She felt appreciated and understood; her conflicts with her own sister gradually diminished. (p.47).

Age

Age is another unique issue for stepsiblings for a number of reasons. When two sets of biological siblings are combined, the original birth order ranking may change depending upon the overall age order of children in a stepfamily. Secondly, the number of years between children in a stepfamily can vary greatly. In short, the age order is not determined by birth order, and age interval in the stepsibling hierarchy is not determined by birth interval.

Age, as a source of power in children's ranking systems, cannot be distributed equally. However, there has been much speculation and insufficient evidence among family researchers, that age-order places are important to

children's development (Kramer & Baron, 1995). Even less can be said about the long-term effects of changes in age order in stepsibling relationships.

Research on this issue has yet to be done.

Sexuality

Rules governing sexual behaviour are fundamental to the cohesion of the family. However, stepfamily relations call into question many assumptions about sexual taboos, particularly concerning sex between stepsiblings. If the taboo against incest means a prohibition against sexual activity between parents and children, and among siblings then the boundaries of stepfamilies are not clear (Boss, 1988; Crosbie-Burnett, 1994). It is often difficult to decide where the family begins and ends (Boss, 1988). Additionally, Beer (1989) reported that the laws concerning stepsibling sexual relationships are unclear, but laws in Canada have generally not regarded sex between stepsiblings as incestuous. However, sexuality is a major issue for children in stepfamilies, particularly in adolescence, and it is a dilemma faced by parents and therapists.

Siblings and their Parents

The idea that parent-child relationships are important influences on sibling relationships has been maintained both in the clinical and research literature for many decades (Boer, Goedhart, & Treffers, 1992). Many questions and assumptions arise when linking the quality of sibling relationships to the quality of parental care.

A recurring theme in the research literature is that differential parental treatment contributes to conflicts between siblings (Boer et al., 1992; Cicirelli,

1995; Dunn, 1992; Vandell & Bailey, 1989). Differential treatment can take many forms. As expressed by Cicirelli (1995), "parents play favourites by pampering and praising one child and ignoring, depriving, or punishing the other" (p. 160). The result can breed hostility and rivalry between siblings. However, according to Vandell and Bailey (1989), there are times when differential treatment of siblings is appropriate and even necessary. For example, parents typically intervene into a sibling conflict when one child is an infant (Dunn & Munn, 1986), age differences among siblings is considerable, or physical aggression is involved (Felson & Russo, 1988). Thus, differential treatment, in many cases, does not include preferential treatment. Siblings of various ages and developmental levels have different needs which inevitably elicit differential treatment by parents.

The evidence for links between parental preferential treatment and quality of sibling relationships are correlational, thus caution must be made when making causal inferences about the direction of these associations. However, recent reports suggested that these links appear stronger in families under stress, such as following divorce (Hetherington, 1988). Hetherington found that parental preferential treatment affected both siblings negatively. Both siblings were found to behave in an aggressive and avoidant manners towards each other. Thus, her results indicated that it was the disparity in treatment rather than the absolute levels of parental behavior that had a negative effect on siblings relationships.

Clearly, forming a stepfamily can also be a stressful event. However, since we know relatively little of life-long stepsibling relationships, it is not surprising that even less is known about how parents manage the stepsibling relationship, particularly when conflict occurs. The following section will summarize recent findings concerning the perceptions of children and parents regarding the interrelation of stepsibling and step/parents subsystems with the stepfamily unit.

Linking Stepsibling and Stepparent Relationships

Although the current research is quite limited concerning links between stepsibling and stepparent/stepchild relationships, Ganong and Coleman (1993a) measured the quality of stepsibling relations based on perspectives of adults and children in stepfamilies. Interestingly, their results indicated that the presence of stepsiblings in the home was seen as a greater problem for parents than for children.

Both children and parents rated the stepsibling relationship positively, although children's interactions with half-siblings were slightly more positive. Not surprisingly, parents reported feeling closer to their biological children than stepchildren; however, the authors failed to report whether they controlled for the duration of the stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Additionally, a significant proportion of parents reported that the presence of stepsiblings affected their relationship with their biological children in a negative way. The authors gave only a few examples of what they considered negative influences, such as having less time with their children, added tension,

and discipline problems. Further, distinctions between parents' perceptions of short-term and long-term negative effects of the presence of stepchildren were not reported. Finally, examples of potentially positive influences of stepsiblings on the parent-child relationship were excluded.

Regarding discipline, Ganong and Coleman (1993a) compared reports of children with and without stepsiblings. Children with stepsiblings were more likely to report that rules in their households were made by both their biological parents and stepparents. Further, these children were more likely to perceive only their biological parents made decisions about discipline. However, children without stepsibling subsystems were more likely to report that their stepparents made the rules in their households and enforced them. While it would have been interesting to compare whether perceptions of children within the same households differ, the authors did not include this comparison.

Further, strategies that parents used when managing stepsibling relationships were not directly addressed in the study. Parents often respond to sibling conflicts as a discipline situation, in which they attempted to enforce household rules or smooth over sibling distress or hostility (Ross, 1996). How parents react to stepsibling conflict, including attribution of blame and types of intervention strategies, may be quite important for the stepsibling relationship. Clearly, more research is needed to understand the dynamics of stepsibling conflict and parental responses. Accordingly, the final section of this literature review addresses parental reactions and involvement in sibling conflict.

Parental Involvement in Sibling Conflicts

To date, the study of stepsibling relationships remains exploratory and descriptive, and research has not specifically addressed the dynamics of stepsibling conflicts or how step/parents respond to these disputes. Yet researchers argue that parents are important socializing agents, and often intervene as third parties in their children's quarrels (e.g., Howe & Ross, 1990; Perlman & Ross, 1997; Piotrowski et al., 1996; Ross, 1996). It has been argued that when parents intervene "they support rules that might reasonably guide their children's current and future interaction" (Perlman & Ross, 1997, p.3).

Interestingly, when research has examined parental responses to sibling conflict it has been largely observational in nature (e.g., Howe & Ross, 1990; Martin & Ross, 1995; Perlman & Ross, 1997; Ross, 1996). Based on these findings, several important components of parental responses to sibling conflicts have been uncovered. For example, Perlman and Ross (1997) found that parents intervened and took explicit positions in their preschool-aged children's conflicts an average of three times per hour. In addition, Martin and Ross (1995) found parents responded to less than 50% of aggression between their children. Overall, parents were more likely to respond to the aggressive behavior of their first-born than their second-born children.

Martin and Ross (1995) also found parents most often responded to their children's aggression with simple commands, asking questions to stop the aggression, or by discussing issues not directly related to the conflict. Parents rarely responded to their children's aggression by physical restraint or

punishment. Yet perceptions of these events are also important predictors of later psychosocial adjustment (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995).

Furthermore, it is known that perceptions of conflict in the home often diverge and that antagonists involved can have very discrepant views of the same event (Larson, 1994). Parental responses to sibling conflict can be viewed differently by each family member. Unfortunately, previous research on stepchildren has been typically collected from only a single respondent in a stepfamily (Ganong & Coleman, 1987).

In first-married families, parents have reported a variety of means of responding to their children's conflict. On the basis of maternal interviews, Piotrowski et al. (1996) uncovered several intervention strategies for dealing with aggressive sibling conflicts, including low power responses (e.g., discussion, apologies, separation, distraction, comforting, using reasoning and rules, guilt induction and refraining from intervention) as well as high power responses (e.g., punishment, threats, commands and yelling). Overall, mothers felt that the "best" strategy was calm discussion, although mothers' definition of "best" was not addressed in the study. In addition, mothers who reported more high than low power intervention strategies also reported more frequent sibling aggression.

Further, Piotrowski et al. (1996) found mothers reported blaming both siblings relatively equally for aggressive behavior, which is contrary to earlier findings that found parents tended to favour the younger child out of moral obligation to protect them (Felson & Russo, 1988).

In the case of stepfamilies, it is unclear whether step/parents would intervene in a similar manner, or if kinship ties might play a role in how parents manage conflict and attribute blame. It may be the case that parental intervention on the basis of household rules (e.g., ownership, sharing) may seem fair and legitimate for one child and completely unfair to another. The role of biological kinship in how step/parents manage the stepsibling relationship and successfully intervene into conflict needs to be addressed. Ganong and Coleman (1993a) began an exploration of these issues when they asked stepchildren which parent they perceived to make decisions about discipline. They found that stepchildren often perceived their biological parent to be the decision-maker about discipline rather than their stepparent. The goal of the present study is to explore the dynamics of step/parent responses to stepsibling conflicts in more depth and detail.

Summary

It has become evident that very little is empirically understood about stepsibling relationships. The main goal of the present study was to describe how children in stepfamilies perceive their relationships with one another; therefore, perceptions of children themselves were investigated. Both positive and negative aspects of these relationships were addressed; although love and affection may develop among stepsiblings, issues of conflict are omnipresent. Further, since parents are an important influence on the quality of sibling relationships (Brody & Stoneman, 1994), the present study also examined parent perceptions of how stepsiblings got along. Parental management of sibling

relationships often involves dealing with conflict (Piotrowski et al., 1996), therefore the examination of parent perceptions of their involvement in stepsibling conflict was also a goal of the present study. Since the nature of the present study was exploratory, operational definitions of variables under study were clarified and several descriptive hypotheses were developed.

Operational Definition of Variables

Step. A kin relation acquired by the remarriage of one's biological parent, without any biological connection.

Complex Stepfamily. This type of stepfamily was investigated in the present study. It was defined as a stepfamily in which both partners have biological children from previous partnerships (Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

Step/parents. This definition was created for the present study, and was defined as individuals with dual roles in their remarriages, both as a biological parent to their child(ren) by previous partnership(s) and as a stepparent to their spouse's biological child(ren) by previous partnership(s). In contrast, the term stepparent, which is common in stepfamily literature, can refer to individuals who become a stepparent to their partner's biological child(ren), but enter the remarriage without biological child(ren) of their own.

Stepsiblings. A sibling relationship, without any biological connection, that is acquired by the remarriage of one's biological parent.

Target biological child. Refers to the child who was interviewed for the present study, and was invariably the step/mother's biological child by previous partnership.

Target stepchild. Refers to the step/father's biological child by previous partnership who was not interviewed, however was chosen for the target stepsibling relationship in the present study.

Stepsibling Conflict. Mutual oppositional behavior between stepsiblings which could be physical and/or verbal. It was marked behaviorally by actions such as "quarrelling, fighting, resisting, opposing, refusing, denying, objecting, and protesting" (Vandell & Bailey, 1992, p.243).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Step/mother

I. It was expected that step/mother perceptions of warmth and affection in the target stepsibling relationship would be predictive of reports of low power parental intervention strategies into stepsibling conflict, and a balanced pattern in their attribution of blame (e.g., blame in conflict is shared between children).

II. Conversely, it was expected step/mother perceptions of conflict and rivalry in the target stepsibling relationship would predict reports of high power parental intervention strategies into stepsibling conflict, and a biased pattern in their attribution of blame (e.g., one child is blamed more often in conflicts).

Hypothesis 2: Child

I. Target biological child reports of warmth and affection in the target stepsibling relationship were expected to be predictive of their perceptions of low power maternal intervention strategies into stepsibling conflict, and a balanced pattern in attribution of blame (e.g., both stepsiblings share blame in conflicts).

II. It was also expected that target biological child reports of conflict and rivalry in the target stepsibling relationship would predict their perceptions of high power maternal intervention strategies into stepsibling conflict, and a pattern of bias in attribution of blame (e.g., only one stepsibling is blamed more often in conflicts).

Hypothesis 3: Kinship

III. If kinship ties played a role in step/parent intervention into stepsibling conflicts, then it was expected that target biological children would expect a greater show of support from their biological parent than from their stepparent in stepsibling conflict situations.

CHAPTER III

Method

Subjects

Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria

Target participants included step/mothers and their school-age biological child who were currently living in the remarried household. Only stepfamilies that had at least one stepsibling relationship were included in the sample. The target stepsibling relationship was required to have a minimum contact of five days each month with each other; stepsiblings ranged from seven to eighteen years of age. If there was more than one stepsibling relationship in the remarried household, the stepsibling closest in age to the target biological child was selected as the target stepsibling relationship. As the study was exploratory, the wide age range was established to facilitate the acquisition of a sample as representative of the general population as possible. Step/fathers were also encouraged to participate, however, as they did not do so as often as step/mothers, they were excluded from the analyses (n=10). To minimize misinterpretation of the measures, participants were required to speak English fluently. Although stepfamilies were recruited by advertisements in Winnipeg city, some participants (n=2) lived in surrounding communities.

Demographic Characteristics

A complete summary of family demographic characteristics are presented in Tables 1-3. Thirty step/mothers and their biological child participated in the present study. The majority of stepfamilies were Caucasian (n=28), and 63%

($n=19$) had an average total family income exceeding \$50,000 per year.

Stepfamilies had resided together an average of four years ($SD = 2.69$; range = 0-10), with an average of four children from previous partnerships living in the remarried household. Eighty-seven percent ($n=26$) of step/mothers and 80% ($n=24$) of step/fathers brought two or fewer children from a previous relationship into the stepfamily household. Thirty percent ($n=9$) of the sample had at least one mutual child from their current partnership.

Issues of child custody are relevant to every stepfamily (refer to Tables 2 and 3). In the present study, children who were in sole custody of their biological mother or father were defined as those who resided only in the remarried household, and had minimal contact with their absent biological parent (e.g., less than two weeks per year). In contrast, children who were in shared custody arrangements with both biological parents had regular contact with both parents (e.g., every weekend, fifteen days per month) and consequently resided only part-time in the remarried household. In the majority of cases, either sole or shared custody was granted to parents for all their biological children ($n=29$). However, in two separate stepfamilies, one step/mother and one step/father indicated they had sole custody of some of their biological children and shared custody for others (see Tables 2 and 3). Not surprisingly, step/mothers were more likely to have sole custody of their biological children (47%) compared to step/fathers (37%). However, for shared custody the opposite was true; 60% of step/fathers and 50% of step/mothers shared custody with the other biological parent.

Parents.

Step/mother and step/father demographic characteristics are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. Step/mothers were 36 years old on average ($SD = 4.60$; range = 24-44), while the mean age for step/fathers was 38 years ($SD = 5.15$; range = 24-44). Approximately half of the step/mothers ($n=16$) and step/fathers ($n=16$) indicated they had some post-secondary education. In addition, 73% ($n=22$) of both step/mothers and step/fathers were divorced from their previous partnership, while only one step/father was widowed. When asked about cultural background, 80% ($n=24$) of step/mothers and 83% ($n=25$) of step/fathers stated no particular ethnic affiliation other than Canadian.

Target children.

Target biological children were 12 years old on average ($SD = 2.79$; range = 7-18), and consisted of 15 girls and 15 boys. The mean age of target stepsiblings was also 12 years ($SD = 2.85$; range = 7-18), and included 15 girls and 15 boys. The average age difference in the target stepsibling relationship was two years ($SD = 1.87$; range = 0-8). There were 14 pairs of same sex stepsiblings in the sample.

In order to assess the amount of contact that stepsiblings had with each other in the remarried household, four possible custody arrangements were possible (see Table 1). By far, the most common situation was that stepsiblings were living together part-time where either the target biological child ($n=8$), target stepchild ($n=4$) or both children ($n=12$) were in a shared custody arrangement. Interestingly, there were some stepfamilies in which both step/mothers and

step/fathers had sole custody of their biological children ($n=6$), hence these stepsiblings had constant contact with each other as they resided full-time in the remarried household.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Stepfamily and Children

Characteristic	Absolute Frequency ¹	Percentage
Family Income		
Missing data	2	6.7
Under \$10,000	0	0.0
\$10,000 - \$20,000	2	6.7
\$20,000 - \$30,000	2	6.7
\$30,000 - \$40,000	3	10.0
\$40,000 - \$50,000	2	6.7
Over \$50,000	19	63.3
Location		
Winnipeg, MB		
North of Portage Ave	12	40.0
South of Portage Ave	16	53.3
Portage La Prairie, MB	1	3.3
La Salle, MB	1	3.3
Total children residing in household		
1 – 2	5	16.7
3 – 4	16	53.3
5 – 6	7	23.3
7 – 8	2	6.7
Mutual Children in current partnership		
None	21	70.0
1 – 2	9	30.0
Stepsibling contact		
Both children sole custody	6	20.0
Both children shared custody	12	40.0
Target stepchild shared custody	8	26.7
Target biological child shared custody	4	13.3

¹ n=30

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Step/mothers

Characteristic	Absolute Frequency ¹	Percentage
Biological children from previous partnership		
1 – 2	26	86.7
3 – 4	3	10.0
5 or more	1	3.3
Custody of biological children		
Sole custody of all biological children	14	46.7
Shared custody of all biological children	15	50.0
Sole & shared custody of biological children	1	3.3
Education history		
High school or less	14	46.7
Any post-secondary education	16	53.3
Previous Marital Status		
Never Married	3	10.0
Co-habitation	4	13.3
Divorced	22	73.3
Separated	1	3.3
Widowed	0	0.0
Cultural Background		
No stated affiliation	24	80.0
European - Canadian	4	13.3
African – Canadian	1	3.3
Aboriginal	1	3.3

¹ n=30

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Step/fathers

Characteristic	Absolute Frequency ¹	Percentage
Biological children from previous partnership		
1 – 2	24	80.0
3 – 4	6	20.0
Custody of biological children		
Sole custody of all biological children	11	36.7
Shared custody of all biological children	18	60.0
Sole & Shared custody of biological children	1	3.3
Education history		
High school or less	14	46.7
Any post-secondary education	16	53.3
Previous Marital Status		
Never Married	3	10.0
Co-habitation	3	10.0
Divorced	22	73.3
Separated	1	3.3
Widowed	1	3.3
Cultural Background		
No stated affiliation	25	83.3
European – Canadian	3	10.0
African – Canadian	1	3.3
Aboriginal	1	3.3

¹ n=30

Procedure

Recruitment

The recruitment methods used for the present study included advertising via posters, ad bag flyers, local newspaper, and parent letters in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Advertising posters were circulated to several community centres including South Winnipeg Family Information Centre, Child and Family Resource Centre of Windsor Park/Southdale and YM/YWCA. In addition, a letter (see Appendix A) explaining the purpose and nature of the study was mailed to directors of various school-age daycares requesting verbal permission to post the advertising posters in their centres. Interested stepfamilies could call a telephone number advertised on the poster.

By far, the most successful method of recruitment was ad bag advertisements. Winnipeg residents receive a small bag of local flyers and advertisements in their mailboxes every Sunday morning. Colourful flyers advertised in the present study were distributed in ad bags to various neighbourhoods around the city. The cost of sending ad bag flyers was inexpensive (\$35 for 1000 flyers) and targeted a large population. Interested stepfamilies were asked to call a telephone number on the flyer.

Placing classified ads in the Winnipeg Free Press was another cost-efficient way to reach a large sample of the general population. Since stepfamilies were paid a \$25 honorarium for their participation, short advertisements were placed under the "general help wanted" section inviting interested stepfamilies to make a telephone call if they wished to participate.

Stepfamilies left messages at a University of Manitoba telephone number which were forwarded to the researcher. Each stepfamily was then screened by several standardized questions (Appendix B) to ensure they met the qualifications of the study. Interviews, which were conducted in the respondent's home, were also scheduled at this time. One-time home visits lasted approximately 60 minutes. At the completion of a home visit, step/parents were also given a letter (Appendix C) to distribute to another stepfamily that may be interested in the study, therefore a "snowball" recruitment technique was also utilized.

Home Visit

All protocols were first piloted on five stepfamilies to ensure that instructions were clear and that estimated time of completion was reasonable. Both the researcher of the present study and a research assistant conducted home visits. Upon arrival at the participant's home, rapport was established by introducing researchers and talking to family members for a few minutes. At the outset, step/mothers were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix D) and a receipt for their honorarium. Then, step/mothers and the target child were separated and interviewed in private rooms of their home.

The researcher always interviewed the step/mother. First, the Step/parent Stepsibling Conflict Interview (SSCI) (Appendix E) was administered. This interview was audiotaped and lasted approximately 15 minutes. Step/mothers were then asked to complete the Family Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix F) and Parental Expectations and the Perceptions of Children's Sibling

Relationship Questionnaire (PEPC-SRQ) (Appendix G). The researcher provided brief explanations of each measure and assisted if necessary. If a step/father wished to participate, he was first asked to work on the PEPC-SRQ while his partner was being interviewed, after which he was interviewed using the SSCI. Other measures were also administered but they were not included as part of the present study. The entire step/parent protocol lasted 30 to 40 minutes.

At the same time that step/parent protocol was conducted, a research assistant interviewed target child participants. Both the Sibling Relationship Interview (SRI) (Appendix H) and the Stepsibling Conflict Interview (SCI) (Appendix I) were administered and audiotaped. Other measures, which were not included in the present study, were also administered. Child protocols lasted 45 minutes on average. Upon completion, children were rewarded with a small gift as a token of appreciation, which included age-appropriate items such as a calendar and pencils, an activity book and marker, or a \$2 gift certificate to Cinema City. At the end of home visits, stepfamilies were notified that a summary of results concerning groups, not individuals, from the present study would be mailed to them. Feedback letters to parents and directors of daycares are currently in progress and will include a summary of results from the present study as well as findings from additional measurements which were administered but not included in the present study.

Measures

Family Demographic Questionnaire

Step/mothers were asked to complete a short questionnaire concerning demographic information about the stepfamily (Appendix F), which was created for the present study. For children, step/mothers were asked to list biological kinship, age, sex, and contact with absent biological parents for all children in the remarried household. Thus, children from previous partnerships who did not have any contact with family members of the remarried household were not included in the sample. Step/mothers were also asked descriptive information about themselves and their partner including age, schooling, previous marital status and cultural affiliation. Finally, the number of years in the current remarriage and total family income was also included in the measure.

Step/mother Measures

Step/parent Stepsibling Conflict Interview (SSCI).

The SSCI included a series of open-ended questions concerning how step/mothers responded to stepsibling conflicts (Appendix E). The structure of the SSCI was adapted from Piotrowski, Morga, Keast and Arnould (1996). Some wording was modified from its original format in order to maintain relevance to stepfamily dynamics. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

The two main questions associated with the SSCI that were most relevant to step/mother hypotheses were “What do you usually do when you intervene?” and “Do you find yourself supporting one child more than the other in stepsibling conflicts? - Is he/she more of an instigator?”. Two raters independently coded

60% of the maternal interviews: inter-coder agreement on identification of maternal intervention strategies was 80%. Step/mothers described a total of eight intervention strategies ($\kappa=1.0$), including five low power strategies (discussion, separation, distraction, comfort, refraining from intervention) and three high power strategies (punishment, yelling, simple commands). See Appendix J for SSCI coding definitions and examples of maternal intervention strategies. As illustrated in Figure 1, step/mothers reported that they either employed only high power strategies, only low power strategies, or they relied on using both high and low power strategies when intervening into stepsibling conflicts. For the purpose of analyses, step/mothers were collapsed into two groups: those who employed only low power strategies ($n=16$), and those who used high/low power strategies ($n=14$). The later category combined step/mothers who reported *only* using high power strategies, as well as a *combination* of high and low power strategies.

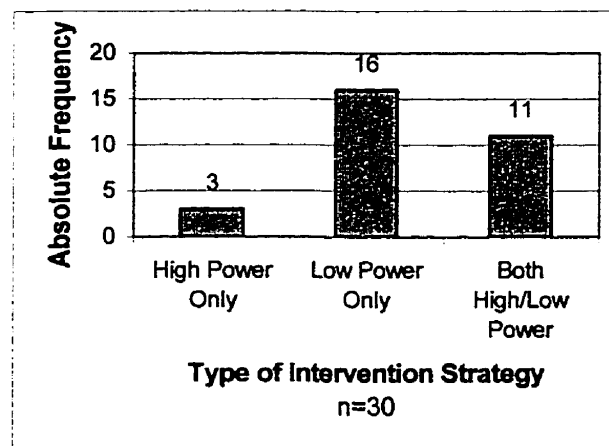


Figure 1. Absolute frequency scores for type of step/mother intervention strategies (SSCI).

As illustrated in Figure 2, step/mothers were also asked a closed-ended question concerning whether they tended to attribute blame to either their biological child ($n= 11$) or stepchild ($n= 4$) more often, or to both children relatively consistently ($n=14$) when they intervened into a stepsibling conflict. For the purpose of analyses, attribution of blame was collapsed into two categories, sole blame and shared blame. The sole attribution of blame category ($n=15$) combined step/mothers who tended to attribute blame more often to their biological child or their stepchild, while the shared blame ($n=14$) category continued to reflect attribution to both children.

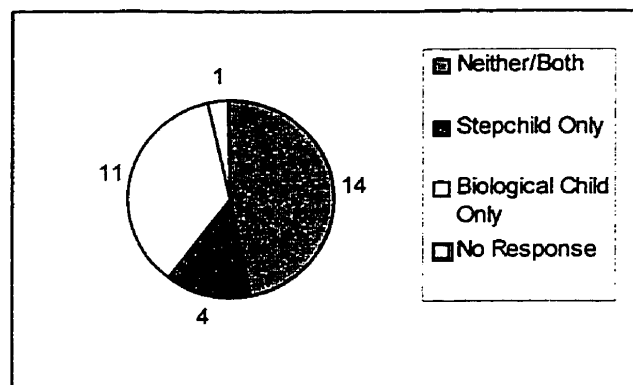


Figure 2. Absolute frequency scores for step/mother attribution of blame (SSCI).

Other questions in the SSCI were also administered, but were not directly related to hypothesis testing. Refer to Appendix E for sample questions.

Parental Expectations and Perceptions of Children's Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (PEPC-SRQ).

The PEPC-SRQ is a self-report instrument developed by Kramer and Baron (1995) that assessed parental appraisals of the quality of sibling relationships on three factors, warmth, agonism, and rivalry/competition

(Appendix G). The PEPC-SRQ has previously been used with two-parent, middle class families with children ranging in age from 14 months to 8 years. However, Kramer and Baron agreed that with minor modifications, the instrument could also be appropriate for families with children up to age 18. The PEPC-SRQ integrates direct and discrepant strategies. These two approaches assess both the degree to which parents perceive the actual sibling relationship and the consistency of this sibling relationship with parental goals and standards.

As reported by Kramer and Baron (1995), test-retest correlations three months apart for parental perceptions of children's reported behavior were .71 for warmth, .47 for agonism, and .37 for rivalry/competition. Construct validity was supported by similar factors derived by other standardized measures such as the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) and the Sibling Relationship Inventory (Stocker & McHale, 1992).

For the purpose of the present study, items pertaining to step/mother perceptions of the stepsibling relationship was used to measure quality on the three factors; warmth, agonism and rivalry. Using a 5-point Likert scale, step/mothers rated how often 12 positive and 10 negative behaviors occurred in their children's stepsibling interaction in the past two weeks. The warmth subscale ($\alpha = .85$) consisted of 12 items: pride, protectiveness, comfort, loyalty, help, respect, sharing worries, talking to each other, going out together, sharing, and teaching. Agonism ($\alpha = .77$) consisted of 7 items: fighting over objects, fighting over territory, arguing, aggression, anger, threats, and unresolved conflicts. The Rivalry subscale ($\alpha = .83$) consisted of 3 items: rivalry,

competition, and jealousy. For the purpose of the present analyses, agonism and rivalry subscales were combined into a global Perceived Conflict subscale ($\alpha = .85$).

Child Measures

Sibling Relationship Interview (SRI).

The SRI is a 26-item self-report instrument originally developed by Stocker and McHale (1990). However, Stormshak, Bellanti, and Bierman (1996) later adapted the instrument and this second version was used in the present study. The instrument assessed four dimensions of sibling relationships: affection, hostility, rivalry and power/symmetry (Appendix H). Children were asked to rate the frequency of positive and negative dimensions of their sibling relationship on a 4-point Likert scale. For each item, the child was the initiator of the behavior (e.g., "How often do you start fights with your brother/sister?) and the recipient of the behavior (e.g., "How often does your brother/sister start fights with you?).

According to Stocker and McHale (1992) items loaded on three factors of affection, hostility, and rivalry scales; however, the relative power/symmetry dimension did not emerge from factor analyses. These authors reported that Cronbach alphas for affection, hostility, and rivalry were .82, .84, and .74, respectively, for target children and .72, .88, and .71, respectively for target siblings. Test-retest correlations one year apart for target children were .64 for affection, .32 for hostility, and .51 for rivalry. Likewise, to support validity of the SRI, children used a 1-9 Likert scale to rate how happy they were with affection, hostility and rivalry dimensions of their sibling relationship, and total scores were

created by summing children's ratings. Correlations between this measure and the SRI revealed that relationship satisfaction was positively correlated with reports of affection (.51, .49) and negatively correlated with reports of hostility (-.36, -.35) and rivalry (-.30, -.37) for first-born and second-born children, respectively.

In the present study, a factor analysis was conducted separately for items reflecting initiated versus received behavior (using a principal-component analysis with varimax rotation). As expected, only two factors emerged based on item content (warmth and conflict). Although Stocker and McHale (1990) reported a third scale related to rivalry, this factor did not emerge for the present sample. These factor analyses replicated those of Stormshak et al. (1996); therefore, only warmth and conflict subscales were used in the present study.

Both the warmth and conflict subscales consisted of five separate items that the child rated on two dimensions; received and initiated, for a total of 10 items in each subscale. The items that composed the warmth subscale ($\alpha = .87$) included: mutual play, sharing, affection, sharing secrets, and comforting the stepsibling. The conflict subscale ($\alpha = .84$) items included stealing, mean behavior, fighting, physical aggression, and anger.

Stepsibling Conflict Interview (SCI).

This interview, adapted from Stein (1997), assessed the nature of stepsibling conflicts (Appendix I). Children were asked a series of open-ended questions pertaining to a recent conflict with their stepsibling, and step/parents responses to these conflicts. It was audiotaped and transcribed.

The two main questions associated with the SCI that were most relevant to the child hypotheses were “What does your mother usually do when she gets involved in conflicts between you and (stepsibling name)?” and “Who does she usually blame when you and (stepsibling) are in conflict?”. Child interviews were coded using the same coding scheme of intervention strategies that emerged from the SSCI (Appendix J) which consisted of five low power strategies (discussion, separation, distraction, comfort, refraining from intervention), and three high power strategies (punishment, yelling, simple commands). Figure 3 illustrates the type of maternal intervention strategy that target children reported in stepsibling conflicts. As with step/mothers, target children responses were also collapsed into two categories based on whether they reported only low power strategies (n=16), or reported high/low power strategies (n=14) (combining only high power with both high and low power).

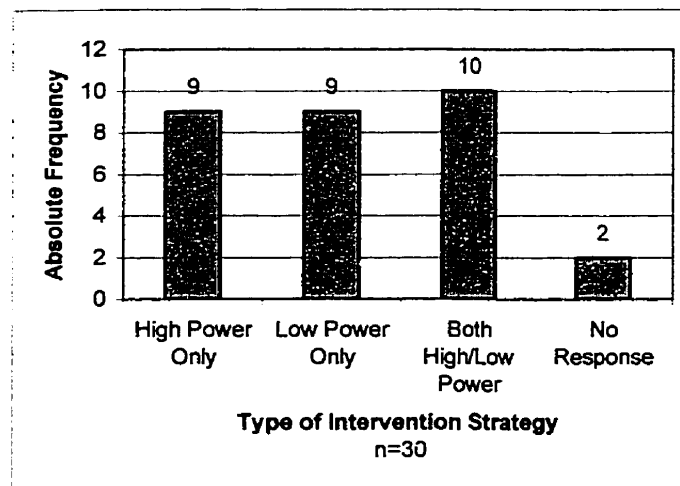


Figure 3. Absolute frequency scores for target child reports of maternal intervention strategies (SCI).

As illustrated in Figure 4, target biological children were also asked a closed-ended question concerning whether they perceived that their mother attributed blame to themselves ($n=4$) or their stepsibling ($n=9$) more often, or to both of them relatively consistently ($n=20$) when mothers intervened into a stepsibling conflict. Again, as with the SSCI, attribution of blame was collapsed into two mutually exclusive categories, sole blame ($n=9$) which combined perceived blame directed solely toward either child and shared blame ($n=20$).

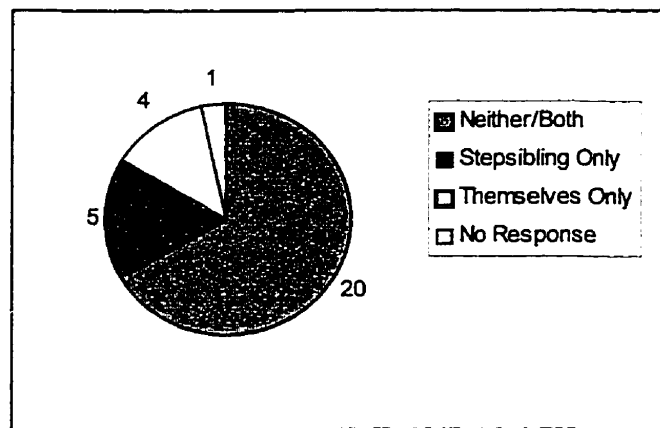


Figure 4. Absolute frequency scores for target child perception of maternal attribution of blame using the SCI.

To assess the role of biological kinship in stepsibling conflict, target children were asked a closed-ended question regarding which parent (biological mother, biological father, stepmother or stepfather) they felt would be most supportive of them in stepsibling conflict situations. Other questions were also administered as part of the SCI; however, as they were not directly related to hypothesis testing they are not included in the present study. Refer to Appendix I for sample questions.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

Since the nature of the present study was exploratory and the sample size was relatively small, the alpha level was set at $p < .10$ for all analyses. Logistic regression analysis was utilized and requires a number of assumptions that were necessary to consider. These assumptions are a random sample of participants, equivalent proportions between groups and comparative demographic characteristics, and data that are free of outliers and miscellaneous errors (Afifi & Clark, 1990). Descriptive information concerning warmth and conflict variables used to measure the quality of stepsibling relationship is presented in Table 4.

Overall, step/mothers rated the stepsibling relationship positively. As presented in Table 4, PEPC-SRQ scores on perceptions of warmth and conflict could range between from 20 to 100. Although the perceptions of step/mothers varied across the sample, their views on warmth ($M=63$) and conflict ($M=49$) subscales were similar. That is, step/mothers generally did not perceived the target stepsibling relationship to be highly affectionate or extremely conflictual, but rather relatively warm with some conflict occurring. Children also viewed the quality of their stepsibling relationship positively; scores on the SRI could range from 45 to 100. Their responses varied across the sample, and the difference between their reports of warmth ($M=68$) and conflict ($M=49$) appear similar. Children's perceptions appeared to be similar to step/mothers; however, since their responses were collected from two different measurements, a statistical comparison was not conducted.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Quality on Stepsibling Relationship

<u>Variables</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>SD</u>
Hypothesis 1: Step/mother (PEPC-SRQ) ¹			
Perceived warmth	63	60	11.4
Perceived conflict	49	48	11.0
Hypothesis 2: Child (SRI) ²			
Warmth	68	53	16.7
Conflict	49	56	14.8

¹ maximum range = 20-100 for warmth and conflict using PEPC-SRQ;
observed range: 43-95 (warmth) / 24-84(conflict) in present sample.

² maximum range = 25-100 for warmth and conflict using SRI;
observed range: 45-100 (warmth) / 25-75 (conflict) in present sample.

Hypothesis 1: Step/mother

Logistic regression was used to determine if continuous variables concerning the quality of the stepsibling relationship (perceived warmth and perceived conflict) could significantly predict categories of step/mothers reports of their intervention strategies (low power only versus high and/or low power). Three separate regression analyses were conducted: first, with perceived warmth as the sole predictor, second, with perceived conflict as the sole predictor, and third, with both perceived warmth and conflicts as joint predictors.

Corresponding logistic regression analyses were used to assess whether continuous variables concerning the quality of stepsibling relationship (perceived warmth and perceived conflict) predicted categories of maternal attribution of blame (sole blame versus shared blame) in stepsibling conflicts. Again, three separate regression analyses were conducted; first, with perceived warmth alone, second, with perceived conflict alone, and last, with perceived warmth and conflict as joint predictors of maternal attribution of blame.

Hypothesis 2: Child

Logistic regression was also used to determine if continuous variables concerning the quality of the stepsibling relationship (children's reports of warmth and conflict) could significantly predict categories of target children's perceptions of maternal intervention strategies (low power only versus high and/or low power). As with step/mothers, three separate regression analyses were conducted; first, with children's reports of warmth as the sole predictor, second, with reported conflict as the sole predictor, and last, with warmth and conflict as joint predictors of children's perceptions of maternal intervention strategies.

Likewise final series of three regression analyses were conducted to determine whether the quality of stepsibling relationship (warmth alone, conflict alone, warmth and conflict jointly) could significantly predict categories of attribution of blame (sole blame versus shared blame) based on children's perceptions of maternal intervention into stepsibling conflicts.

Hypothesis 3: kinship ties

It was expected that target children would be more likely to expect support from their biological parents than from their stepparents in stepsibling conflict situations. To test this hypothesis, a t -test comparing the proportion of children expecting support from their biological parents and their stepparents was conducted.

Results

Test of Hypothesis 1: Step/mother

It was predicted that the more warmth and affection step/mothers perceived in the target stepsibling relationship, the more likely they would be to report using low power intervention strategies in stepsibling conflict. Conversely, step/mother perceptions of conflict and rivalry were expected to predict maternal reports of high power intervention strategies into stepsibling conflict.

Logistic regression analyses were conducted to assess if step/mother perceptions of stepsibling warmth and conflict (predictor) would distinguish the likelihood of maternal reports using only low power strategies versus a combination of high and low power strategies (outcome) when they intervened into stepsibling conflicts. As presented in Table 5, these analyses revealed that neither perceived warmth nor perceived conflict alone significantly predicted a step/mother's tendency to report either type of conflict intervention strategy. Further, perceptions of warmth and conflict as joint predictors were not statistically significant (see Table 5).

Table 5

Results of Logistic Regression for Step/mother Reports Predicting the Likelihood of Maternal Intervention Strategies and Patterns of Blame

Variables	R ²
Low Power Only vs High/Low Power	
1. Conflict alone	0.0008
2. Warmth alone	0.0647
3. Conflict and Warmth	0.0656
Sole Blame vs Shared Blame	
1. Conflict alone	0.0354
2. Warmth alone	0.0000
3. Conflict and Warmth	0.0374

$p < .01$

In addition, it was expected that the more warmth and affection step/mothers perceived in the target stepsibling relationship, the more likely they would be to report a balanced pattern in their attribution of blame. Conversely, perceptions of more conflict and rivalry were expected to predict a more biased pattern in their attribution of blame of stepsibling conflict situations. Again, a series of three logistic regression analyses were conducted. Neither maternal

perceptions of warmth alone or conflict alone significantly predicted patterns of blame (see Table 5). In addition, maternal perceptions of warmth and conflict as joint predictors were also not significant (see Table 5).

Since the present study was exploratory in nature, an additional correlational analysis examining the association between the number of differing intervention strategies mothers mentioned and degree of warmth and conflict they reported between stepsiblings was conducted (see Table 6). Since the categories of intervention strategies were not mutually exclusive (see Figure 5), a step/mother could report any combination of low power and high power intervention strategies. Further, since the question was open-ended, step/mothers in this sample mentioned a maximum variety of five different low power strategies compared to a maximum of three different high power strategies. Three separate correlational analyses were conducted. First, the number or variety of differing low power strategies step/mothers reported was correlated with their perceptions of stepsibling warmth and conflict. Step/mother's perceptions of warmth in the stepsibling relationship were significantly correlated with the number of low power strategies they mentioned, $r(30) = .32, p < .10$ (see Table 6). Secondly, a correlation assessing the association between the number of times step/mothers mentioned a differing high power strategy and their perceptions of warmth and conflict was conducted; however, the correlation was not significant. Since the maximum of differing high power strategies was small, this extremely restricted range prompted a third correlational analysis which included the total number of reported strategies

(range =1-8; combination of all high power and low power types of strategies) and perceptions of warmth and conflict; however this correlation was not significant.

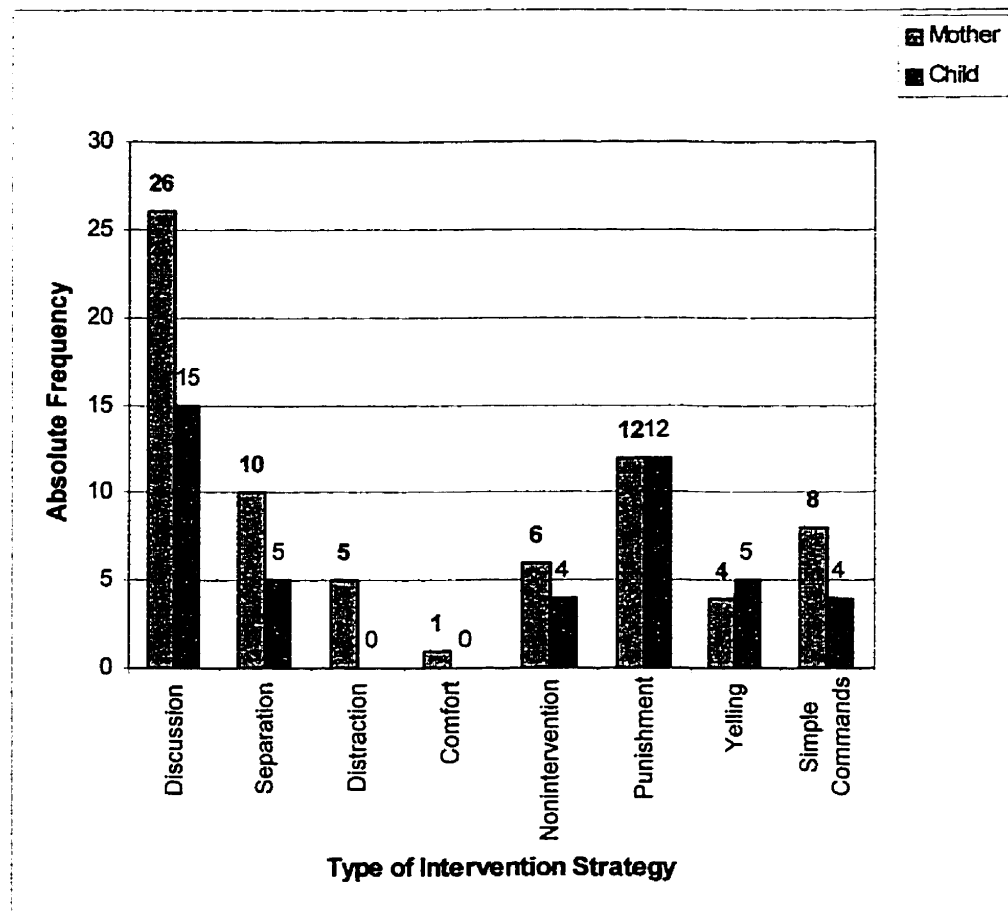


Figure 5. Step/mother (SSCI) and child (SCI) reports of maternal intervention strategies into stepsibling conflicts.

Table 6

Correlations Between Quality of Stepsibling Relationship and Number of Intervention Strategies for Step/mothers and Target Children

Subscales ¹	<u>Number of Intervention Strategies</u>		
	High Power	Low Power	Total Strategies
Step/mothers (n=30)			
1. Perceived Warmth	-.11	.32*	.14
2. Perceived Conflict	.02	.05	.05
Target Children (n=30)			
1. Warmth	.13	.02	-.29
2. Conflict	.24	-.06	.23

¹ maximum range for differing high power strategies (1-3);
maximum range for differing low power strategies (1-5);
maximum range for total number differing intervention strategies (1-8).

* $p < .10$

Test of Hypothesis 2: Child

It was expected that the more warmth and affection target children reported in their stepsibling relationship, the more likely they would be to perceive maternal intervention strategies into stepsibling conflicts as low power. Conversely, children who reported more conflict and rivalry in their stepsibling relationship were expected to perceive maternal intervention strategies as high power.

Logistic regression analyses were conducted to assess if children's perceptions of stepsibling warmth and conflict predicted children's perceptions of maternal intervention strategies on the basis of power. As with step/mothers, a series of three separate regression equations were performed utilizing children's reports of warmth as a sole predictor, conflict as a sole predictor and, lastly, with warmth and conflict as joint predictors. As presented in Table 7, these analyses were not significant.

In addition, it was expected that more warmth and affection children reported in their stepsibling relationship, the more likely they would perceive a balanced pattern of attribution of blame when their mothers intervened into their stepsibling conflicts. A final series of three logistic regression analyses were conducted. Analyses utilizing warmth and conflict as the sole predictors of blame were not significant. The final analysis conducted on warmth and conflict as joint predictors did not yield significant regression coefficients (see Table 7).

As with step/mothers, further exploratory correlation analyses were conducted to assess the link between the number of differing maternal intervention strategies children perceived (refer to Figure 5) and their reports of warmth and conflict in their stepsibling relationship. Again, the key component was the number of different times children reported a low power strategy compared to a high power strategy. As presented in Table 6, children's reports of warmth and conflict were not associated to either high power or low power strategies; the total number of maternal intervention strategies reported also did not yield significant findings.

Table 7

Results of Logistic Regression for Target Children Reports Predicting the
Likelihood of Maternal Intervention Strategies and Patterns of Blame

Variables	R ²
Low Power Only vs High/Low Power	
4. Conflict alone	0.0161
5. Warmth alone	0.0743
6. Conflict and Warmth	0.0969
Sole Blame vs Shared Blame	
4. Conflict alone	0.0000
5. Warmth alone	0.0071
6. Conflict and Warmth	0.0071

$p < .01$

Test of Hypothesis 3: Kinship ties

Target children were expected to anticipate more support from their biological parents than from their stepparents in stepsibling conflict situations. As illustrated in Figure 6, children overwhelmingly reported that either their biological mother (n=13) or biological father (n=7) would offer them support during a

stepsibling conflict as compared to stepparents ($n=1$). Not surprisingly, t -tests revealed significant differences between the proportions of expected biological parent ($p=.71$) versus stepparent ($p=.41$) support, $t(28) = 2.33$, $p < .05$.

Therefore, the third hypothesis was supported.

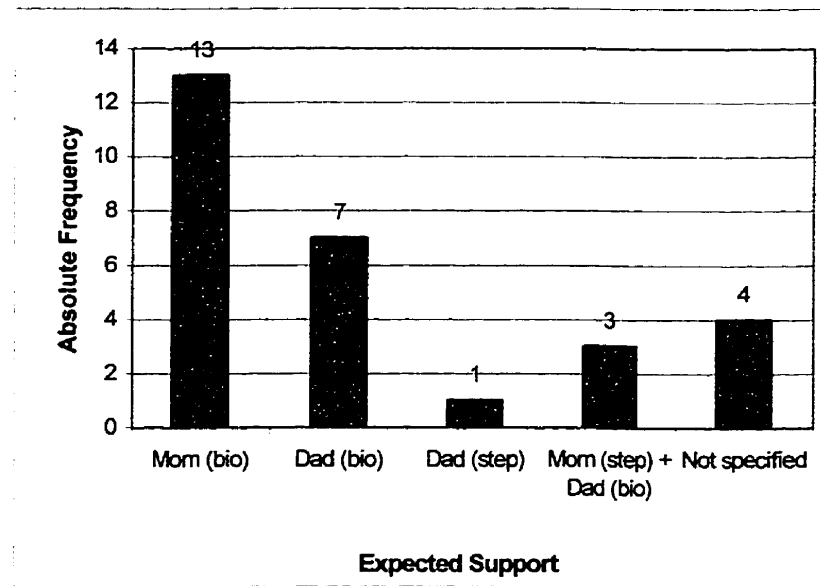


Figure 6. Absolute frequency scores for children reports of expected support in stepsibling conflicts (SCI).

Discussion

Like stepfamilies in general, stepsibling relations force us to reformulate our thinking about the meaning of family. Most research has focused on the direct effect the stepparent-stepchild dyad has on children's adjustment into stepfamilies (e.g., Brock, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1993b; Gold, Bubenzer, &

West, 1993; Hobart, 1991). However, other research found that sibling connections are relevant to the development of a sense of self and have considerable potential for affecting children's well-being (Boer & Dunn, 1992). What has been overlooked is the effect that stepsiblings have on each other, and how this relationship contributes to positive or negative effects on the structure of the entire stepfamily (Ganong & Coleman, 1993a). Accordingly, the main purpose of the present study was to examine perceptions of both adults and children concerning stepsibling relationships by addressing both warmth and conflict present in their relationships. To study stepsibling relations in isolation would ignore the importance of parental influences in how stepsiblings get along; therefore, parental management of stepsibling conflicts was also investigated.

Step/mother Perceptions

The first question addressed in the present study concerned the perceptions of step/mothers. It was expected that maternal perceptions of warmth in the stepsibling relationship would be predictive of their reports of low power intervention strategies in stepsibling conflicts, as well as a balanced pattern in their attribution of blame between stepsiblings. Conversely, their perceptions of conflict in the stepsibling relationship were expected to predict reports of high power intervention strategies and a biased pattern of blame. Although the findings of the present study did not yield strong evidence to support these predictions, they helped to isolate issues that may be key to researching stepsiblings and the effect of parental influences on their relationships. A number of specific factors that may have contributed to the

present findings will be discussed; however, the following section will first address some general observations worthy of consideration.

First, it is important to bear in mind that the design of the present study was based on self-report instruments. Perceptions of step/mothers and their biological children were of key importance in the present study, as these perceptions characterize how different individuals of the same stepfamily feel about similar events. Observational data were not included and may well have yielded different interpretations. Previous observational work on sibling conflicts has exclusively investigated first-married families. Interestingly, the results of observations of parent intervention strategies into sibling conflicts (Martin & Ross, 1995) appear to differ from the findings of the present study on step/mother perceptions. Even with school-age children, mothers were observed to react to sibling conflicts using mainly high power strategies such as simple commands (Trickett & Kuczynski, 1986), as opposed to step/mothers in the present study, who mainly reported using low power discussion between stepsiblings to stop their conflict. Perceptions of events may paint a different picture than observable behavior; however, they are important in providing insight into salient features of individual viewpoints which are often discrepant even with members of the same household (Larson, 1994). Further, perceptions of individuals are often important predictors of later psychosocial development (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995).

Second, the fact that step/parents do intervene into stepsibling conflicts was confirmed in the present study (Ganong & Coleman, 1993a). In fact, no

step/mothers admitted that conflicts were completely absent from the target stepsibling relationship or that nonintervention was their only response to all stepsibling conflicts. Since parents are important socializing agents, how step/mothers reported responding to stepsibling conflicts was highlighted in the present study. These findings on maternal intervention and attribution of blame into stepsibling conflicts are fascinating and unprecedented to the area of stepfamily research.

It should be noted that intervention strategies step/mothers reported in the present study, including both low power responses (e.g., discussion, separation, distraction, comforting, nonintervention) and high power responses (e.g., punishment, yelling, simple commands) replicated previous research on parent responses to sibling conflict in first-married families (Piotrowski et al., 1996). Previous research found a positive correlation between high power intervention strategies and reports of sibling aggression (e.g., Boldizar, Kharti, & Jones, 1991; Larzelere, 1986; Piotrowski et al., 1996). However, the findings of the present study did not provide conclusive evidence that type of intervention strategies and maternal attribution of blame were associated with step/mothers' perceptions of the quality of the stepsibling relationship. Although the correlational findings were very modest, there was some evidence to suggest that a link exists between type of maternal intervention strategy, attribution of blame and the level of warmth and conflict step/mothers perceived.

As noted earlier, the majority of stepmothers viewed the stepsibling relationship positively with regard to warmth and cooperation, but also

acknowledged challenging aspects of this relationship as well, such as conflict and rivalry. These findings replicated previous research (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1993a) which initially explored the nature of stepsibling relationships and found such ambivalence in both the perceptions of step/parents and children. This combination of warmth and conflict is quite common in any sibling relationship (Dunn, 1992), and it makes logical sense that such ambivalence would be present in stepsibling relationships as well. In addition, an overwhelming majority of step/mothers in the present study tended to report adopting a low power method of intervention into stepsibling conflicts. They hesitated when asked if they would attribute blame solely to one child. However, since the results of the present study were not conclusive, the existence of a link between the nature of the stepsibling relationship and parental management of their conflicts should be questioned and researched further.

However, on the other end of the continuum, a few step/mothers reported that their remarried household was clearly divided along the lines of biology. One step/mother reported "I'm always saying 'your kids', or he's saying 'mine'...so even our kids say that". Based on anecdotal evidence from interviews, these step/mothers perceived very high conflict in the stepsibling relationship and coincidentally intervened using mostly high power methods, such as separation and yelling. They often punished and blamed their stepchild for instigating the majority of stepsibling conflicts. Given that such a situation may exist in some stepfamilies, a number of factors which help to explain the present findings must also be taken into account, including demographic

characteristics of the sample, age and/or developmental stage of stepsiblings, structural complexity of stepfamilies, and the development of the stepfamily within the context of the Stepfamily Cycle.

First and foremost, the homogeneity of the present sample needs to be addressed. Previous research has been criticized for using populations that are too heterogeneous; therefore, the present study focused on a very specific type of stepfamily (Beer, 1989). However, an important criticism in this field of research is that overgeneralizations of limited samples tend to be applied to all type of stepfamilies (e.g., Bray & Kelly, 1998). As noted earlier, stepfamilies come in many forms, ranging from one adult solely bringing a child from a previous partnership into a remarriage, to more complex networks such as when both partners of a remarriage bring children from previous partnerships. The present study examined the latter, more complex structure involving stepsiblings. Therefore, generalizations should not be made to any other forms of stepfamilies.

In addition, the present findings capture perceptions of individuals with particular demographic characteristics; participants were primarily Caucasian, middle-class, well-educated and without any specific ethnic or cultural affiliation other than Canadian. Therefore, the present findings are not representative of all types of complex stepfamilies. For instance, Canino and Spurlock (1994) reported that sociodemographic factors influence family functioning profoundly. They reviewed literature which identified social class and environment risk factors as added stressors to family cohesion. Further, ethnic values and beliefs which vary between cultures greatly effect the style of resolution and

management of conflict among siblings; "Cultures vary in their styles of discipline, which may be short-term or long-term and may involve physical punishment, embarrassment or shame, withdrawal of love, suspension of social and recreational activities, or deprivation of toys and television time " (Canino & Spurlock, 1994, p.55).

Age may be another factor in explaining the present results. In the current sample, the average age of both target biological children and target stepchildren was twelve years, with an average age difference being only two years. It may be the case that step/mothers are less likely to resort to using high power methods in middle childhood (Newman, 1994). At this point in their children's development, step/mothers may view stepsiblings as being mature and competent at working out their own disagreements with the need for little or very mild parental assistance.

Age may also account for the correlation found between high power maternal intervention and frequency of aggression in siblings found in previous research, since much of this work was based on siblings in early childhood (e.g., Piotrowski et al, 1996). The predicted association may not be as strong with older children as parents switch to using age-appropriate low power methods, and even less representative with stepsiblings relations as step/parents may be more hesitant adopting high power intervention strategies with their partner's children.

In addition, step/mothers may use low power methods as preferable methods of intervention into stepsibling conflicts because of the general nature of the stepfamily structure. Recent studies examining parental goals of disciplining

(e.g., Grusec, Rudy, & Martini, 1997; Hastings & Grusec, 1997) found reduction of conflict to be of primary importance for parents. Hence, when intervention into stepsibling conflict is necessary, step/mothers may choose methods that are more likely to teach children how to monitor their own behavior such as discussing the problem or a period of brief separation. Hastings and Grusec (1997) also found that parents aim to preserve a positive relationship with their children. It can be speculated that this goal may be especially relevant to step/mothers who get involved into stepsibling conflicts; the instigator may be irrelevant to step/mothers as their emphasis may be on preserving stepfamily harmony rather than to assign blame, pass judgement or even to punish the misbehavior. Future research should assess parental goals of intervention into stepsibling conflicts.

However, a comment is in order about the assessment of quality of intervention strategy compared to frequency of implementing intervention strategies. Clearly, the present study focused on a comparison between types of maternal intervention strategies, and it may be the case that two step/mothers who reported using a variety of high and low power strategies may differ substantially in the frequency with which each of them implemented these strategies. Nevertheless, the structural complexity of stepfamilies, including some biological ties and step relations, may warrant step/mothers to report using more low power compared to high power methods because it feels safer and less judgmental in their precarious relationship with their partner's children. The role

of disciplinarian is assumed by all step/parents, however it is inevitably built over a period of time just as the foundation of step relations solidifies:

One of the traps that many step/parents fall into is the belief that they become instant parents to their stepchildren once they start living with them. This belief frequently leads to conflict when step/parents try to discipline – especially early in stepfamily life – only to find that it doesn't go over very well. Children, and sometimes their parent, often challenge this intrusion into their psychological space (Newman, 1994, p.133).

Using high power maternal intervention when stepsibling conflicts are revolved around issues of loyalty places step/mothers in an uncomfortable position when they are trying to maintain cohesiveness within the stepfamily unit.

Therefore, because of the developmental age of stepsiblings and the intrusiveness of high power methods on their stepfamily unit, remarried partners may decide together to adopt low power methods when situations of stepsibling conflicts arise and it is necessary for them to intervene.

Time together as a stepfamily is another crucial variable to consider in stepfamily research. At the time of the present study, the majority of stepfamilies lived together an average of four years in the remarried household. Hence, relationships between parents and children and among the children themselves had time to establish, despite the fact that most children lived in a shared custody arrangement with their other biological parent. According to the Stepfamily Cycle many of these stepfamilies have already surpassed the early stages and have moved into the middle stages (Papernow, 1984). Therefore, stepfamilies have

shifted from disorientation and confusion, which is typically found with newly formed stepfamilies, towards self-acceptance and clarity.

It is proposed that step/mothers would perceive stepsibling relationships in these middle stages as warm and cooperative because they have had time to adjust and accept each other as family members, and step/parents would begin to operate as partners with their spouses on step issues. However, step/mothers would also perceive greater conflict because with the establishment of these relationships often comes a "period which is noisy, frightening, chaotic time, as greater expressiveness between members exposes painful differences between the biological and step experience of the family" (Papernow, 1988, p.68). The middle stages have been typically characterized as more conflictual, as members of stepfamilies become more expressive of their demands and expectations. In this context, it is not surprising to find that type of maternal intervention strategy did not predict warmth and conflict in the present study, if low power methods into stepsibling conflict are more common during the middle stages and conflict and rivalry are ubiquitous and incessant. This may not be the case early in the fantasy stage of stepfamily life, when step/parents have been found to portray a rosy picture of their stepfamily life filled only with happiness and warmth, or in the later stages when middle ground has been firmly established and stepsibling relationships have gained a sense of durability (Papernow, 1989).

Child Perceptions

The second question addressed in the present study concerned perceptions of children. As with step/mothers, it was expected that children's

reports of warmth in the stepsibling relationship would be predictive of their perceptions of low power maternal intervention strategies, as well as a balanced pattern in their perceptions of maternal attribution of blame in stepsibling conflicts. Conversely, their reports of conflict in the stepsibling relationship were expected to predict perceptions of high power maternal intervention strategies and a biased pattern of blame. Again, the findings did not yield strong evidence supporting these predictions. Factors that were discussed earlier in the context of step/mother perceptions also apply to the results of children reports, such as age of stepsiblings, years living together as a stepfamily and the development of stepsibling relationships within the context of the Stepfamily Cycle. An additional component of normative patterns in child development pertinent to understanding stepsibling relationships will also be addressed.

As with step/mothers, children had similar views of the quality of their stepsibling relationship, reporting moderate levels of both warmth and conflict. Previous research has found age and sex to be two strong bases for stepsibling alliance (Beer, 1989). In the present study, stepsiblings have been present in each other's lives from the onset of their middle childhood years. From a developmental perspective, middle childhood is a period where children develop a more pervasive sense of self (Garbarino & Stott, 1992). Further, their perspective-taking skills enable them to be more aware of others' emotions and feelings, and they begin to develop rules that guide them in comparing their idealized self to others. Consequently, the cognitive, social and emotional

capabilities of children during their middle years shifts and the roles of peers and siblings become more egalitarian (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Dunn, 1992).

Unlike biological sibling relationships, which begin at the birth of the younger child, stepsibling relationships are formed later in a child's life when two broken family structures are joined into one. During the middle childhood years, children may feel resentment towards their biological parent and bitterness towards their stepparent; however, sympathy towards another child in a similar situation may drive the alliance of stepsiblings. In addition, the lack of a biological connection, and similarity in age and sex, may feel safe to stepsiblings and result in warm and supportive coalitions. Finally, alliances among stepsiblings may serve an additional purpose of a powerful tool to influence parental judgement if presented as a united front.

Individual differences and forced togetherness will inevitably breed conflict and rivalry in stepsibling relationships, but for different reasons during middle childhood and pre-adolescence. Since the average age of stepsiblings in the present sample was twelve years old, it can be inferred that many, but not all, of these children were on the verge of puberty. Laursen and Brett (1994) argued that a number of age-related changes in sibling conflicts behaviors occurred with the onset of puberty, including an increase in incidence and intensity. Further, research has also examined the developmental age of stepchildren and found that the process of identity formation, including separateness and individuation was a very powerful influence on children in stepfamilies (Newman, 1994). The typical developmental stage of these children is also a time where "the

togetherness force begins to exert its strength in the creation of the new family. The teenager seeks to separate in order to seek his or her identity. The question “who am I?” becomes a burning psychological issue, and stepfamily values are frequently challenged and flaunted” (Newman, 1994, p.26). Consequently, conflict among stepsiblings may serve multiple purposes. Conflict may challenge the harmony of the stepfamily unit and clarify roles for step/parents, but also create opportunities for pre-adolescents in the stepfamily to establish a greater sense of independence and autonomy.

Kinship Ties

The final question addressed in the present study concerned kinship ties. It was expected that target children would expect more support from their biological parents than from their stepparents during stepsibling conflicts. The findings supported this hypothesis.

Children overwhelmingly chose their biological parents over their stepparents with regard to support in stepsibling conflict situations, with the majority of children selecting their biological mother. These findings replicated previous research (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1994) which discovered the relationship between the residential parent and biological child to be the closest bond. This bond was especially strong upon formation of the stepfamily, even stronger than the union of the remarried couple. This is not surprising since the relationships between biological parents and children pre-date the remarried family household.

It should be noted that children expected support from other family members as well. Relationships are not static. They change over time in response to developmental modifications of other close relationships. In fact, the findings of the present study also indicated that support was not limited to the remarried household and children, but it often referred to nonresidential parents as well. A number of children ($n=7$) in the sample selected their biological father, and a few ($n=3$) even reported that their biological father together with their stepmother as most supportive to them.

Within the context of the Stepfamily Cycle, it is not surprising that during the middle stages children would not expect support from their stepparent (Papernow, 1984). This is a period involving hard labor in solidifying all step relations, and it is not until later stages that a clearly identifiable stepparent-stepchild role emerges. At the same time, the negotiations that are pervasive among stepfamily members during the middle stages often permeate the boundaries of the remarried household. With the majority of children in shared custody arrangements, greater parental involvement by both biological parents is inevitable. Therefore, when stepsiblings are in conflict and adults in the remarried household are intervening to maintain cohesiveness of the stepfamily, it may lead children to doubt their personal loyalty, consequently shift their expectations of support to nonresidential parents (Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

To this end, the findings on kinship ties in the present study challenge previous findings on differential parental treatment in sibling conflicts of first-married families (e.g., Dunn & Munn, 1986). In first-married families, it has been

found that parents typically intervened in favour of younger siblings (birth-order effects); however, in stepfamilies it may be the case that step/mothers intervene in favour of biological relatedness (kinship effect). Therefore, differential parental treatment may function differently in stepfamilies than first-married families. The present study began an exploration of kinship ties in stepsibling conflict situations, and found a significant link between biological connections and expected support. Future research should address the pervasiveness and intensity of these alliances over time, as children's relationships within stepfamilies develop and strengthen with both stepparents and stepsiblings.

CHAPTER V

Contributions

Although the present study has limitations, its contributions should also be noted. Most notably, the use of multiple perspectives enriched the present exploration of stepsibling relationships. As mentioned earlier, previous work in this area has been criticized for excluding stepchildren and relying solely on parental reports (e.g., Skopin, Newman, & McKenry, 1993). Seldom have children themselves been studied; however, the present study incorporated perspectives of both step/mothers and their biological children to gain a fuller representation of stepsibling relationships.

Another contribution of the present study was the utilization of multiple measurement techniques. Previous exploratory research has also used multiple measures to assess the nature of the stepsibling relationship, but the findings were based on a series of open-ended interviews which gathered mainly descriptive information (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1993a). The present study, however, used a variety of age-appropriate standardized questionnaires to obtain a more global and objective rating of stepsibling relationships, measuring both positive and negative aspects (e.g., PEPC-SRQ for step/mothers; SRI for children). In addition, as parental management of stepsibling conflicts is an exploratory area of stepsibling research, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions regarding styles of maternal interventions strategies were adapted for the present study (e.g., SSCI for step/mothers; SCI for children).

The demographic information questionnaire used the present study was very thorough. This is in contrast to previous stepfamily research (e.g., Brock, 1994; Gold, Bubenzer, & West; Hobart, 1991) which tended to exclude important details such as how the stepfamily was formed (e.g., following divorce or death of a previous partnership), or the number of years that the stepfamily has been together. The present study was very careful in collecting extensive demographic detail of its participants and family history since many of these factors greatly effect the interpretation and generalizability of the findings.

On a related theme, another worthy contribution of the present study was the adoption of a normative-adaptive perspective that focused on making within group comparisons (Ganong & Coleman, 1987). This approach is in contrast to the deficit-comparison paradigm that compared norms and values of stepfamilies to first-married families (e.g., Hobart, 1991; Visser and Visser, 1990) and stems from Cherlin's (1978) "incomplete institutionalization" hypothesis. However, a stepfamily versus first-married family comparison may not be valid since structures of stepfamilies are qualitatively different than other family forms (Zeppa & Norem, 1993). Accordingly, extra precautions were taken in the present study to include a detailed report of stepfamily demographics. The homogeneity of this sample can inform future stepsibling research on testing similar hypotheses but at different stages and dynamics of stepfamily life.

Finally, the present study deserves credit for focusing on the nature of relationships among stepsiblings. Until recently, sibling research has received little attention and empirical support (Dunn, 1992). Even less can be said about

systemic research on stepsibling relationships (Beer, 1989). The present study explored the quality of stepsibling relationships and found that both warmth and conflict was inherent in the reports of step/mothers and children. Ambivalence and individual differences are common themes throughout sibling research (Piotrowski et al, 1996) and has similarly been found in the results of the present study. These findings have also been replicated by initial exploratory research on the quality of stepsibling relationships (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1993a).

Limitations and Directions of Future Research

Several limitations of the present study should also be recognized, and the present findings suggest several avenues of future research that could enhance our understanding of the nature of stepsibling relationships and parental management of these conflicts.

The present results may, in part, reflect the relatively small sample size, and as mentioned earlier due to selection bias a homogeneous group of stepfamilies was depicted. The majority of the stepfamilies were white, middle-class and well educated. For these two primary reasons alone, the findings should not be generalized to representing viewpoints of all types stepfamilies, or for that matter, all complex stepfamilies. Future research should replicate the present findings on stepfamilies with other more diverse samples with a differing variety of demographic characteristics. For example, future research could include a cross-cultural comparison of stepfamilies to examine differences in conflict management of stepsibling relationships, or a comparison among

stepfamilies with differing socioeconomic status to examine differences in discipline strategies of parental intervention into stepsibling conflicts.

In addition, the findings were based on a one-time measurement of the quality of the stepsibling relationship. However, the results suggested that developmental factors must be considered when drawing conclusions, specifically relating to both the age of the children and the developmental state of the stepfamily. A longitudinal design that examined the quality of the stepsibling relationship as it changes over time and in relation to the various stages of Patricia Papernow's (1984) Stepfamily Cycle would provide a more developmental and comprehensive understanding of the stepsibling relationship.

Another caveat of the present study worthy of consideration involves the use of self-report instruments, which may contribute to the social desirability of responses. Stepfamily research is relatively new, and in many respects the exploration of stepsibling relations is uncharted territory. Issues of maternal intervention into stepsibling conflicts, attribution of blame and quality of stepsibling relations could be interpreted as potentially sensitive issues for both step/mothers and children who struggle in preserving a cohesive family unit. Although an examination of different perspectives of individuals is undoubtedly useful in this area, an additional observational component would assist in establishing external validity of the results.

The present study examined the stepsibling relationship based on perspectives of step/mothers and their biological child. To this end, future research could include additional perspectives of step/fathers and their biological

child. Including step/fathers would enable a comparison of parental strategies into stepsibling conflicts between adults within the same household. Likewise, the inclusion of the other stepsibling in the target relationship would allow a comparison between how both children perceive the quality of their relationship. And finally, in order to understand how various adults and children within the same remarried household perceive the stepsibling relationship, the present study would recommend utilization of a standardized instrument designed specifically to make these comparisons valid (e.g., Sibling Relationship Interview for Parents, Stocker and McHale, 1992).

The investigation of step/parent intervention strategies into stepsibling conflict is unprecedented in stepfamily research. The present study revealed important findings regarding the styles of maternal intervention, including both low power and high power methods. These two types of intervention strategies emerged from narrative descriptions provided by step/mothers. The lack of conclusive evidence linking intervention strategies to quality of stepsibling relationships may also stem from methodological limitations such as the comparison between low power strategies and the combination of low and/or high power strategies. To properly conduct logistic regression analyses and test the predictions the creation of two groups of equivalent proportions was necessary. In order to create these groups within the present sample, the first group included step/mothers who reported only low power strategies, which was then compared to the second group which included step/mothers who reported using a combination of low power and/or high power methods. A more clear and

powerful comparison would contrast step/mothers who use only low power strategies with step/mothers who predominantly use high power methods of intervention into stepsibling conflicts, taking frequency into account.

Finally, an examination of parental intervention strategies captures only a fragment of understanding parental management of stepsibling relationships. The present study examined what step/mothers do when they intervene, but this leads one to question why step/mothers would come to adopt particular styles and methods. A broader examination of socialization strategies would address parental goals of intervention into stepsibling conflicts and managing the overall stepsibling relationships. For example, step/mothers may work hard to prevent stepsibling conflicts in order to teach children problem solving techniques or to maintain harmony within their remarried household. By the same token, future research should address how remarried partners handle specific co-parenting issues involving their own children, their partner's children, and their mutual children.

Conclusions

The results of the present study did not provide support for the expected association between step/mothers' or children's perceptions of the quality of the stepsibling and type of maternal intervention strategy or maternal attribution of blame in stepsibling conflicts. However, there was weak evidence of this link from individual reports of step/mothers who reported a breakdown in cohesiveness of their stepfamily, and a positive correlation was found between step/mother's perceptions of warmth in the stepsibling relationship and the

number of differing low power strategies they reported. These modest results suggest that low power methods may be more desirable to step/mothers as they try to maintain stepfamily cohesiveness. In fact, step/parents may have different reasons and goals for choosing a particular method of intervention, such as low power rather than high power strategies; however, this tentative assumption remains to be tested.

A number of factors were addressed to explain these results, and suggestions were made to direct future research on stepsibling research. The findings of the present study should not be generalized to all complex stepfamilies. Alternatively, the restricted demographic characteristics of the sample and developmental age of the stepsiblings facilitated understanding these stepfamilies within the context of the Stepfamily Cycle. The task of future research is to replicate these findings, but with different samples within the stepfamily population. Accordingly, a greater understanding of stepfamily dynamics would be achieved by adopting the normative-adaptive framework.

Finally, the findings of the present study suggested that kinship ties play a role in stepsibling conflicts. Children reported that they expected support from their biological parents in stepsibling conflict situations, and a number of factors were discussed to explain these findings. These results suggest that examining only stepfamily members who reside within the remarried household may be too limited. Future research should be extremely sensitive to the inherent complexity of stepfamilies themselves, by including all important family members, such as non-custodial parents and siblings who reside outside of the household but visit

regularly. Only by acknowledging the complexity of stepfamilies can we fully understand and explain both the challenges and rewards that these families experience.

References

- Affi, A., & Clark, V. (1990). Computer-aided multivariate analysis (2nd ed.). New York: Chapman and Hall.
- Beer, W. R. (1989). Strangers in the house: The world of stepsiblings and half-siblings. New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction Publications.
- Bernstein, A. C. (1989). Yours, mine, and ours: How families change when remarried parents have a child together. New York: Macmillan.
- Bloomfield, H. H. (1993). Making peace in your stepfamily: Surviving and thriving as parents and stepparents. New York: Hyperion.
- Boer, F., & Dunn, J. (1992). Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Boer, F., Goedhart, A. W., & Treffers, P. D. A. (1992) Siblings and their parents. In F. Boer, & J. Dunn (Eds.), Children's sibling relationships: Developmental and clinical issues (pp 41-54). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Boldizar, J., Kharti, P., & Jones, E. A. (1991). Parents' disciplinary strategies: Children's outcome cognitions and aggression. Poster session presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, Seattle, WA.
- Boss, P. (1988). Family stress management. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bray, J. H., & Kelly, J. (1998). Stepfamilies: Love, marriage, and parenting in the first decade. New York: Broadway Books.
- Brock, J. B. (1994). Parenting in the 90s. California: Mayfield Press.

Buhrmester, D., & Furman, W. (1987). The development of companionship and intimacy. Child Development, 58, 1101-1113.

Canino, I. A., & Spurlock, J. (1994). The influence of culture and multiple social stressors. In I. A. Canino and J. Spurlock (Eds), Culturally Diverse Children and Adolescents (pp. 5-86). New York: Guilford Press.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1995). Sibling relationships across the lifespan. New York: Plenum Press.

Cherlin, A. (1978). Remarriage as an incomplete institution. American Journal of Sociology, 84, 634-650.

Crosbie-Burnett, M. (1994). Remarriage and recoupling. In P. C. McHenry & S. J. Price (Eds.), Families and change: Coping with stressful events (pp. 219-241). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Deutsch, M. (1973). The resolution of conflict. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dunn, J. (1993). Young children's close relationships: Beyond attachment (pp. 43-57). New York: Sage Publications.

Dunn, J., & Munn, P. (1986). Sibling quarrels and maternal intervention: Individual differences in understanding and aggression. Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 27(5), 583-595.

Dunn, J., Slomkowski, C., Beardsall, L., & Rende, R. (1994). Adjustment in middle childhood and early adolescence: Links with earlier and contemporary sibling relationships. Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 35(2), 491-504.

Felson, R. B., & Russo, N. (1988). Parental punishment and sibling aggression. Social Psychology Quarterly, 51(1), 11-18.

Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perceptions of the qualities of sibling relationships. Child Development, 56, 448-461.

Furstenberg, F. F., & Spanier, G. B. (1984). The risk of dissolution in remarriage: An examination of Cherlin's hypothesis of incomplete institutionalization. Family Relations, 33, 433-441.

Ganong, L., & Coleman, M. (1987). Effects of parental remarriage on children: An updated comparison of theories, methods, and findings from clinical and empirical research. In K. Pasley & M. Ihinger-Tallman (Eds.), Remarriage and Stepparenting: Current Research and Theory (pp. 94-140). New York: Guilford Press.

Ganong, L., & Coleman, M. (1993a). An exploratory study of stepsibling subsystems. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 19(3/4), 125-141.

Ganong, L., & Coleman, M. (1993b). A meta-analytic comparison of the self-esteem and behaviour problems of stepchildren to children in other family structures. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 19(3/4), 143-163.

Ganong, L., & Coleman, M. (1994). Remarried family relationships. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Garbarino, J., & Stott, F. M. (1992). What children can tell us. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Gold, J. M., Bubenzer, D. L., & West, J. D. (1993). The presence of children and blended family marital intimacy. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 19(3/4), 97-108.

Grusec, J., Rudy, D., & Martini, T. (1997). Parenting cognitions and child outcomes: An overview and implications for children's internalization of values. In J. E. Grusec and L. Kuczynski (Eds.), Parenting and children's internalization of values. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Hastings, P., & Grusec, J. (1997). Conflict outcome as a function of parental accuracy in perceiving child cognitions and affect. Social Development, 6(1), 76-90.

Hetherington, E. M. (1988). Parents, children, and siblings six years after divorce. In R. A. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), Relationships within families (pp. 311-331). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hobart, C. (1991). Conflict in remarriages. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 15(3/4), 69-86.

Howe, N., & Ross, H. S. (1990). Socialization, perspective-taking, and the sibling relationship. Developmental Psychology, 26(1), 160-165.

Ihinger-Tallman, M. (1987). Sibling and stepsibling bonding in stepfamilies. In K. Pasley & M. Ihinger-Tallman (Eds.), Remarriage and stepparenting (pp. 164-182). New York: The Guilford Press.

Kramer, L., & Baron, L. A. (1995). Parental perceptions of children's sibling relationships. Family Relations, 44, 95-103.

Larson, R. (1994). Divergent realities. New York: Basic Books.

Larzelere, R. E. (1986). Moderate spanking: Model or deterrent of children's aggression in the family? Journal of Family Violence, 1, 27-36.

Laursen, B., & Collins, W. A. (1994). Interpersonal conflict during adolescence. Psychological Bulletin, 115(2), 197-209.

MacDonald, W. L., & DeMaris, A. (1995). Remarriage, stepchildren, and marital conflict: Challenges to the incomplete institutionalization hypothesis. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 57, 387-398.

Mandell, D., & Birenzweig, E. (1990). Stepfamilies: A model for group work with remarried couples and their children. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 14(1), 29-41.

Martin, J., & Ross, H. S. (1995). The development of aggression within sibling conflict. Early Education and Development, 6(4), 335-358.

McCloskey, L. A., Figueredo, A. J., & Koss, M. P. (1995). The effects of systematic family violence on children's mental health. Child Development, 66, 1239-1261.

McDaniel, S. A., & Strike, C. (1994). General social survey analysis series: Family and friends. (No. 11-612, n. 9). Ottawa, Ontario: Minister of Industry, Science and Technology.

McHale, S. M., & Crouter, A. C. (1996). The family contexts of children's sibling relationships. In G. H. Brody (Ed.), Sibling relationships: Their causes and consequences (pp. 173-195). New Jersey: Ablex.

Mills, D. M. (1988). Stepfamilies in context. In W. R. Beer (Ed.), Relative strangers: Studies of stepfamily processes (pp. 1-29). New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield.

Munn, P., & Dunn, J. (1988). Temperament and the developing relationship between siblings. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 12, 433-451.

Neumann-Clubb, A. A. (1988). Love in the blended family: Falling in love with a package deal. Toronto, Ont: New Canada.

Newman, M. (1994). Stepfamily realities: How to overcome difficulties and have a happy family. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Papernow, P. L. (1984). The stepfamily cycle: An experiential model of stepfamily development. Family Relations, 33, 355-363.

Papernow, P. L. (1988). Stepparent role development: From outsider to intimate. In W. R. Beer (Ed.), Relative strangers: Studies of stepfamily processes (pp. 54-82). New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield.

Perlman, M., & Ross, H. S. (1997). Who's the boss? Parents' failed attempts to influence the outcome of conflicts between their children. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 14(4), 463-480.

Piotrowski, C. C., Morga, A., Keast, T., & Arnould, G. (1996, August). Parental beliefs concerning sibling aggression at home: maternal reports. Poster session presented at the XIVth Biennial meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, Quebec City, Canada.

Popenoe, D. (1994). The evolution of marriage and the problem of stepfamilies: A biosocial perspective. In A. Booth, & J. Dunn (Eds.), Stepfamilies: who benefits? who does not? (pp. 3-27). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Pruett, C. L., Calsyn, R. J., & Jensen, F. M. (1993). Social support received by children in stepmother, stepfather, and intact families. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 19,(3/4), 165-179.

Ram, B. (1990). Current demographic analysis: New trends in the family, Canada, March 1990 (No. 91-535E). Ottawa: Minister of Industry, Science and Technology.

Ross, H. S. (1996). Negotiating principles of entitlement in sibling property disputes. Developmental Psychology, 32(1), 90-101.

Skopin, A. R., Newman, B. M., & McKenry, P. C. (1993). Influences on the quality of stepfather-adolescent relationships: Views of both family members. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 19(3/4), 181-196.

Shantz, C. U., & Hobart, C. J. (1989). Social conflict and development: Peers and siblings. In T. J. Berndt & G. W. Ladd (Eds.), Peer relationships in child development. (pp. 71-94) New York: Wiley.

Spanier, G. B. (1988). Foreward. In W. R. Beer (Ed.). (1988), Relative strangers: Studies of stepfamily processes. (p ix). New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield.

Stein, N. (1997). Multiple perspectives on children's understanding, evaluation, and resolution of conflict. Poster session presented at the Xth Biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Washington, DC.

Stocker, C. M., & McHale, S. M. (1992). The nature and family correlates of preadolescents' perceptions of their sibling relationships. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 9, 179-195.

Stoneman, Z., & Brody, G. H. (1993). Sibling temperaments, conflict, warmth, and role asymmetry. Child Development, 64, 1786-1800.

Stormshak, E. A., Bellanti, C. J., & Bierman, K. L. (1996). The quality of sibling relationships and the development of social competence and behavioral control in aggressive children. Developmental Psychology, 32 (1), 79-89.

The Vanier Institute of the Family. (1994). Profiling Canada's families. Ottawa: author.

The Walt Disney Company. (1994). Cinderella. Printed in the United States of America.

Trickett, P., & Kuczynski, L. (1986). Children's misbehaviors and parental discipline strategies in abusive and nonabusive families. Developmental Psychology, 22, 113-123.

Vandell, D., & Bailey, M. (1992). Conflicts between siblings. In C. Shantz & W. Hartup (Eds.), Conflict in child and adolescent development (pp. 242-269). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Visher, E. B., & Visher, J. S. (1990). Dynamics of successful stepfamilies. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 14(1), 3-12.

Zeppa, A., & Norem, R. H. (1993). Stressors, manifestations of stress, and first-family/stepfamily group membership. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 19(3/4), 3-23.

Appendix A

Director Letter

Dear Director/Co-ordinator:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Family Studies at the University of Manitoba, under supervision of Dr. Caroline Piotrowski. I am conducting a study looking at how stepbrothers and stepsisters get along with each other. I am asking the assistance of step/parents and one child who is between 7 years and 18 years of age. **With your permission, I would like to post advertising posters in your establishment to acquire participation for this study.**

BRIEF DESCRIPTION ABOUT THIS STUDY:

The purpose of this investigation is to find out more about how stepsiblings learn to settle their disagreements. All stepbrothers and stepsisters quarrel and fight sometimes, and step/parents may need to respond. I am interested in asking step/parents questions about conflicts between stepsiblings. I would like to ask the opinion of both step/mothers and step/fathers, if possible. However, if only one step/parent chooses to participate, I would still be very interested in including these opinions.

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Human Ecology Ethics Review Committee at the University of Manitoba. If stepfamilies agree to participate, all information will be kept strictly confidential. All results reported will concern groups, not individuals.

I will be contacting you by telephone in a few days to verify whether permission is granted to hang advertising posters in your establishment. However, if you have any further questions or concerns please call Ales or Caroline at **474-9033 to leave a message.**

Sincerely,

Ales B. Morga

Dr. Caroline Piotrowski
Department of Family Studies

Appendix B
Screening Protocol Sheet

DATE CONFIRMED: _____

NAME: _____ Phone# _____

TELEPHONE PROTOCOL SHEET:

I have just a few questions to ask you:

- Are you currently a stepparent?
- Do you have a biological child from a previous relationship that is living in your home?
- Do you have a stepchild that is in contact with your biological child at least a few times each month?

AGES: Target bio: _____ Target stepsib: _____
 Other bio _____ Other step _____

- I need stepmoms to participate, but would your husband be interested? Y or N

This study will consist of one visit in your home whenever is most convenient for you. I will be visiting your home with a research assistant. During this visit you will be asked some question about how your biological child and his/her stepsibling get along...this will take approx 30-45 min. Then your biological child will be asked some questions about his/her stepsibling relationship...this should only take about 15-20 min. Both interviews will be audiotaped so that what is said can be accurately recorded...but all information that you and your child provide will be kept strictly confidential. **Your family will be paid \$25 for your participation.** Any questions?

SCHEDULING HOME VISIT:

BIOLOGICAL CHILD: _____

STEPCHILD: _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

RA confirmed ☐ pickup time: _____

Appendix C

Parent Letter

Winter, 1998

Dear Parent(s):

I am conducting a study looking at how stepbrothers and stepsisters get along with each other. I am asking the assistance of step/parents and one child who is between 7 years and 15 years of age. If you have a biological child by a previous relationship that is living in your home, and a stepchild that is in contact with your biological child at least a few times each month, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. **In appreciation of your time and effort, you will receive a payment of \$25 for your participation in this study**

The purpose of this investigation is to find out more about how stepsiblings learn to settle their disagreements. All stepbrothers and stepsisters quarrel and fight sometimes, and step/parents may need to respond. I am interested in asking step/parents questions about conflicts between stepsiblings. I would like to ask the opinion of both step/mothers and step/fathers, if possible. However, if only one step/parent chooses to participate, I would still be very interested in including your opinion.

If you assist me in this study, I will visit you in your home. This visit will be scheduled whenever it is most convenient for you. During this visit you will be asked some questions about how your biological child and his/her stepsibling get along. Afterward, your biological child will be interviewed about how well they get along with their stepsister or stepbrother. The entire commitment to this study for you and your child will be approximately 45 to 90 minutes. Both interviews will be audiotaped, so that what is said can be accurately recorded. At the end of the study, all step/parents who are interested will receive a summary of the findings.

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Human Ecology Ethics Review Committee at the University of Manitoba. If you agree to participate, all information you and your child provide will be kept strictly confidential. All results reported will concern groups, not individuals. If at any time, or for any reason, you or your child no longer wish to participate, you would be free to do so.

If you are interested in participating, please call 474-9033 to leave a message.

Sincerely,

Dr. Caroline Piotrowski
Department of Family Studies

Appendix D
Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Step/parent responses to stepsibling conflicts

Principal Investigator Name: Ales Barbara Morga, Masters of Science Candidate Tel: 474-9033

Supervisor: Dr. Caroline Piotrowski, Dept of Family Studies Tel: 474-9033

PLEASE TICK EITHER YES OR NO IN RESPONSE TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 2. Have you read the information sheet or heard the verbal explanation of the investigator? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 3. Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in the research study? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 4. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 5. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason and without any detriment to your ongoing association with the University of Manitoba? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 6. Do you understand that you can refuse to answer any questions or provide information or samples during your participation in the study? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 7. Has the issue of confidentiality been described to you and do you understand: a) who will have access to the information you provide, b) that no reports will identify you as an individual ? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| 8. I understand that this involves myself and my child filling out questionnaires and being interviewed in my home, and that our answers will be taperecorded. | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |

I agree to take part in this study Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant

Printed name of participant

Date

Two copies of this form are provided for you to complete, one of which you are expected to keep. The second copy will be kept by the principal investigator.

Thank you.

Appendix E

Step/parent Stepsibling Conflict Interview (SSCI) (adapted from Piotrowski, Morga, Keast, & Arnould, 1996)

Family #: _____ Mom/Dad

Introduction:

In every stepfamily, stepbrother and stepsisters quarrel and fight about lots of different things. In some stepfamilies, like in any other types of families, children fight a lot, and in other stepfamilies, there isn't much fighting.

Every step/parent does things in their own way, and so **there are no right or wrong answers to these questions.**

We value your opinion as a biological parent and as a stepparent, and would like to know what you think. Please feel free to ask me any questions, or stop at any time.

Section 1 : Parent Intervention Strategies

These next few questions are about how you get involved in your children's arguments.

What do you usually do when you intervene?***

What works best for you? Why?***

OTHER FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

On what kinds of occasions do you think it might be necessary for a parent to get involved in quarrels between stepsiblings?

How often do you intervene?

What is it usually about?

Are you asked more often to get involved in quarrel? Or, do you often jump in before/without being asked?

What usually happens after you intervene?

Under what circumstances do you think a parent should not intervene in a conflict or dispute between stepsiblings?

Section 2: Attribution of Blame

Is one child more an instigator in these kind of conflicts? Or, does it seem to change from fight to fight?***

In your opinion, is this child (from above question) usually to blame for starting these fights?***

OTHER FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

Does one child usually ask for help, or tell on the other when they have been fighting?
Or, both equally?

What rules do you have in your house about conflict management?

With one being your biological child and the other being your stepchild, how do you usually feel when they've been arguing? What is that issue like for you? Do you feel drawn to one child more than the other? Has this changed for you?

***Questions most relevant to hypothesis testing

Appendix F

Family Demographic Questionnaire

Family # _____

Section I: Please tell us about your children:

Whose biological child is this? (circle)	SEX (circle)	AGE (in years)	Currently lives with you(circle	Does this child have any contact with an absent biological parent? How often?
(a) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	
(b) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	
(c) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	
(d) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	
(e) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	
(f) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	
(g) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	
(h) Mom/Dad/both	boy/girl		yes/no	

Section II. Please tell us about yourself, so that we can describe the group of stepfamilies who participated in this study.

How old are you? _____ yrs.

How many years of school have you completed? Begin counting with Grade 1, and check one of the choices below.

8 years or less ()

9 to 12 years ()

13 to 16 years ()

More than 16 years ()

What was your previous marital status? (Please check one:)

never married	()
living with partner	()
divorced	()
separated	()
widowed	()

Please tell us about your spouse.

How old is your spouse? Age: _____ yrs.

Years of school completed, starting with Grade 1:

8 years or less ()	9 to 12 years ()
13 to 16 years ()	More than 16 years ()

Previous marital status:

never married	()
living with partner	()
divorced	()
widowed	()

SECTION III: Please tell us about your family.

Do you feel you belong to a cultural group? Which group? _____

Is it any different for your spouse? Which group? _____

So that we can describe the group of stepfamilies participating in this study, please indicate your **total family income** before taxes last years (e.g., income of all the family members residing in the household):

under \$10,000()	
\$10,001 to \$20,000 ()	
\$20,001 to \$30,000 ()	
\$30,001 to \$40,000 ()	
\$40,001 to \$50,000 ()	
Over \$50,000 ()	

Appendix G

Parental Expectations and Perceptions of Children's Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (PEPC-SRQ) (adapted from Kramer & Baron, 1995)

ID# _____

Who is completing questionnaire? 3=Mom

4=Dad

HOW I SEE MY CHILDREN'S SIBLING RELATIONSHIP

Remember: You can refuse to answer any questions or stop at any time.

Please circle the number that best fits your feelings about the following aspects of your children's relationship during the past 2 weeks.

SAMPLE LIKERT SCALE:

Never Rarely Sometimes usually always

1 2 3 4 5

SAMPLE PERCEIVED WARMTH ITEMS:

Sharing, going out together (movies, shopping, etc), respecting each other's property, sharing worries or concerns, loyalty or sticking up for one another, comforting one another, protectiveness – looking out for each other's welfare, feeling proud of one another, talking to each other or having conversations, helping one another, teaching (homework etc), affection (hugging, kissing, "I Love you")

SAMPLE PERCEIVED CONFLICT ITEMS:

Physical aggression (hitting, pushing, etc), jealousy, competition, rivalry, angry feelings, arguing, fighting over territory or space, fighting where the problem never gets solved, fighting over objects (games, toys, clothes, tv), threatening one another

Appendix H

Sibling Relationship Interview (adapted from Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996)

I'm going to ask you some questions about how you and _____ (stepbrother or stepsister) get along. I am going to tell you some things about how brothers and sisters get along, and I want you to tell me what it's like for you.

Remember: You can refuse to answer any questions or stop at any time.

SAMPLE OF CONFLICT ITEM:

Received:

Some kids get mad at their brother/sister a lot. Other kids don't get mad at their brother/sister very much. How about _____? Does he/she ever get mad at you?

If yes: Does he/she get mad at you a lot? (4)
Does he/she get mad at you a little? (3)

If no: Does he/she get mad at you not ever? (1)
Does he/she get mad at you once in awhile? (2)

Initiated:

How about you? Do you ever get mad at _____?

If yes: Does you get mad at him/her a lot? (4)
Does you get mad at him/her a little? (3)

If no: Does you get mad at him/her not ever? (1)
Does you get mad at him/her once in awhile? (2)

SAMPLE OF WARMTH ITEM:

Received:

Some kids go out with their brother/sister a lot. Other kids don't go out with each other at all. How about _____? Does he/she ever go out with you

If yes: Does he/she get mad at you a lot? (4)
Does he/she get mad at you a little? (3)

If no: Does he/she get mad at you not ever? (1)
Does he/she get mad at you once in awhile? (2)

Initiated:

How about you? Do you ever go out with _____?

If yes: Does you get mad at him/her a lot? (4)
Does you get mad at him/her a little? (3)

If no: Does you get mad at him/her not ever? (1)
Does you get mad at him/her once in awhile? (2)

Appendix I

Stepsibling Conflict Interview (adapted from Stein, 1997)

Family #: _____

Step/parent Intervention into stepsibling conflicts

Who usually makes the rules in your house?

- a. Mom only b. stepdad only
c. both d. neither

Who usually makes decisions about discipline when you and your stepbrother/stepsister are fighting?

- a. Mom usually
b. stepdad usually
c. both of them relatively equally
d. mom usually, step dad sometimes
e. step usually, mom sometimes
f. neither of them/resolve our differences

Which parent usually gets involved when you and your stepbrother/stepsister are fighting/arguing?

- a. Mom (bio) only b. Stepdad only
c. both d. neither, they never get involved

How often does _____ (from above) get involved:

- a. once b. only 2 or 3 times
c. some of the time d. a lot of the time e. all the time

What about your other parent? Your stepdad?

- a. once b. only 2 or 3 times
c. some of the time d. a lot of the time e. all the time

What does your mom usually do when gets involved? How?*

Who does she usually blame? You or _____ or both?***

What does your stepdad usually do when he gets involved? How?*

Who do they usually blame? You or _____ or both? **

And finally, who do you expect to support you more when you two are arguing?****

- a. Mom (bio) b. Dad (bio)
c. Mom (step) d. Dad (step) e. Other

**** Questions most relevant to child hypothesis**

**** Questions most revelant to kinship hypothesis

Stepsibling Conflict

1. What do you really like about your stepbrother/stepsister? What do you think is really neat about him/her? (Tell me more).

2. What is it that you really don't like about your stepbrother/stepsister? What is it that really bugs you about him/her? (tell me more)

3. All kids/teenagers have fights or arguments with their stepbrothers and stepsisters. Can you think of one time, maybe even today, when you and your stepbrother/stepsister got into a fight? Can you tell me what the fight was about and what happened?

CONFLICT PROBES

Can you think of an argument/fight you had today or yesterday?

What was it about? Who started it?

What reason do you think you/stepsibling started it?

How did it feel? Why?

How do you think your stepsibling felt? Why?

What happened once it started?

Did you and your stepsibling agree on a way to settle your problem/differences?

How did it end?

Did your feelings about your stepsibling change after the fight was over?

Have you ever had this kind of fight before?

If so, how many times have you had this kind of fight?

- a. once
- b. only 2 or 3 times
- c. some of the time
- d. a lot of the time
- e. all of the time

Additional Probes

Sometimes it is very hard to think of fights because we're so good at stopping them from happening. Can you remember any time when you almost go into a fight with your stepbrother/stepsister?

Appendix J

SSCI and SCI Coding – Definitions

Parent Intervention Strategies

LOW POWER STRATEGIES

1. Discussion

Parent listens to or encourages children's discussion of the conflict (e.g., talking it out, discussing alternatives, listening to both sides, etc), problem-solving (e.g., what could you have done, how can you ask him/her, etc), parent as role of mediator (e.g., offering conflict mgmt strategies, suggestions)

a) Reasoning & Social Rules

Parent talks about the feelings, needs or perspectives of the other; references to rules concerning appropriate behavior (e.g., you shouldn't hit people, you need to use your words, etc.), asking what happened

2. Separation

Children are separated either to end the conflict or to give them time to calm down (e.g., sent to different rooms or bedrooms).

NB: Separation can be double-coded as punishment if time-out is used as a withdrawal of a privilege or punishment for arguing. (e.g., sends only one child away)

3. Distraction

Changing the topic, suggestion alternative activities or providing children with something else to do.

4. Comforting

Nurturing the victim.

5. Nonintervention (removal)

Ignoring or staying out of the conflict; leaving the room or requesting the children to fight elsewhere.

HIGH POWER STRATEGIES

6. Punishment

Can include removal of toys, objects or privileges (e.g., access to toys or playing together, physical restraints, both sit on couch).

7. Yelling

Parent expression of anger (e.g., raising voice)

8. Simple commands

Orders to end the conflict immediately (e.g., stop fighting, cut it out)