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# A Study of the Internal Family Systems Model Applied to Remarried Couples of Stepfamilies in Different Stages of Adjustment

Susan Marie Carter  
*Andrews University*

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**Andrews University**

**School of Education**

**A STUDY OF THE INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS MODEL  
APPLIED TO REMARRIED COUPLES OF STEPFAMILIES  
IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF ADJUSTMENT**

**A Dissertation**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

**Susan Marie Carter**

**June 1998**

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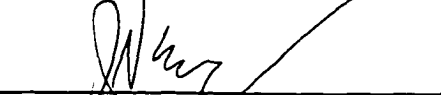
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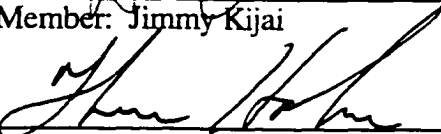
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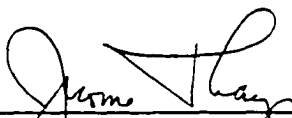
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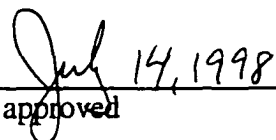
  
Member: Frederick Kosinski

  
Member: Jimmy Kijai

  
Member: Thomas Holmes  
Western Michigan University

  
Director of Graduate Programs  
Jerome D. Thayer

  
Dean, School of Education  
Karen R. Graham

  
Date approved



**ABSTRACT**

**A STUDY OF THE INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS MODEL  
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**by**

**Susan Marie Carter**

Chair: Nancy Carbonell

**ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH  
DISSERTATION**

**Andrews University**

School of Education

**Title: A STUDY OF THE INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS MODEL  
APPLIED TO REMARRIED COUPLES OF STEPFAMILIES IN  
DIFFERENT STAGES OF ADJUSTMENT**

Name of researcher: Susan Marie Carter

Name and degree of faculty chair: Nancy Carbonell, Ph.D.

Date completed: June 1998

**Problem**

Stepfamilies are becoming the largest family type in the United States. This has significant implications for understanding the complications of remarriage and providing clinical interventions that support the adjustment process of stepfamilies. The Internal Family Systems Model, developed by Dr. Richard Schwartz, asserts that an individual's personality is multiple naturally, and that there are interactions within the individual that have significant impact on their external systems. In applying the IFS model to the study of stepfamilies, this present study identifies the IFS maps of the partners of remarried couples active in stepfamily interaction and to determine how this IFS Map enhanced or detracted from stepfamily development.

## **Method**

A combined qualitative and quantitative study was designed. The Stepfamily Adjustment Scale, developed by Dr. Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, provided quantitative assessment of the stage of stepfamily adjustment. Stepfamilies were assessed qualitatively as to their stage of stepfamily adjustment as well. The IFS Map of each individual in stepfamily interaction was identified along with their access to Self.

## **Results**

Six stepfamilies were found to be in Stage II of stepfamily adjustment, two in Stage III, and two in Stage I. SAS results supported these qualitative conclusions, with one exception. IFS Maps disclosed both functional and extreme personality parts present in stepfamily interactions.

## **Conclusions**

The ability to evoke Self leadership was found to be a significant factor in stepfamily adjustment with these stepfamilies. The SAS appeared to be a valid instrument in assessing stage of stepfamily adjustment, and more so when accompanied with a qualitative evaluation. Internal personality parts played a complex role in the adjustment process of these stepfamilies.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Families are simply collections of people whose behavior is colored as much by individual experience as by interaction.  
Michael Nichols 1987

Stepfamilies are fast becoming the norm in the United States. Demographic studies predict that by the year 2000, the largest single family type in our society will be remarried families, and that a majority of children may be living in a stepfamily (Glick, 1989). Yet remarriage families continue to be treated as the extreme. Stepfamily needs and differences are not understood by society, by institutions, or even by its own membership (Einstein, 1985; Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1986; McGolderick & Carter, 1980; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1983; Visser & Visser, 1991). Children have been singled out as deprived, underprivileged, or disadvantaged because they were members of a step-relationship (Einstein, 1985). The complexity of the stepfamily brings considerable strain, and remarriages fail at a much greater rate than first marriages (Glick, 1989; Glick & Lin, 1986, 1987). The result is children experiencing continuous trauma, lack of stability and dysfunction in relationships, and maladjustment in adulthood (Hetherington, 1989). Research to determine factors that inhibit or foster the adjustment of individuals into a family unit after remarriage is essential (Esses & Campbell, 1984; Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

#### **Why Study Stepfamilies?**

According to 1987 U. S. Census survey data, there were approximately 11.0 million remarried families in the United States and about 4.3 million stepfamilies (Glick,

1989), and the rate continued to rise in the 1990s (Norton & Michaels, 1994). Although this represents a decline in the growth from prior decades, the decrease is due to the fall in population figures and the number of marriages overall rather than individual choice (Glick, 1989; Glick & Lin, 1986, 1987). Remarriage as a percent of total marriages continues to grow (Chadwick & Heaton, 1992). Stepfamilies have existed throughout history, but only in recent times have they become such a predominant entity in society. In the past, step-relations were mainly formed as a result of death or abandonment of a spouse (Einstein, 1985). The meteoric rise in divorce rates over the 1970s and 1980s have changed this pattern and most remarriages now occur as the result of divorce (Einstein, 1985; Glick, 1989). The divorce rate in the United States, although declining in the 1990s (Norton & Michaels, 1994), approaches 48% and approximately three out of five divorced adults remarry (Chadwick & Heaton, 1992). In 1988, surveys indicated that 46% of all marriages formed stepfamilies (Levinson, 1995) and that in 1990, 16% of children under 18 of all races lived with a stepparent (Schmittroth, 1994). Only a few more than 50% of children today live with both biological parents, and it is estimated that by the year 2000 greater than 50% of children under the age of 18 today may be members of a stepfamily (Glick, 1989). This represents a formidable group of people attempting to forge new lives out of loss and turmoil, without guidelines or standards from society at large (McGolderick & Carter, 1980; Visher & Visher, 1979; 1991).

Research on divorce indicates that second and subsequent marriages fail at an ever increasing rate, and in greater numbers than first marriages (Coleman & Ganong, 1990; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1994; Lawton & Sanders, 1994; Levinson, 1995; DeMaris, 1995; Norton & Michaels, 1994). The stress of this retraumatization on the children through repeated divorce turmoil and the detrimental impact on relational models leaves shock waves to be felt by generations to come (Brand & Clingempeel, 1987; Hetherington, 1989; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, & Anderson, 1989; Jacobson, 1987; McLanahan & Hanson, 1996).

Although becoming more and more prevalent in society, stepfamilies are cast in a negative light. Western culture equates normal and positive with two-parent nuclear families, and “our society abounds in romantic myths about the joys of family life that seem to require second families to bend themselves into the shape of the mythological ‘happy intact family’ ” (McGolderick & Carter, 1980, p. 266). Along with being pressured to conform to societal expectations of looking like a first-marriage family, remarriage families have only two models of stepfamily life to emulate: the mean, ugly picture painted by fairy tales such as Cinderella and Snow White, or the perfection portrayed by the Brady Bunch where everyone’s conflicts and emotional upheavals are resolved in 30 minutes with time out for commercials (Beer, 1992; McGolderick & Carter, 1980; Visher & Visher, 1979). This “cultural lag” (Giles-Sims & Crosbie-Burnett, 1989, p. 20) created by the difference between the needs of the stepfamily members and societal expectations, forces stepfamilies into “an idealized situation [in which] stepfamilies appear deficient” (p. 20). These expectations negatively impact the self-esteem of stepfamily members and trigger internal conflict within the individuals (Coleman & Ganong, 1990; Schwartz, 1995). Although the external forces that come to play on stepparents have received more attention from researchers in recent years, the impact of these extraneous stressors on the internal psyche of the remarried couple is yet to be explored.

The need for studies on stepfamilies is evident by the increasing number of adults and children who are and will be living in this family form. (Booth & Dunn, 1994; Coleman & Ganong, 1990; Dainton, 1993; Glick, 1989; Giles-Sims & Crosbie-Burnett, 1989; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1994; Jacobson, 1987; Kelley, 1992; Visher & Visher, 1991). Research on stepfamilies is still needed to alert us to the causes of erosion and ultimate dissolution of the stepfamily. The existing research literature has been predominantly clinical report (Giles-Sims 1987; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1987, 1994) or empirical study of specific questions (Pink & Smith Wampler, 1985) regarding stepfamilies. A new approach to assess stepfamilies, so as to allow for the richness and

variability of individual experience, is needed. Attention has been initiated in recent years to addressing the unique nature of stepfamilies distinct from first-marriage families (Carter & McGolderick, 1980; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1994; Hobart, 1989; Kelley, 1992; Keshet, 1987; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995; Mills, 1984; Papernow, 1984, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1979, 1991; Walsh, 1992). The structure, composition, interaction, cohesive nature, and developmental process of stepfamilies are being explored in their varied appearance, even from one stepfamily to another (Clingempeel & Brand, 1985; Giles-Sims & Crosbie-Burnett, 1989; Waldren, Bell, Peek, & Sorell, 1990). According to Esses and Campbell (1984) difficulty is experienced in researching stepfamilies due to the wide array of forms a stepfamily can assume: stepmother, stepfather, complex (i.e., both parents bringing children from a prior marriage) or compound (i.e., both biological parents remarried) stepfamily, residential and nonresidential biological and stepchildren, not to mention the vast number of custody and visitation arrangements that complicate family unity and membership. Because of this complexity of form and membership, finding common ground on which to understand the issues of stepfamilies is challenging. The remarried couple appears to be that common ground between all stepfamilies, and an important one at that. It is documented that one of the primary elements of stepfamily adjustment is a strong, united parental unit (Kelley, 1992; Keshet, 1987; Mills, 1984; Visher & Visher, 1979, 1990).

Research on stepparents points to sociological, financial, and familial forces that adversely impact the remarried couple: children and custody arrangements, child-support and financial constraints, living arrangements, former partners and spouses, in-laws, grandparents (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984; 1989a, 1989b; Dean & Gurak, 1978; Giles-Sims, 1987; Hobart, 1989; Kelley, 1992; Visher & Visher, 1991; Walsh, 1992). The dissolution rate of remarriages is frequently tied to unresolved issues from family of origin, prior marriages and relationships, and prior divorces (Ganong & Coleman, 1989; McGolderick & Carter, 1980). These issues are personal and individual, yet significantly impact the

adjustment of the family system at large (Minuchin, 1974). Although many of these external pressures have been researched to some degree or another (Coleman & Ganong, 1990; Crosbie-Burnett, 1989a, 1989b; Hobart, 1989; Kelley, 1992; Mills, 1984; Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher 1979, 1991; Walsh, 1992), no research has yet been conducted on stepfamilies which explores what Salvador Minuchin calls the “individual’s experience of the system” (1974, p. 2).

Studies looking at stepfamilies from the perspective of the individual as one system, the remarried couple as a second system, and the stepfamily as a separate, third entity were not found in the literature. The constructs of the Internal Family System (IFS) seek to understand the complex issues of personality development and system interaction from the inside out, the system within a system (Nichols, 1987; Schwartz, 1995). Using these constructs, I proposed to explore the internal system of the members of the remarried couple. Although no research has been conducted on stepfamilies specifically using the IFS model, outcome studies with bulimic clients in this modality have proven that external, systemic issues can be resolved efficiently and effectively by identifying the systemic concerns within the individual and applying them externally (Schwartz, 1987; personal communication, October 1993). It was speculated in this research that the internal, individual experience of remarriage and stepparenting by the remarried couple may have significant impact on the adjustment of stepfamily. By interviewing the one entity common to all stepfamilies, the remarried couple, I hoped to provide additional insight into potential causes for the failure of a stepfamily to successfully move through the stages of adjustment.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used extensively throughout this research and their definition at this point will assist in the understanding of the project.

**Activating Event:** An external situation or circumstance which initiates a particular pattern of behavior or emotional response in a particular personality part, causing it to become extreme and take over the internal system.

**Boundaries:** Implicit and explicit rules which form emotional barriers to protect and enhance the integrity of individuals, subsystems, and families.

**Complex Stepfamily:** A stepfamily unit where both members of the remarriage have children from a prior marriage.

**Compound Stepfamily:** A stepfamily unit where both biological parents of a child have remarried and formed separate stepfamilies.

**Developmental Stages:** Those identifiable processes characteristic to similar institutions and individuals as they move through their respective lifecycles.

**Differentiation:** The process by which an adolescent (or an individual of any age) psychologically disengages self from others (i.e., from the family unit).

**Distracting:** Behaviors that keep the family dysfunction from being consciously acknowledged.

**Emotional Atmosphere:** The presence or absence of psychological energy in a group of people.

**Exiles:** Child-like parts in the Internal Family Systems model, formed in response to trauma, who are protected and controlled by the managers, and calmed and silenced by the firefighters. These parts can be volatile, needy, and potentially dangerous to the individual system. Exiles hold the memories of the trauma and are generally stuck emotionally and psychologically in the age that the trauma took place.

**Family Culture:** The collective set of rules, beliefs, and mores either explicit or implicit within a defined family unit.

**Family System:** The interaction of the defined members of a particular family unit. The family system includes family culture, role definition, and developmental characteristics.



**Firefighters:** These are the parts called upon to “put out the fires” started by needy exile parts. These parts are often harmful to the individual, using any means at their disposal to silence the exiles. Firefighters are prone to rage, substance abuse, addictive behaviors in general - eating, gambling, shopping, sexual promiscuity. They are triggered when the managers appear unable to control the exile situation.

**Hierarchies:** The place of an individual within the family system, on an ascending/descending basis, ascribing power and influence based on position.

**Inner Experience:** The personal, individual filtering and meaning-making of external events.

**Intellectualizing:** The process by which emotional responses are defended through the cognitive processes of the mind.

**Internal Family System:** A model of the mind that uses systemic principles and techniques to understand and change intrapsychic processes.

**Loyalties:** The connection between family members against or in favor of other family members.

**Managers:** Parts of the Internal Family System which are responsible for day-to-day functions and protection of the individual’s vulnerabilities. Managers tend to be more adult in nature, with controlling behaviors and more rigid, moralistic beliefs.

**Object Selection:** The adult who is the focus of an infant’s attention for security and validation, and for their sense of identity overall.

**Parts:** Subpersonalities that make up the greater portion of the internal family system.

**Positive Feedback Loop:** See Vicious Circle.

**Remarried Couple:** A marital couple where at least one member is marrying for at least the second time.

**Self-Image:** How one views oneself, related to positive or negative impressions.

**Stepchild:** A child in relationship to the remarriage partner(s) of their biological parents.

**Stepfamily:** A family unit where one or both of the members of the marital couple have been previously married, and have children from a previous marriage.

**Stepparent:** An adult who is in relationship with the children of their remarried spouse, either through physical living arrangements or simply by marriage.

**Step-relationship:** The interaction of two or more persons brought about through the process of remarriage.

**System:** The collective interactions of all individuals or subpersonalities of a particular societal unit or of an individual.

**Triangulation:** The process of focusing relational conflict on a third person.

**Trigger or Triggering Event:** See Activating Event.

**Unresolved Issues:** Events from an individual's past which cause psychological unrest in the present.

**Vicious Circle: (Circular Sequence):** The process by which one individual perpetuates the negative behavior of another individual, even when the intervention was initiated to bring about change.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In a general sense, the purpose of this study was to examine the internal issues impacting members of the marital couple, through the context of IFS, in the hope that this method could provide information that would ultimately enhance stepfamily adjustment. In selecting the remarried couple for evaluation, the specific purpose was fourfold: first, to identify the nature of the individual's internal system and how the individual personality parts of the remarried couple impacted the adjustment of the stepfamily; second, to determine the individual spouse's ability to act as compassionate witness to what was occurring within themselves and the members of the stepfamily, in other words the individual's access to Self; third, to identify the triggering or activating events, common in

many stepfamilies and present in these stepfamilies, which contributed to the positive feedback loops, created negative interactional patterns, and deterred from stepfamily adjustment; and finally, to evaluate the larger systemic issues which are created through internal family system polarizations projected externally.

### **Research Questions**

Using the IFS model, I hoped to answer the following questions in this study:

1. What was the nature of the individual participant's internal family system? That is, what was their internal map of personality parts in the context of the stepfamily? How were their individual personality parts impacting the adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole?
2. Did the individual have access to Self? That is, did they have the capacity to be compassionate witness to their own and other's interactions in the context of stepfamily development?
3. What were the interactional patterns--polarizations, coalitions, triangles, positive feedback loops--within the internal family systems which were mirrored in stepfamily interactions? How did these patterns contribute to, or deter from, the development of the stepfamily?
4. What external stressors common to stepfamilies in different stages of development acted as triggering events for internal personality parts of the remarried couple? What impact did these external events have on the overall adjustment of the stepfamily?

### **Theoretical Foundation of the Study**

The principles and theories that drive the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model were the primary theoretical basis for this research. IFS incorporates the theories and intervention strategies of family systems theory into an individual application: the psychodynamic process of the individual. IFS, following Minuchin (1974), focuses on a person as a system within a system (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Nichols, 1987;

Schwartz, 1987, 1995). Therefore, the systemic definitions of an external family are equally applicable internally to the interactions of the individual subpersonalities. Schwartz (1995) describes each of us as having a “multiple personality naturally” (p. 5) and that these subpersonalities have distinct behavioral and communication patterns, just like individuals have. External triggers of these individual subpersonalities or parts can result in extreme behaviors which are dysfunctional for the individual, just as extreme behaviors in a family member are dysfunctional for the family as a whole. It was within this context of a system within a system that I framed the exploratory interviews of this study. Because IFS evolved out of family systems theories applied to the psychodynamic processes of the individual, systems theory and psychodynamic personality theory also formed theoretical bases for this research study.

Psychodynamic influences on the multiplicity theory of personality, inherent in the development of the IFS model, stem predominantly from three sources: from the work of Assagioli (1975) relative to the subpersonality theory of psychosynthesis; from object relations theory in understanding the introjected other (Kegan, 1982); and from the work of Jung (1968, 1969, 1971) in his understanding of the complexes of the mind. The information that Schwartz was receiving from his clients about their personality parts compared similarly to the processes of psychosynthesis in understanding the individual subpersonalities, “helping people to achieve the full potential of their subpersonalities [rather] than helping them to solve problems” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 4). However, rather than integrating the different parts into one whole, as in psychosynthesis, IFS seeks to differentiate the parts from the Self, and to allow the uniqueness of each part to thrive in harmony within the system.

Parallel to object relations theory, IFS seeks to understand the burdens (emotionally laden beliefs) handed down from generation to generation, carried by the personality parts. Further, object relations personality theory encompasses the concept of the introjected external objects, where an individual internalizes those personality traits and speech

patterns characteristic of their caregiving other (Kegan, 1982). Different from object relations, IFS sees personality parts as having been developed individually and internally, rather than introjected external others.

Schwartz applied Jung's descriptions of the inner beings of the mind, complexes (negative) and archetypes (positive), to the IFS model. Like Jung, Schwartz categorized subpersonalities encountered with clients into three groups: Manager Parts, Firefighter Parts, and Exile Parts. Manager Parts are those aspects of personality that direct the daily activities of the system. Firefighter Parts are those that strive to keep the individual from experiencing pain from current turmoil or past trauma. Exile Parts are child-like parts, immature in their emotions and behaviors, usually formed in trauma, who carry the pain and emotion associated with that prior experience. Schwartz (1995) draws upon the Jungian technique of active imagination to create direct interaction with these various personality parts. This understanding of the categories of personality parts and the ability to isolate them and interact with them, along with the assessment process detailed in Schwartz (1995), was the basis for the development of the interview used for data collection for this study.

Family systems theory "focuses on current behavior in the family, overt and covert communications processes, feedback loops, and roles" (Freidman, 1980, p. 64). Historical, interactional, and experiential perspectives are essential to understanding the inner workings of the family unit (Chasin & Grunebaum, 1980), whether internal or external. It was viewing these phenomenon both internally and externally that is the unique nature of IFS and this research project.

In the development of IFS, Schwartz (1995) drew upon a variety of sources within the family systems theory spectrum. From the structural school of family therapy, the IFS asserts the ability of each individual to competently take care of themselves, albeit that this "competence is constrained by their family structure" (Schwartz, 1995, p. 6). In addition

to the concept of competence. IFS employs the structural technique of establishing boundaries to enhance the balance within the internal system.

Strategic family therapy influences on IFS are seen in the circular sequences (i.e., the vicious circle) between parts. Also, the protective role that dysfunctional family members play in relation to each other has been positive in understanding the relationship between subpersonality parts. “In addition, the hypnotherapist Milton Erickson, who strongly influenced the strategic school, was one of the first to hold the conviction that the unconscious is a source of wisdom and strength rather than a repository of interfering drives” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 6).

The differentiation process of the Self in IFS is similar to differentiation in Murray Bowen’s model. Bowen’s theory also engenders the concept of burdens (emotionally charged beliefs) being passed from generation to generation, which is also a hallmark of IFS. The collaborative stance of the therapist in IFS is parallel to that of the clinician in the Milan model of family therapy. Finally, borrowing from the work of Virginia Satir, “as she has been the only prominent family therapist to write about parts of people” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 7), Schwartz built upon her early incorporation of self-awareness and “intrapsychic subpersonalities with systems theory” ( p. 7). The theoretical underpinnings from family systems and psychodynamic perspectives inherent in the IFS gave this study of stepfamilies an entirely different dynamic, yet to be explored in the literature.

### **Significance of the Study**

This particular study was significant, not only because this was the first implementation of the IFS model within dissertation research and stepfamily research, but also because stepfamilies are such an integral, majority family system in society today and need to be more clearly understood. Because of the impact family structure and stability have on child development and psychological well-being (Hetherington et al., 1989), research into the causes of remarriage failure are necessary. Seventy percent of remarriages end in divorce, compared with 50% of first marriages (Hernandez, 1988), and frequently

irreconcilable differences with respect to the stepfamily are cited as the cause. Through IFS it was possible to examine the intrapsychic behaviors of the personalities of the remarried couple in order to determine to what extent these irreconcilable differences might be mitigated. The IFS model provides the individual with an opportunity to look at themselves, or literally their Self, in order to seek alternative responses to a given situation. It is potentially through the evaluation of the multiple aspects of the personality, and intervening with these parts appropriately, that responses in stepfamilies may hopefully change. Identifying the patterns in remarried couples, and perhaps the triggering cycle of personality parts, may give information to clinicians on how to intervene with stepfamily members to discover why they react in certain ways to certain circumstances (Pasley, Dollahite, & Ihinger-Tallman, 1993). Altering these reactions may mean the difference between divorce and family stability in the stepfamily.

### **Limitations**

The best method available to study the internal system of the remarried couple, using the IFS model, was to utilize an interview format, where I relied on self-reported information. Although the probing and continued clarification allowed by the interview process improved the data, it could only be assumed that the information presented by the sample was honest and forthright. Because of the purposeful sampling of respondents, the conclusions were intended to be informative rather than generalizable to the larger population of stepfamilies.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study is organized into five sections. Chapter 1 is an overview of the study, introducing the concepts of personality parts and the individual as a system unto itself; reasons for studying the Internal Family Systems model in the context of stepfamilies; theoretical foundation of the study; significance of the study; research questions to be studied; purpose of the study; theoretical foundations; definition of terms used in the study; limitations of the research; and a review of how this study is organized.

Chapter 2 contains a discussion of the literature on Systems Theory and Psychodynamic Theory and their relationship, an explanation of the Internal Family Systems model with particular description of the concept of Self, and a review of the literature on stages of stepfamily adjustment and remarriage.

The design and methods used to conduct this study are outlined in chapter 3. This includes discussion about research methods, sampling and soliciting participants, instrumentation including a discussion of the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale and the development of the interview questions, data collection and transcription, preliminary data analysis, and the process by which themes and interpretations were drawn.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study, including demographics of the sample, results of the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale compared with subjective evaluation of the stepfamily's level of adjustment, and the interaction of internal personality parts within the remarried dyad and how they impacted the adjustment of the stepfamily.

Conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further study are contained in chapter 5. A summary of the study details what was hoped to be learned through the research questions. Conclusions highlight the observed impact of individual personality parts on the adjustment process and recommendations suggest possible therapeutic interventions that may prove effective in aiding stepfamilies, as well as providing ideas for further study.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What are we to make of what seem to be different personalities within people? Are they merely sets of cognitions and emotions, or are they something more?  
Richard C. Schwartz, 1995

#### **Introduction**

The literature on stepfamilies, remarriage, and stepfamily development has grown exponentially in the past decade. Social scientists and clinicians have recognized the growing need to understand this family type with its own uniqueness, rather than overlay the characteristics of the biological family and expect them to fit. However, the entirety of this body of literature has focused on the external stressors impacting the stepfamily and remarriage couple, rather than on the internal processes of the individual. The IFS model provides that intrapsychic look into stepfamily functioning and individual experience.

IFS borrowed basic ideas from the major family systems theories and psychodynamic theory of personality. Essentially, IFS is “a new way of thinking about and changing the human condition” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 9). Although there are pieces of the IFS model that resemble other theories and models of therapy, upon examination it represents the synergy of two schools of thought: multiplicity theory of personality and systems theory. IFS is the first synthesis of these well-known ideas, and the premises borrowed from them are discussed in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section gives an overview of psychodynamic and systems theory as it relates to the development of IFS. Within this section are discussions of the major systems theories and how each contributed to the

foundation of IFS. The psychodynamic view of multiplicity inherent in personality and how it is represented in the IFS model is outlined. In the second section the Internal Family System model is discussed and described in detail. The third section reviews literature on stages of stepfamily adjustment and development. The final section discusses remarriage literature and includes a review of the specific literature on the intrapsychic processes of the remarriage couple.

### **Two Paradigms of IFS: Systems Thinking and Multiplicity of the Mind**

Family systems theorists and psychodynamic clinicians have a history of being at odds with each other (Pearce & Freidman, 1980; Schwartz, 1995). Systems thinking, whether Experiential, Structural or Strategic, focuses on the interpersonal functioning of the system's members in the present. In contrast, psychodynamic processes emphasize past events and how personality and patterns of behavior are developed out of these events in the history of the individual. Many practitioners have called for the integration of the two theories to better study systems from the perspective of the individual experience (Holmes, 1994; Nichols, 1987; Pearce & Freidman, 1980; Schwartz, 1987, 1995).

Systems theories have, as their common denominator, a rejection of intrapsychic phenomenon and instead focus on the dynamics of interpersonal exchange (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). The schema of the "healthy" family as a system includes the following elements:

it is an open socio-cultural system in transformation; family undergoes development, stages require restructuring; family adapts to change to maintain continuity and enhance personal and social growth of members; the structure of the family places invisible demands on the way the family interacts. (Minuchin, 1974, p. 51)

As I further explain, this schema is superimposed on internal subpersonalities in the IFS model, as each part is considered an individual member of the system.

Systems theory focuses on action; that is, on the conscious processes and patterns of behavior observable within and between family members. It incorporates the

relationship between established and accepted interactional patterns and how external factors impact that interaction into the process of healing and change (Minuchin, 1974; Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). In IFS, Schwartz (1995) has applied these concepts of systems theory to the internal processes of the individual. In that regard, each subpersonality has conscious processes, interactional patterns, and relationships with other parts of the internal family. By studying the internal reactions to external factors, Schwartz and his colleagues have found that change and healing can be brought to both “internal” and “external” families (Holmes, 1994; Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1987, 1988, 1992, 1995). In this way, Schwartz (1995) has blended psychodynamic personality theory with the active, conscious approaches of systems work.

Structural family therapy and the contributions of Salvador Minuchin are hallmarks of IFS. The interaction of subsystems of personalities in IFS parallels the interaction of subsystems in Minuchin’s interpersonal boundaries (Minuchin, 1974; Schwartz, 1995). Dysfunction, in both cases, is defined as the lack of clear, explicitly defined boundaries between the members of the system. Boundaries define which members (or in IFS, parts) participate in a subsystem and how they are to participate (Minuchin, 1974; Schwartz, 1995):

Salvadore Minuchin asserted that people are basically competent but that this competence is constrained by their family structure; to release the competence, change the structure. The IFS model still holds this basic philosophy, but suggests that it is not just the external family structure that constrains and can change. In addition, the IFS overlays some structural methods, particularly the boundary-making technique, on internal family process. (Schwartz, 1995, p. 6)

In IFS, the intrapsychic boundaries are decided by the parts themselves either explicitly or implicitly. As in an external family system, dysfunction is evidenced by the clear lack of separation and definition between them.

Also inherent in the Structural model is the idea that when a family absorbs a new member, that new member must adapt to the system’s rules and the old structure must be modified to include the new member (Minuchin, 1974). The tendency to maintain old

patterns, or the previous structure, places stress on the new member and causes him or her to increase demands on the system. The same phenomenon is visible in loss: the system must adapt and accommodate to the lost member. As stepfamilies are formed in loss (Visher & Visher, 1990), how this systemic accommodation occurs, both to adapt to the loss and to accommodate the new member or members, is critical to the success of a stepfamily. In this study, how this adaptation is envisioned and assimilated intrapsychically in the individual members of the new family was of particular interest.

Apart from Structural influences, IFS borrows from the Strategic school of thought, with “the importance of tracking and understanding sequences of interaction” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 6). The concept of polarization of parts in IFS is a direct reflection of Jay Haley’s work with circular sequences or the vicious circle (Schwartz, 1995): Part One attempts to change or influence behaviors of Part Two, whose behaviors then become more extreme in response, causing Part One to repeat the sequence.

IFS parallels the work of Murray Bowen in his differentiation of self, where in IFS the individuation of the Self is paramount to healing the system (Schwartz, 1995). “His idea of helping people maintain differentiated selves in the presence of family members and sending clients on family-of-origin voyages also have [similarities] within IFS” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 6). Like Bowen’s intergenerational evolution of family issues, the IFS is concerned with the legacy of burdens, that is, extreme beliefs and their associated emotions, promoted from generation to generation.

The collaborative stance of the therapist in IFS is an extension of the less directive position of the clinician in the Milan model of systems therapy. As with Milanian therapists, “the IFS model also produces a form of psychotherapy that is collaborative...People already have the resources they need, [and] therapists can collaborate with them rather than teaching them, confronting them, or trying to fill putative holes in their psyches or families” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 9).

Examination of stories or narratives of the Exiled Parts and the healing that comes from the retelling of those stories from a different perspective, is similar to the techniques of Michael White of Australia and Narrative Therapy (Schwartz, 1995). Narrative Therapy essentially encourages clients to understand what is happening to them in the present by narrating the stories from their past. The healing comes from “seeing” the story from a new perspective. In IFS, by encouraging the Exiled Part to tell its story, more adaptive parts can then recognize the dysfunctional emotional attachment to the past, strive to heal that pain, and bring the system into a more adaptive present life.

Finally, along with Bowen’s differentiation of the self (described above), IFS has profited from the pioneering work with self-awareness and subpersonality processes by Virginia Satir. Satir is noted as the first systems theorist to clearly understand the impact of the clinician’s self in therapy and to write about the importance of engaging with clients at that level. Schwartz used these ideas as a springboard to a more in-depth understanding of the internal system of personality parts in relation to the Self (Schwartz, 1995).

Psychodynamic theory, underlying IFS, is drawn primarily from Freud, the archetypal characteristics of Jung (1968, 1969, 1971), object relations theory (Kegan, 1982), and the subpersonality process described in psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1975). Schwartz accredits his beginnings with multiplicity theory of personality with Freud’s id, ego, and superego, but “various post-Freudian theorists have moved beyond [Freud’s] tripartite model and discussed a range of inner entities” (1995, p. 12). Among these most importantly is object relations theory, which asserts “that our internal experience is shaped by introjected “objects,” holograph-like representations of significant people in our lives” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 12). Assagioli, an Italian psychiatrist in the 1900s, is said by some to be the first person in Western civilization to speak and write on the multiplicity of the mind (Schwartz, 1995). In his work, which became known as psychosynthesis, effort is spent helping people to know and understand their subpersonalities individually, rather than in a systemic context. According to psychosynthesis, these subpersonalities take on behaviors

and reactions all their own and are more than introjects of a significant other (Assagioli, 1975).

The Jungian archetypes give firm foundation to the idea of an individual personality being comprised of many entities, complexes or subpersonalities, which are again more than mere introjects. Jung described archetypes as “having the tendency to form a little personality of itself. It has a sort of body, a certain amount of its own physiology. It can upset the stomach, it upsets the breathing, it disturbs the heart--in short, it behaves like a partial personality” (Jung, 1968, pp. 80-81).

In the combination of psychodynamic theories with family systems theories, Schwartz gives another dimension to the study of stepfamily adjustment, looking at personal impediments to change, individual intentions toward behaviors, and how those individual experiences impact the stability of the whole (Schwartz, 1995). This combination of the internal and external family systems perspectives gives a new focus to the stepfamily literature.

### **Internal Family Systems Model**

The IFS model was developed by Richard C. Schwartz at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the 1980s, “using family systems principles to understand the inner experience of individuals” (Schwartz, 1992, p. 34). Schwartz, a noted scholar in family systems applications, found that he was not having success at relieving bulimic symptoms of clients in a family systems outcome study (Schwartz, 1987). He was perplexed when the family as a whole appeared to be improving and responding to systems interventions but the identified bulimic client continued to binge and purge. As a last resort, he looked at the internal experience of the bulimic client. Schwartz discovered that people have an internal system of subpersonalities which interacts and polarizes just like an external family system and that individual experience of a situation can have a substantial impact on the behavior of the system as a whole (Breulin, Schwartz, & MacKune-Karrer, 1990, 1991; Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1987, 1995). It was out of these initial forays into

the inner experience of the client that Schwartz developed the Internal Family Systems model.

The IFS model is based upon the multiplicity theory of personality, that is, the personality is multiple naturally.

In Ornstein's words, "we are not a single person. We are many." From this multiple perspective, we no longer have to fear "fragmenting"--we are already fragmented. In a sense we are all multiple personalities. The condition we call multiple personality disorder only represents an extreme disengaged and polarized version of the ordinary operation of our internal system. This is a very difficult proposition for most people to fully accept, but once it is accepted, one's view of one's self and of human nature is profoundly altered. (Schwartz, 1987, p. 27)

In this way, a clinician seeks the multiple perspective of the individual as the rationale for certain behaviors. The multiple personality overview sees interaction in the context of the internal experience. "There is a part of Johnny that, when extreme, worries about being deserted and tells him to protect his parent's marriage. There are other parts of [his personality] that feel strong or competent but get overridden when [a] scared part is activated" (Schwartz, 1987, p. 28).

### Self

A differentiating feature of the IFS model from its predecessors of Jungian archetypes, from psychosynthesis, or from the concept of an internalized other, is the concept of Self. Underlying the multiplicity theory of personality is the assumption that everyone has a Self--Real Self or Greater Self, which is a separate kind of entity from the subpersonalities (Rowan, 1990). Both Jung and Assagioli maintain that every individual has a basic, central core that is separate and individual from subpersonalities.

As both saw it, this Self is a state of mind to be achieved--a place of non-judgmental, clear perspective (although Jung also discussed Self as the total personality at times). According to Jung, this Self is a passive, observing state. According to Assagioli, a person can eventually evolve to a point at which the Self shifts from passive observer to active manager of the personality. (Schwartz, 1995, pp. 4-5)

This state of achievement is also similar to the Supportive Observer of Wexler's work (1991) in which the Observer is the "homoneucleus inside each of us who filters

.information in its own ...helpful way” (p. 48) and the Supportive Observer “is this little voice inside which is capable of being supportive, self-trusting, and self-respecting” (p. 49). Needleham (1985) describes Freud’s idea of Self as the “existence of a level and quality of human attention hitherto unsuspected and unrecognized by modern science and [Freud] found that this force... served to balance his own intellectual and emotional functions thereby enabling him to be compassionate and insightful” (Needleham, 1985, p. 84).

The Self is described also in IFS as “the center of the person, the place from which one observes” (Holmes, 1994, p. 27). However, according to Schwartz and contrary to Jung’s ideas, the Self is an active presence.

At the core of everyone is the Self, which is the seat of consciousness. From birth this Self has all the necessary qualities of good leadership, such as compassion, perspective, curiosity, acceptance, and confidence. As a result, the Self makes the best internal leader, and will engender inner balance and harmony if it is allowed by the parts to lead. A person’s parts are organized to protect the Self at all costs and will remove it from danger and from leadership in the face of trauma . . . obscuring its leadership qualities, and causing it to be separated from the sensations of the person’s body. . . . It is also not merely a passive observer or witness state; instead, once differentiated from the parts, it becomes an active, compassionate, and collaborative leader (Schwartz, 1995, pp. 57-58)

Also different from psychosynthesis, IFS maintains the multiple nature of personality and does not strive to integrate the parts and Self into one entity. Instead, when Self-leadership is attained, the Self and parts work together to share talents and ideas, experiences, and expertise in a cooperative manner. Each part has “a different, valuable role and set of abilities. [When in balance] they cooperate rather than compete or conflict with each other, and when conflicts arise, the Self mediates” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 58). Rather than integrating into a monolithic personality system then, in IFS the natural multiplicity theory remains intact. Further, with the meta-perspective of the Self (the ability to see the perspective of the many parts where parts can only see their own), resolution of internal conflict is possible.

In family and stepfamily interactions, individual Self-leadership is critical to harmony. All systems--family, community, national--function best with clearly defined,



competent, fair, non-judgmental leadership. As with internal systems, in external systems IFS proposes that when an individual can attain Self-leadership and can interact within the family system in this state of mind, dysfunction can be resolved. When an individual is able to move out of a part and into Self, interactions with others are also less conflictual and more harmonious. It is within this context that this study looked for expressions of Self-leadership in the individual members of the couples, that is, their ability to look beyond the emotional and controlling behaviors of the parts to resolve their differences, as an indication of their ability to adjust as a stepfamily.

### Personality Parts

The IFS model recognizes three essential personality parts, separate and distinct from each other and from the Self: Managers, Firefighters, and Exiles (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). It is the reasonable intention of each part to strive for something positive for the individual. There are no bad parts, only parts behaving in the extreme, based upon their interpretation of the current situation and how the events of the moment could impact the individual. For example, a stepmother becomes extremely angry and raises her voice in response to certain behaviors of her stepchildren. In the language of the IFS, it is reasonable to assume that this stepmother's Angry Part is interpreting the current circumstances as hurtful, or potentially dangerous to a vulnerable system, and becomes extreme, that is, takes over the entire functioning of the stepmother's system at that moment with less than appropriate or helpful behaviors. The Angry Part is attempting to protect the system (i.e., the stepmother) from being taken advantage of, or hurt, or manipulated in some way by the stepchildren, behaviors which the Angry Part sees as imperative at the moment. Insight in the IFS is defined as the Self understanding the role of the part in the extreme, and assisting it to return to its reasonable position or role.

As individuals develop, their personality parts develop as well, forming a complex system of internal interactions, with rules, boundaries, and expectations, part to part. Understanding this interaction is key to resolving internal and external conflict with the

individual (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, personal communication, October 26, 1993 & January 2, 1997). By reorganizing the internal system, parts can change their beliefs and their behavior. Change in the internal system impacts the external world and vice versa. "The implication of this assumption is that both the internal and external levels of system should be assessed" (Schwartz, personal communication, October 26, 1993). With stepfamilies, that would indicate examination of both the external stressors and the internal implications of those stressors.

*Manager Parts* are the parts that control the day-to-day activities of the individual. Schwartz (1995) found that these parts, which exist in every individual, attempt to keep the individual from feeling hurt, rejected, or abused in any way. To do this, they control relationships and situations in an effort to keep the individual from harm. These parts make sure that life holds no unpleasant surprises. They try to help the individual not to become too dependent on others generally through a multitude of behaviors, individually or through a combination of parts. Behaviors which are frequently attributed to managers include controlling (self and others), striving or overachieving, evaluating or judging (self and others), caretaking (of others), worrying, denial, passive-pessimist, pleasing (others), and withdrawal (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Manager Parts preempt Exile Parts (see Exile Parts below), keeping them and their pain at bay. They are careful, strategic, rational, and moralizing.

*Firefighter Parts* were so named because of their role to extinguish the emotional and destructive "fires" created by activation of Exile Parts (see Exile Parts below). Where Manager Parts are proactive, Firefighter Parts are reactive. After an Exile Part has been activated, firefighters intercede to calm, control, insulate, distract, anesthetize, or dissociate--in short to effect any behavior which will keep the individual from feeling the pain (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). These behaviors include drug and alcohol use and abuse, self-mutilation (cutting and hitting), bingeing and starvation, sexual promiscuity, suicidal ideation, stealing, shoplifting, and rage. Unlike Manager Parts who

wish to control to protect the system, Firefighter Parts are out of control and put the system at risk. They are unilateral and narrow in their interpretation and seek only to resolve the current inner turmoil at whatever the cost (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Again, because parts seek the best for the individual within their narrow perspective of the system, Firefighters perceive their role as appropriate. Their behavior has worked in the past to relieve the pain and they will continue to employ the same tactics or escalations of same, until there is some form of intervention.

*Exile Parts* are the third group of parts experienced in the personality. These are young, child-like parts, that have experienced trauma in the past, and are often isolated from the rest of the internal family system (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). They are the parts of us who are burdened with the memories of trauma and the associated emotional responses. As a result, the other parts, Managers and Firefighters, perceive the Exile Parts as dangerous. The Exile Parts are isolated from the system in an effort to protect and insulate the individual from the extreme emotions--sadness, fear, terror, hopelessness, and pain (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). These parts can be dangerous, as they are the parts that experience extreme hopelessness, a catalyst in suicide. Like children, Exile Parts are desperate in their attempt to be cared for, to be valued, and to have their story heard; it is as though survival depends on value. Exile Parts are characterized by such feelings as fragility, vulnerability, unloveableness, worthlessness, emptiness, shame, sadness, rejection, hopelessness, and helplessness (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995).

Managers, the parts that most often interact with the subpersonalities of others in relationship, live in the present, and believe that the past is in the past; the damage is done. Exiles, on the other hand, live in the past and can only leave their extreme roles when brought into the present through psychotherapy. Managers believe that others will think less of them if the truth about them is known, so they live an existence of pretense (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). It is in this pretense that relationships are

born and disintegrate, as partners get caught up in the deception. "People tend to mistake the parts they activate in each other for the whole person and consequently become locked in rigid ways of relating" (Schwartz, 1987, p. 28). Frequently, individuals enter into remarriage still locked in formerly unsuccessful ways of relating to another. Fantasies are maintained about finding the right person who can understand them and make their life complete (Visher & Visher, 1990; Walsh, 1992) rather than taking an introspective view of what caused problems in the first marriage. Unlocking these rigid patterns of relating is potentially the key to furthering stepfamily adjustment. The IFS may provide a mechanism through which these patterns can be understood and unraveled.

### **Stepfamily Adjustment**

Researchers call for an identification of stepfamilies separate from first-marriage families (Einstein, 1985; Kelley, 1992; Keshet, 1987; McGolderick & Carter, 1980; Mills, 1984; Papernow, 1984, 1993; Walsh, 1992; Visher & Visher, 1990). Family studies until recently had little awareness of the differences between stepfamily life and that of first-marriage families, and stepfamilies were "lumped with general family research [and] statistics" (Einstein, 1985, p. 86). Further, as a society, we have classified remarriage families and relationships as inferior, and in that way have pressured these new family units to be ashamed of who and what they are and to emulate, as much as possible, first-marriage families.

Even the language used in English to identify relationship by marriage rather than biology is ugly and unrefined. In French, the term for stepmother is "belle mere" or "lovely (beautiful) mother." In English we have adopted a term which has its etymology in the Anglo Saxon word *astepan*, meaning to deprive. A stepchild was an orphan, deprived of natural parents and family heritage. Thus the language identifying remarriage families is rooted in negative, inferior inferences of loss, bereavement, and depravation. In the 50's, Jessie Bernard (1956) called for new language to identify step relationships, refusing to use stepchild, stepmother, or stepfather in her writing, referring to them as near obscenities.

However, the current euphemisms in stepfamily research--blended, acquired, recoupled, reconstituted, refamilies, binuclear, synergistic--do little to mask the negative attitudes held inside and outside the family (Einstein, 1985).

To address these negative attitudes several researchers have endeavored to identify the stages of adjustment particular to stepfamilies (Keshet, 1987; Mills, 1989; Papernow, 1984, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1990). In this process, their hope was to create an understanding and knowledge base which would begin the process of reversing the negative, inferior attitude toward this growing family type. Emily and John Visher, stepparents themselves, have studied and encouraged stepfamilies for more than 20 years. Although not a developmental overview of stepfamily adjustment, they have identified several developmental tasks that are essential to establishing a healthy stepfamily unit (Visher & Visher, 1990). In their research they identified "six important characteristics of stepfamily adults which [we] believe are associated with a satisfactory adjustment for this type of family" (p. 5). First, in successful stepfamilies, adults have mourned their previous losses, including the lost dream of a successful first marriage. Second, the adults have a "realistic expectation that their family will be different from a first-marriage family" (p. 6). Differences to be accepted include:

1. Individual life cycle stages, different personalities, and different ways of doing things are based upon the culture of their family of origin, including the previous family unit.
2. Biological parent/child bonds precede the remarried couple and therefore are unique from first-marriage relationships.
3. There may be a biological parent with significant influence on this family elsewhere, and children move between these influences.

Third, in adjusted stepfamilies, step-relationships are based on mutual respect rather than legal ties. Fourth, rituals and traditions are established around significant family events and step-relationships have been allowed to develop according to their own natural course. Fifth, former-spouse households cooperate in a "parenting coalition" (p. 10).

The sixth and final characteristic of well-adjusted stepfamilies is a strong, unified marital couple, which is often difficult to establish in the midst of strong parent/child coalitions and demands from former spouses. A stable, consistent interaction between the remarried couple provides the children with a "sense of security...and assurance that the stepfamily unit will continue" (Visher & Visher, 1990, p. 8). In that way, children and extended family members more readily invest time and effort in adapting to the ways and needs of the new family unit. In this study, the focus was on the internal personality factors of the remarried couple that potentially undermine marital unity, and thus the stepfamily adjustment as a whole.

According to Papernow (1993), "stepfamily structure and history make both intrapsychic and interpersonal functioning very different in stepfamilies and in biological families" (p. 22). In her landmark work defining the Stepfamily Cycle (1993), Papernow references the Gestalt Experience Cycle (Zinker, 1977), and how this experiential model of individual process gives understanding to the differences between biological and remarriage families. The Gestalt Experience Cycle begins with *sensation*---"that feeling that something is about to happen" (Papernow, 1993, p. 22), followed by *awareness* --"paying attention to the sensations . . . naming them . . . gathering data from the real world about what might be happening" (p. 22). Awareness is then supported by *mobilization* -- "the physical energy to do something about his or her awareness" (p. 23). The ability to move to the next stage, *action* , "requires directing and focusing one's energy" (p. 23). Once in action, an individual connects or makes *contact* with some aspect of themselves or another. The final stages have to do with completion: *resolution* is the getting ready to end or complete what is happening, and *withdrawal* is the removal of oneself from the situation or process to give it closure.

The Stepfamily Cycle (Papernow, 1993) is characterized by three levels--early, middle, and late--flowing like the Gestalt Experience Cycle from Fantasy (sensation) to Immersion and Awareness as the Early Stages, to Mobilization and Action as the Middle

Stages, and finally to Contact and Resolution in the Late Stages. The task of the new stepfamily, according to Papernow (1993), is to create a nourishing, sustaining, “middle ground” (p. 67) amongst the step-relationships. In the Early Stages, this middle ground is within the pre-existing parent-child relationships, but it begins to shift in the Middle Stages, and “by the Later Stages . . . the middle ground in step relationships is finally thick enough to give the family a sense of identity and solidity as a stepfamily” (p. 67).

Each one of these stages has its own unique characteristics and developmental tasks for the members of the stepfamily. In the Early Stages, Fantasy contains the wishes, hopes, and dreams that the remarried couple and their children bring to the new relationship. These fantasies are both conscious and spoken expectations, and silent, unconscious fears and desires. Families remain in this Fantasy Stage until they realize that the new stepfamily is not going to make their dreams come true. What follows is the Immersion Stage which is characterized by “constant and confusing glitches and misunderstandings, as [members] experience family events very differently” (Papernow, 1993, p. 84) from one another. The family cultures and histories of each former family unit begin to collide and clash and coexistence becomes a struggle. The Awareness Stage is the time for new members to get to know each other, what their differences and their individual needs are, and to begin to make allowances for both. Finding one’s place in the new system is the critical task for each person in the Stepfamily Cycle, and Awareness Stage tasks begin the process.

Middle Stages have to do with the process of moving forward, of “restructuring the family” (Papernow, 1993, p. 152). Changes can be seen in individuals: needs have been honored, territory relinquished, wounds healed, losses grieved. Although the family remains essentially organized around former family relationships, bonds begin to form between certain step relations. Where the Early Stages are characterized by individual realizations, Papernow (1993) classifies tasks in the Middle Stages as systemic. Mobilization is the stage in which conflict between members is brought out into the open.

Through direct confrontation family members begin to know and experience each other in a new way. This allows for the formation of more middle ground in which the stepfamily can function. The Action Stage is where the bond between the couple is most critical. In this stage the “couple can become the architect of the new family, beginning to form clearer boundaries around its step subsystems” (p. 153). The Middle Stages is where the family works hardest, especially the remarried couple. It is also the most precarious in terms of the continuation of the family unit. Lack of ability to identify the gaps in compatibility and move through them could jeopardize the fabric of the stepfamily membership.

The Later Stages called Contact and Resolution (Papernow, 1993) are all about fine-tuning the work begun in the Middle Stages. Members of the stepfamily move easily between their situations of insider and outsider, role definition has taken place between stepparents and stepchildren, and each feels comfortable with the other. There is no longer the triangulation of biological parent and child. The stepparent and children sense the stability and reliability of the family community. They know their place and are secure that they belong. Through the restructuring of the Middle Stages, the stepfamily has moved from triadic to dyadic in its organization, allowing individual pairs to find their own middle ground in the Contact Stage.

The remarried couple relationship at last becomes an intimate sanctuary. Difficulties that were sources of confusion and shame in the Immersion Stage, remained painful and unarticulated in Awareness, and were struggled over in the Mobilization and Action Stages, can [now] be brought to the couple relationship. Spouses can reliably provide support and comfort to each other on step issues and they can turn to each other for help in problem solving. (Papernow, 1993, p. 199)

Resolution is the stage where that which was hammered out in the former stages becomes a matter of course. Issues that were once a constant source of consternation, frequently discussed deeply and passionately, are now of little consequence. “Family life now feels normal, reliable, and predictable” (Papernow, 1993, p. 213). Although no family is without challenges or circumstances requiring action, the Resolution Stage stepfamily-



handles these daily occurrences with relative ease and lack of frustration, through coordinated efforts by both adult members of the community.

Papernow (1993) suggests that the average family will spend anywhere from 5 to 7 years navigating the Stepfamily Cycle of adjustment. Depending on personality type, history from prior marriages and families of origin, and willingness to be open and honest with themselves and their spouses, many families could take longer and many families do not make it to the end. Getting stuck developmentally is what discourages and dissolves many stepfamilies. It is through this research of the internal patterns of interaction it is hoped that information can be given to those struggling through this adjustment cycle to ease the way.

In his developmental stepfamily model, Mills (1984) created a goal-oriented, psychoeducational process by which stepfamilies come together as a unit. Based on personal experience and clinical work with stepfamilies, Mills outlines multiple underlying assumptions of the model. First, the remarried couple has the responsibility for being “the architect[s] of the stepfamily system, [assuming] conscious executive control of the family” (Mills, 1984, p. 367). By asserting the marital couple as the authority in the family, boundary issues with step and biological relationships can be resolved. Second, the stepparent must consciously choose, with the support of the biological parent, what their role with the stepchildren will be. This role may fluctuate from child to child, depending upon their personality, age, and individual needs. Finally, a stepfamily will determine the structure and organization that best fits the individual needs of the members. This structure will be flexible and change over time, as the lifecycle of each member changes and their requirements from the system changes. The Stepfamily Model (Mills, 1984) is delineated by the following steps or stages: (1) long-term goal setting for the stepfamily structure and biological parent limit-setting; (2) stepparent bonding and blending family rules; and (3) step-relationship building and structure modification. Mills’s process is one imposed upon the family by a therapist, in a group setting, rather than a descriptive process of the natural

evolution of stepfamilies. However, as with the more descriptive models, again the responsibility for stepfamily adjustment rests with the remarried couple.

Keshet (1987) writes of three stages of adjustment in the stepfamily: Acceptance, Authority, and Affection/Unification. These correspond almost exactly to the Early Stages, Middle Stages, and Later Stages categories presented by Papernow (1993). The Acceptance Stage is characterized by balancing time commitments, adapting to visitation schedules, loyalty issues, and definition of membership. The task is to begin the process of accepting differences. The stepfamily is split into minifamilies which hold the history and demand the loyalty of its membership. The Authority Stage is called the “make it or break it stage” (p. 94) by Keshet, the hardest for stepfamilies to master, and the place where most remarriages breakdown. Like in the Middle Stages of Papernow’s model (1992), the stepfamily members in the Authority Stage become more vocal in their disagreements, more insistent in their demands on each other, more intolerant of their differences. However, it is also the stage where the stepparent and stepchild begin to establish their relationships with each other apart from and without the interference of the biological parent. It is the time when authority is challenged and authority established and supported. Adult leadership meshes and a parental coalition is cemented. Affection/Unification is rooted in the realization that this stepfamily is different from biological families, and unique unto itself among stepfamilies (Keshet, 1987). This stage is characterized by a more relaxed atmosphere when all members are present and they stop thinking of themselves as “steps”. A stepfamily history forms with rituals and traditions, and the concerns of the day include stepfamily issues along with those of any community of people co-existing.

Because of the similarity of the characteristics of a healthy stepfamily in Visher and Visher (1990), the three developmental stages of Keshet (1987), the three levels of stages in Papernow’s Stepfamily Cycle (1993), and the tasks inherent in the Mills model, I created a compilation of all four of these models to use in this research. I classified stepfamily adjustment into three stages: Stage I: Preparation; Stage II: Working It Out; and Stage III:

Living. Stage I, Preparation, takes into account learning about each other, becoming aware of the differences between families, between partners, and between lifestyles. Stage II is Working It Out, where habit is separated from need. Members learn where authority must be maintained, and where it can be shared, where individual strengths are honored and weaknesses forgiven, and where partners decide what they can live with and what they cannot, in terms of the demands and idiosyncrasies of children and spouse. Stage III, Living, is where the work of Stage II pays off. Being a stepfamily becomes just a part of daily living, rather than the focus of it. These three stages were then implemented into the interview instrument as the means by which I extrapolated the stepfamily's developmental task at hand and determined if there is intrapsychic conflict that has stifled or interfered in some way with that developmental task.

### **Remarriage**

Remarriage has long been a topic of research in the field of psychology, due to the large number of people who remarry, and the proportionally large number of remarriages that fail (MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995). Specific to this research was the literature pertaining to causes of remarriage satisfaction or dissolution, particularly those studies that focus on intrapsychic or personality-related issues.

In his review of the remarriage literature, Walsh (1992) identified 20 major issues identified in the professional literature that significantly impacted the adjustment and satisfaction of the remarriage family. He grouped these issues into four primary categories: initial family issues, developing family issues, feelings about self and others, and adult issues. Specifically in the category about self and others, there is discussion about the literature on individual self-concept and remarriage (Walsh, 1992). In this literature, there is emphasis on the development of positive self-image through adjustment to external factors and relationships. There is no reference, however, to intrapsychic phenomenon influencing the self-concepts of the remarried couple.

In the adult-issues category, according to Walsh (1992), again the focus is external: parenting effects on the couple; financial concerns; continuing conflict or competition with ex-partners; quality of the remarriage relationship. There appears to be no literature examining the personal experience of the remarriage from the individual perspective.

Crosbie-Burnett (1989b) stated that often stepfamily problems are attributed to personal deficits by the members of the family. "The meaning of the remarriage is influenced by a variety of contextual factors (both inside and outside of the family), which "predict individual . . . coping behaviors and the family's adaptation" (p. 323). She goes on to apply a family stress model to stepfamily coping mechanisms, but no examination takes place of the internal processes individual to each member.

Interesting findings by Pasley, Dollahite, and Ihinger-Tallman (1993), relative to the spousal relationship in remarriage, noted that studies have found no difference in the marital satisfaction between first marriages and remarriages. They did, however, find that "child residence and structural complexity are key issues facing stepfamilies which result in problematic interaction" (p. 316). No discussion is presented, however, in which the personalities of the individuals or their internal coping strategies are somehow interrelated with external events to influence marital satisfaction in remarriage.

MacDonald and DeMaris (1995) evaluated whether or not marital conflict is more prevalent in remarriages than first marriages. Their hypothesis is that stepchildren are the cause of more frequent conflict between the remarried couple. "Contrary to [our] expectations...findings suggest that remarriage and stepchildren are not necessarily associated with more frequent marital conflict, and in some cases are associated with less frequent conflict" (p. 387). Although they did not speak to the internal sources of remarried couple conflict, in their conclusions MacDonald and DeMaris stated that "as stepfamilies are rapidly becoming more common, it is increasingly important that their interactional dynamics be understood" (p. 397).

External sources of conflict for remarriage families are outlined by Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley (1986) as well, highlighting the lack of societal guidelines and societal ostracizing as significant adjustment hindrances for stepfamilies. Coleman and Ganong (1990) challenged the remarriage literature as problem-oriented with respect to stepfamily adjustment, focusing on what is not working rather than seeking positive representations of stepfamilies. Further, when considering multiple hypotheses of positive remarital relationships, only one study (Brody, Neubaum, & Forehand, 1988) looked at intrapsychic phenomenon as a potential variable in remarriage satisfaction. Their study suggested that psychopathology, personality disorders, or behavioral problems may be inherent in the quality and stability of remarriages. Normal personality processes were not part of the discussion.

Kurdek and Fine (1991) searched for cognitive correlates for remarriage satisfaction. They sought to identify stressors unique to remarried persons that put them at risk of divorce. The study found specific beliefs regarding family and stepfamily, particularly unrealistic expectations about the formation of a new family, to be foremost in the minds of unhappy, remarried partners. Most importantly, they found that “not only have cognitions been found to be related to individual adjustment, but they have also been linked to the development and maintenance of marital satisfaction” (Kurdek & Fine, 1991, p. 566). Further, they suggested that as cognitions are “critical components in the sequential flow of behavioral interactions” it follows that “a spouse’s behavior is filtered through the cognitions of the partner, and that this filtering influences the partner’s behavioral response to the spouse’s initial behavior” (p. 567). Translated into the language of IFS, the parts of one partner are triggered by the parts of the other and the interaction spirals. Kurdek and Fine (1991) posited that the remarried partners are predisposed to these cognitive processes (i.e., in IFS language, the personality parts’ behaviors and cognitions predate the relationship). According to their study, these predispositions actually determine before marriage which couples will stay together and which ones will

separate. Perhaps recognition of these cognitive patterns and understanding their corresponding personality parts can potentially reduce this alleged predisposition to divorce in remarried couples.

### **Summary**

In chapter 2, I have reviewed the literature on family systems and psychodynamic theories as it pertains to the IFS. IFS was outlined and explained in detail, followed by discussions of the literature on stepfamily adjustment, the developmental stages and tasks of remarried families, and the literature on intrapsychic functioning in remarriage.

CHAPTER III  
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities.  
Pogo

**Introduction**

This section is dedicated to the review of the methods that were used to research this topic. Included are sections discussing participants, instrumentation, the interview process, initial work on analyzing the data, and an overview of the process that was followed in data analysis.

**Overview**

This research study was conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. Information regarding stepfamily adjustment, specifically, was gathered both through administration of the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale (SAS), developed by Margaret Crosbie-Burnett (1989c), and open-ended questions in an interview format. Data about the remarried couple's internal family system, the interactions of their personality parts, and the ensuing stepfamily dynamics were obtained solely through personal interview and objective observation. In both the interview and in completing the SAS, participants were asked to respond according to their own experience. The interview process gave the participants "an opportunity to elaborate beyond the specific data requested by the researcher" (Halseth, 1989, p. 38), providing a window into the private experience of the remarried individuals, and additional information to expand the understanding of IFS and stepfamilies. The SAS corroborated the subjective determination of the stage of development of the stepfamily obtained in the interview process.

The approach to the qualitative research was both inductive, where specific information was anticipated and sought in the interview, and deductive, where themes and patterns were drawn from the transcripts of the interviews. Following the research conducted by Halseth on intuition (1989), the data collection process (development of the interview questions, conducting the interviews, and analyzing the transcripts) was inductively driven by existing knowledge into the stages of development of stepfamilies (Keshet, 1987; Mills, 1984; Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1990) and learned techniques of the IFS model in identifying personality parts (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Holmes, personal communication, May 1995; Schwartz, personal communication, October 26, 1993; June 6, 1994; March 4, 1995; November 4, 1996; January 2, 1997; Schwartz, 1995). Alternatively, conclusions were deduced from the data, by searching for themes and patterns of personality parts within the participants' responses.

Because of the subjective nature of the IFS process, qualitative methods were particularly necessary and enlightening, and offered participants the opportunity to explore their inner world. Further, open-ended questions allowed them to describe the experience of stepfamily life from their own unique perspective rather than being influenced by the researcher's preconceptions (Halseth, 1989). By interviewing each adult individually, and then together, a clearer pattern of parts interaction emerged.

To be able to learn about the internal experience of the remarried couple more completely, the interview began with an explanation of the study overall. The constructs of the IFS model were explained to the participants and aided in their ability to provide the information essential to clear understanding of their inner experience (see Appendix C).

### **Participants**

The remarried couples in this study represented a solicited group of participants. Because of the complex nature of stepfamily dynamics and the variety of stepfamily types, the only common denominator between the sample of respondents was that one person of the couplehood was indeed remarried. No cohabiting couples were included.



Couples were solicited by advertisements placed in newsletters, church bulletins, local newspapers, and by word-of-mouth in local organizations. Restrictions for participation included that couples had at least one member who was formerly married, that children resided or visited at regular intervals in the home, and that the couple had been married for less than 10 years. Nine couples responded to initial solicitations. From these nine, the first five were chosen. Selection criteria eliminated families where the remarried couple was separating, where the children lived a significant distance away from the couple and visited irregularly, where the family was in legal prosecution for sexual abuse allegations and both members of the remarried couple were inaccessible, and one couple eliminated themselves due to time constraints. Five more stepfamilies were specifically picked by the researcher due to their unique qualities, such as family background, residence of the children, step and natural children between the remarried couple, and age of respondents. A total of ten remarried couples were interviewed and their responses were analyzed in depth.

After discussions with Holmes and Schwartz (personal communication, September 1996) regarding the best way to study the personality parts of stepfamily couples, it was decided to conduct an informed interview. That is, the IFS model, the focus of the study, and what we were hoping to discover, were openly described from the outset. This psychoeducational approach was employed to ensure that each participant was clear about what was expected from the interview. By introducing the language of the IFS model to participants, they were better able to label their personality parts and more fully contribute to the outcome of the study.

### **Sampling**

Because this was the first study of a non-clinical population using the IFS model, I was moving into uncharted territory with respect to the selection of appropriate participants. Therefore, much was to be gained from selecting participants who appeared to provide the most valuable data for the study. I followed the suggestions of Miles and Huberman

(1994), who recommend that a qualitative sample be loosely defined and then redefined as the research progresses, rather than prior identification of the total sample. I began with five remarried couples who had volunteered for the study, and then selected five additional couples on the basis that they provided an additional dimension or perspective to the research. The sample was drawn from Southwestern Michigan, with participants living both in rural and urban areas.

### **Instrumentation**

As this is both an exploratory and a confirmatory study, instrumentation was designed to be flexible, yet specific. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), exploratory studies are those in which the findings are mostly descriptive of a given situation or circumstance, where the boundaries and outcomes of the study are largely unknown at the outset. A confirmatory study, on the other hand, has a more specific, focused set of research questions and sampling source. However, in either case, if the instrumentation is too restrictive, it can hinder the expansion of the dynamics of the interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is common for qualitative research to be exploratory at the beginning and more confirmatory in nature toward the end of the data collection phase. This research was, on the contrary, more confirmatory in nature at the outset, and became largely exploratory as the interviews proceeded. Therefore one instrument was comprised of open-ended questions, related specifically to the information needed to respond to the research questions, and the second was a Likert scale questionnaire, specifically designed to measure stepfamily adjustment.

### **Stepfamily Adjustment Scale**

Developed by Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale was designed for collecting data regarding stepfamilies for research purposes. It is the only published instrument for assessing the unique circumstances of stepfamily life. Described by Crosbie-Burnett (1989c) as a pencil-and-paper self-report instrument, the SAS has four

forms: biological parent, stepparent, adolescent, and child. For this research study, only the biological parent and stepparent forms were used. The biological parent forms consist of 111 items and the stepparent forms are comprised of 122. All the items use a 4-point Likert scale, with the exception of one item on the stepparent form and three items (two of which are multiple-child responses) on the biological parent form that have a 3-point Likert scale. The response descriptor for each item is not the same, as some of the items require different wording to make sense with the question such as True/Untrue, Fair/Unfair, Always/Sometimes/Rarely/Never, or a response description which is specific to that item (see Appendix C, Sample Items). The items on each instrument--stepparent and biological parent--are identical or analogous, making it possible to generate a composite score for the marital dyad, as in this study, or any other composite of stepfamily members (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989c). A sample of the items in the instruments is presented in Appendix C.

An original pilot of the instrument was performed on 87 stepfamilies on the West Coast in 1981, and as a result of that first administration several variables were added, creating the present version of the instrument. Reliability and validity studies for the present generation were conducted on a sample of 104 volunteer Caucasian families, in a small Midwestern city, identified through county marriage records (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989c).

There are 25 psychological variables pertaining to stepfamily adjustment measured by the SAS:

1. Unresolved emotions from the prior marriage and family;
2. Issues related to the children's movement between two households (visitation);
3. Divided loyalties;
4. Psychological inclusion of the stepparent into the family;
5. Biological parent's alliance with the children;
6. The children inhibiting the stepparent from exercising leadership in the family;
7. Displacement of an elder child by the stepparent;
8. The quality of the step relationship;
9. Nurturance in the step relationship;
10. Discipline by the stepparent
11. Biological parent's support of the stepparent
12. Issues related to money;
13. Decision-making power in the marriage;
14. Marital happiness;

15. Family cohesion;
  16. Happiness with the family;
  17. Ambiguity of the stepparent role;
  18. The mutual suitability of the step relationship;
  19. The quality of the relationship with the non-residential biological parent;
  20. The quality of the child-biological parent relationship;
  21. The effect of the remarriage on the child-biological parent relationship;
  22. The impact of visiting stepchildren;
  23. Self-efficacy with respect to the attainment of family-related needs;
  24. Social support; and
- Satisfaction with Stepfamily Life. (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989c, pp. 3-4)

Reliability measures and subscale correlations for the SAS are presented in Appendix D. The first 18 subscales were from the first generation of the instrument, and subscales 19-25 were added after the first administration. Internal consistency was evaluated using both Spearman correlation coefficient  $\rho$  and the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient  $r$ . A majority of the subscales on the adult forms had internal consistency correlations and test-retest correlations above .75, with the noted exception of a few items directly related to adolescent interactions, which were unstable over time, as are adolescents. It was noted that test-retest correlations are more stable in those subscales measuring relationships than those measuring roles, as roles in developing stepfamilies tend to fluctuate daily (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989c).

Validity measures were conducted in various ways to substantiate the subscales. Concurrent validity was measured in three ways:

1. Samples of the bioparents, stepparents, and adolescents were separated based upon responses to the family happiness subscale. T-tests were computed using the other SAS subscales as dependent variables.
2. Subjective ratings by the researchers of each stepfamily on a four-point scale were compared with outcomes on the family happiness subscale.
3. Correlations between a card sort method of assessing the stepfamily and the outcome of the SAS, were made.
4. Comparisons with previously validated family assessment scales such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and FACES III were made (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989c).

In most instances, the subscales of the SAS were found to be valid measures of the different aspects of stepfamily adjustment. Validity and reliability tables for the SAS are provided in Appendix D.

#### This Study's Use of the SAS

The SAS was administered by providing the questionnaire to the couples, along with specific instructions, prior to the interview date. Couples were asked not to discuss the questionnaire with each other, but rather to complete the protocol as independently as possible. They were asked to respond candidly and honestly, and to answer every question, not leaving any blank. How the questions were to be answered was provided as part of the instrument. There was a separate form of the SAS for stepmother, stepfather, biological father, and biological mother. Although unique to each parent-type, the questions in each of the forms of the SAS are relative to each other for the purposes of comparison. In some stepfamilies, the remarried couple could be both stepmother and biological mother, stepfather and biological father. Crosbie-Burnett (personal communication, August 19, 1997) recommended assigning the form based upon the relationship each member of the couplehood had with the resident children. In other words, the biological parent form would be given to that individual whose children resided at least 50% of the time in the home. This recommendation was followed in assigning questionnaires for completion in the study.

The SAS was scored by the researcher as directed by Dr. Crosbie-Burnett and the scores were compared with qualitative data obtained in the interview regarding the stepfamily's stage of development. Scores were a sequential tally of the Likert-scale number assigned by the participant to each question. In some questions, responses were in reverse order and needed to be recoded prior to being tallied. Scores on the SAS had not yet been developed to diagnose dysfunction in stepfamilies; however, scores on the many subscales provided data for evaluation and comparison regarding the stepfamily's stage of development and factors contributing to or hindering development. The subscale scores

were compared with the characteristics of different stages of stepfamily adjustment outlined in the literature as well as to internal family systems interactions present in the remarried couple. Higher scores denoted difficulties in specific areas of adjustment, whereas lower scores indicated that the stepfamily was in the later stage of development.

### Interview Instrument

The interview instrument solicited demographic information from each participant as a precursor to the interview, and a set of interview questions was developed (see Appendix C) to serve as a guide to elicit specific responses about the level of adjustment in the family, as well as to assess and to define the individual's internal map of personality parts present in the context of stepfamily interaction. Each interview was audiotaped, transcribed, and then erased.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), prior instrumentation creates a clear format for eliciting information which would guide the interviews and afford some level of standardization to them. By planning in advance, I was assured of collecting the specific information relevant to the study, rather than being overloaded with data that might have compromised the research. Instrumentation also allowed for comparison and bridging between studies. "We need common instruments to build theory, to improve explanations or predictions, and to make recommendations about practice" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 35). Finally, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that an unprepared researcher will tend to omit important questions, get distracted, invite researcher bias, or perhaps allow the interview process to become skewed or unfocused. This can lead to unreliable or misleading research. "Using validated instruments well is the best guarantee of dependable and meaningful findings" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 35).

The questions in the interview guide were drawn from a compilation of Keshet's (1987), Mills's (1984), and Papernow's (1993) observations on stepfamily adjustment, from Visher and Visher's (1990) characteristics of a well-adjusted stepfamily, and from Holmes (personal communication, May 1995) and Schwartz (1995; personal

communication, January 2, 1997) regarding the exploration and mapping of personality parts. In creating these questions, I hoped to elicit:

1. The participant's world-view: a description of their stepfamily environment in their own words.
2. The participant's inner experience of themselves in relation to the stepfamily and the remarriage.
3. In-depth answers to the research questions stated in chapter 1.

The open-ended interview was intended to provide a milieu in which "participants could communicate their own understandings, in their own terms" (Halseth, 1989).

From the interview instrument, questions 1 through 11, 16, 24, and 34 related specifically to Stage I of stepfamily development. Questions 12-20, 25, 26, 32, 33, and 35 related to tasks associated with Stage II. To identify families that had successfully navigated Stage I and Stage II, questions 21-23, 28-32, and 36 drew upon tasks of Stage III (see Appendix C). These questions were designed to identify whether the family had effectively dealt with the tasks associated with the stages, or were in the process of dealing with them. Although there was no clean break between stages, and although the dance of adjustment moves back and forth as the family moves through the lifecycle (McGoldrick & Carter, 1980; Papernow, 1993), consistent patterns identifying the tasks at hand were identifiable through the instrument. This was further supported by scores on the SAS.

The IFS assessment techniques included in the instrument were intended to ascertain the character of personality parts, and to associate them to the stepfamily experience, in specific response to the research questions. In addition, these questions highlighted the triggering or activating events related to these parts' behaviors and emotions, and provided data to substantiate the existence of interactional patterns, both internally and externally, in these family systems. To do this, the probing questions were designed to be interspersed among the questions directly related to stages of stepfamily

adjustment to clarify the existence of certain parts and the individual's access to Self, implied in the dialogue.

These probes included restating the participants' statements in terms of the IFS model, asking the participants what they felt or how they behaved when a particular event occurred, and then by identifying the reactions as "parts" of themselves, rather than of their whole self. For example, "*So, when your spouse \_\_\_\_\_, a part of you \_\_\_\_\_.*" Or, "*When that happens, where in your body do you feel this--is there a physical sensation that accompanies the emotion?*" or "*Tell me about the part of you that (circumstance): How does it act? What does it say to you, your spouse, your children/stepchildren when this occurs? If it had a name what would that name be?*" These probes worked to begin to create the internal map, and to allow the individual to separate from the part described in the situation. The ability to create this separation gave an indication of their ability to act as compassionate witness (our definition of access to Self), in response to Question 2.

Other probes to accomplish this were such as, "*What do you say to yourself when this happens?*" or, "*What does the part say to you internally, what does it sound like? What kind of voice does it have?*" I expanded the interview by continuing to label the interaction in IFS language (as described in the instrument), such as "*So a part of you feels angry when your stepchildren go around you to their mother, you feel it in your stomach, and then you hear a gruff voice inside saying something negative about you, like you are worthless, or ineffective as a parent, or something like that. Is that how it is?*" This process allowed the participant to affirm what I heard or to correct whatever may not have been true to their experience, and to bring them cognitively into the realm of their own personality.

Part of the instrument contained summarizing statements to clarify the specific triggering events for the personality parts. For example, "*So when \_\_\_\_\_ happens this part takes over.*" Or, "*You feel the \_\_\_\_\_ part and begin (behavior) when (event) happens.*" These summaries or restatements provided data to respond to research



question 1: What is the nature of the individual's internal family system map . . . in the context of the stepfamily? The probing aspect of these statements also elicited information about the subject's access to Self, in response to research question 2, in their ability to describe what is happening within themselves and to observe compassionately the other members of the stepfamily.

All interviews were conducted by myself, either in the participant's home or office. I received extensive training over the past 5 years in the IFS model and assessment techniques inherent in this process from Dr. Holmes and Dr. Schwartz. The assessment techniques, in particular, were a necessary element in the methodology, which allowed the data to be analyzed as the interviews were taking place, searching the on-going dialogue for further development of the understanding of the individual's internal system. Therefore, conducting the interviews myself was essential to the development of the dialogue and the description of parts. The interview questions served as a basis for exploration, however, I followed leads and probed further during the interview, as the participant's story directed, to elicit more in-depth coverage on a particular topic. The open-ended questions in the instrument afforded:

- a) flexibility to react to the respondent's leads;
- b) increased ease in organizing and analyzing data;
- c) reduction of interviewer effect and bias;
- d) increased comparability of data for each respondent. (Halseth, 1989, p. 43)

Because I conducted all of the interviews, I was able to improvise with the interview guide spontaneously as the interview required. This does not mean that the interviews differed greatly. To the contrary, care was taken to ensure that comparable information was collected from each participant. However, the specific content of each person's IFS Map, and the probes used to access that internal system differed substantially.

## Procedures

Twenty, face-to-face, individual interviews and ten collective summary sessions were conducted. Each session was audiotaped and later transcribed, to ensure that all important information was collected and to eliminate the bias inherent in note-taking.

Participants were all volunteers who responded to advertisements or solicitations by the researcher. Prospective subjects were initially contacted by letter and then by telephone. The study was described in detail, including the need for candid, honest responses to potentially personal questions. Further, they were informed that their responses would be anonymous and, therefore, as confidential as the research allowed. Upon their verbal consent, an interview appointment time and place was established.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning each couple a number, and then making references to the participants by their number and gender in the couple. Each participant signed and was given a copy of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) that was approved by the Human Subjects Board of Andrews University. I provided a copy of the Informed Consent Form, along with the SAS, prior to the interview, and then reviewed the consent form in detail with each participant prior to beginning the interview. All couples consented to be interviewed.

Each form was kept in a locked file in my office until the data analysis phase was completed, and then the forms were transferred to the office of the dissertation chairperson. In the process of transcription, all references to the names of the individuals were deleted and the number of the couple substituted in its place. No reference to any individual was made in the writing of the results, the analysis of the data, or in subsequent discussions of the conclusions.

Participants were asked to allow approximately 60 to 120 minutes for each interview, and in only two instances did the interview exceed that time allotment. Interviews ranged in length, depending on the richness of the information being shared and the availability of the participant. Each partner of the couple was first interviewed

separately. The interview began with the description of the IFS model and what was expected in terms of describing their personality in the context of their stepfamily community. All couples affirmed their understanding and the only questions asked were of a rhetorical nature, such as, "Is this [the answer they were formulating] what you are looking for?" Then the couple was revisited together to review and confirm my interpretation of their responses, particularly with respect to their internal parts map and the stepfamily situation. Each participant was thanked first informally and then formally by letter (see Appendix A) for their time, patience, and assistance.

### **Preliminary Data Analysis**

The nature of qualitative analysis is to be analyzing data as it is collected. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that "during an open-ended interview, much interpretation occurs along the way" (p. 35). In the probing, reflecting, and restating that takes place, the interviewer actually condenses or interprets the data and its meaning as it is presented. In that regard, it can be said that the "data are not being collected, but rather co-authored" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 35). Although this may be construed as impacting the validity of the research, the same bias can occur in the construction of any research instrument. I endeavored to create as precise and structured an interview format as possible, to ensure the validity and yet preserve the richness of the data.

Prior to beginning the interview process, considerable attention was paid to explaining the stepfamily adjustment process and the stages of development against which the responses would be compared. Administration of the SAS aided in this understanding and enhanced the understanding of the process. Table 1 highlights the stages of development and the characteristics that were used to create a better understanding of the objectives of the study. Table 2 provides the descriptions of the internal personality parts taken from personal communication with Schwartz (1994), which were also part of the explanation.

Table 1

Stepfamily Stages of Adjustment

Stage I: Preparation	Stage II: Working It Out	Stage III: Living
Developmental Tasks: Awareness of personal differences, letting go of the past, acceptance of present.	Developmental Tasks: Resolve issues of control and authority, cultural differences, and personality differences within various step-relationships.	Developmental Tasks: Stable, unified remarried couple as parenting team, common history and rituals created, and new relationships form.
<b>Characteristics:</b> membership established visitation coordinated mini-families contain history and middle ground differences highlighted loyalties problematical fantasies abound regarding the perfect family	<b>Characteristics:</b> disagreements between strained step-relationships lack of resolution of disagreements or acceptance of differences parenting team formed control issues visible and confronted leadership vs. authority stepfamily rules being established middle ground begins to form	<b>Characteristics:</b> fluid boundaries and loyalties stepfamily history formed identity created through rituals strong leadership boundaries formed resolution of disagreements in remarried couple members think of themselves in unified terms

Note. Adapted from *Love and power in the stepfamily*, by J. K. Keshet 1987, New York: McGraw Hill; *Becoming a stepfamily: Patterns of development in remarried families*, by P. L. Papernow 1993, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers; and "Dynamics of successful stepfamilies," by E. Visher & J. Visher, 1990, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 14 (1), 3-11.

Table 2

IFS Personality Parts: Roles, Behaviors and Emotions

Manager Parts	Firefighter Parts	Exile Parts
Roles	Behaviors	Emotions
Controller	Drug or alcohol abuse	Powerless or helpless
Striver/Achiever	Self-mutilation (cutting)	Vulnerable/Hurt
Evaluator (self and others)	Binge-eating (compulsive	Unloveable or worthless
Caretaker (self and others)	eating)	Rejected or abandoned
People Pleaser	Sexual promiscuity	Empty
Worrier	Suicidal ideation	Hopeless/Sad
Denier	Stealing	Fearful
Passive-pessimist	Gambling	Ashamed
Protector	Rage	Powerless

Note: Adapted from Richard Schwartz in personal communication March 13, 1994.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis began during the initial stages of the interview process. Responses were synthesized and clarification was solicited from the participants at any point during the interview. As a result, themes emerged between interviews, and the information gathered became more relevant as the process evolved. Upon completion of the interview, the SAS was scored and the results were compared with the individuals' description of their stepfamily experience.

Because the IFS model categorizes personality parts into three distinct types, the responses were first intuitively searched for representations, descriptions, or validations of these different types, and the interviewees were queried to more clearly identify the category of the part of their personality within the context of the interview. Later, the transcriptions of the interviews were coded and mapped with the appropriate designation for a personality part. M was used to indicate a Manager Part, E for Exile Part, and FF for Firefighter Part. The Manager Parts were then categorized according to the various roles that they assumed, such as Worrier, Rescuer, Passive-pessimist, or Evaluator as

designated in Table 2. Firefighter Parts were identified by their manifested behaviors such as substance abuse, rage, sexual promiscuity, or other distracting behaviors, and were referred to as a Rage Part or a Substance Abusing Part. Exile Parts (child-like parts) were coded by the emotional response present or not present such as Fearful Part or Hurt Part, or, if identified by the participant, by the age of the Exile Part, such as the 6-year-old Part, or the 12-year-old Part.

In the second stage of analysis the transcribed data were reviewed and mapped for indications of stages of stepfamily adjustment. Because the questions of the interview instrument were designed to delineate one of the three stages, analysis followed the same sequence, coding 1, 2, or 3 for a response corresponding to elements of the first, second, or third stage of adjustment. I then sorted the responses identified in the interview that corresponded to tasks related to a particular stage of adjustment. This was compared with the results of the SAS.

The SAS was scored according to instructions provided by Dr. Crosbie-Burnett, (Personal Communication, 1998) which entailed reversing indicated items and tallying the numerical score for each item. Each individual received an SAS score and a mean composite score was obtained for each stepfamily. Subscale scores on each of the 25 subscales were calculated for each of the remarried families. Each couple's SAS scores were presented in Tables 4 and 5 and the subscale scores are detailed in Appendix E.

The data were reviewed first by reading the typed transcripts while listening to the audiocassettes of the transcripts. This gave an opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy and to correct any misunderstood words or phrases in the transcription, while coding the data. Attention was paid to allusions or descriptions of certain parts within the individual's IFS Map which were emphasized in the interview through inflection or alteration of the interviewee's voice. Next, the text was re-read and again key words and phrases were highlighted as in the review process above and grouped into patterns and themes. Although I intended to use computer software to further organize the data,

difficulties with the computer software caused significant delays in completing the data analysis. Due to complications in the integrity of the software itself, use of the software had to be abbreviated. In spite of these difficulties, the computer analysis did aid somewhat in the organization of the data for analysis.

As detailed in chapter 2, Stages of Stepfamily Adjustment were created from the developmental models of stepfamilies of Keshet (1987), Papernow (1993), and Visher and Visher (1990). I classified stepfamily adjustment into three stages: Stage I: Preparation; Stage II: Working It Out; and Stage III: Living. Stage I, Preparation, takes into account learning about each other, becoming aware of the differences between families, between partners, and between lifestyles. Stage II is Working It Out, where habit is separated from need. Members learn where authority must be maintained, and where it can be shared, where individual strengths are honored and weaknesses forgiven, and where partners decide what they can live with and what they cannot, in terms of the demands and idiosyncrasies of children and spouse. Stage III, Living, is where the work of Stage II pays off. Being a stepfamily becomes just a part of daily living, rather than the focus of it. Searching the data for allusions to the tasks specific to the different stages of adjustment provided the data necessary to classify the stepfamilies into the three stages.

To facilitate comparison and understanding about the nature of Self in the IFS maps of the participants, a Self Scale was developed. The Self Scale was comprised of a 4-point scale based on the following criteria from the interview data. Level 1 equated to the internal system of individuals that had no apparent Self presence. Level 2 represented those individuals where Self was evident to the researcher, but was not expressed or acknowledged by the individual without prompting from the researcher. Level 3 signified those individuals who were aware of the value of Self leadership, recognized its presence in their interactions, but were not able to evoke Self leadership actively or consistently. Level 4 designated those individuals who actively evoked Self leadership in their interactions with themselves and others.

Following the coding and review of each interview in detail was assignment of stages of stepfamily adjustment and definition of personality parts of the IFS Maps. Data were organized according to the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), to facilitate reviewing the themes and patterns consistent with stepfamily developmental tasks and to more clearly identify the individual IFS maps. Specific references and statements from the participants were collected for each of the stepfamilies' stages of development and the personality parts that were identified.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided an introduction and overview of the data analysis portion of the research. I discussed the methodology that was employed, and described in detail the participants, sampling techniques, the instrumentation used (including the interview instrument and the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale), the preliminary data analysis, procedures used in the study, and how the data were analyzed, including the development of the Self Scale and the Stages of Stepfamily Adjustment.



## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The important thing is not to stop questioning.  
Curiosity has its own reason for existing.  
Albert Einstein

The findings of this study are summarized in this chapter. First, I provide an overview of the sample of the remarried couples and their stepfamilies. The second section reviews the characteristics of the sampled stepfamilies. Results of the findings of the study are detailed in the final two sections. This section describes how the stage of stepfamily adjustment was determined qualitatively, and compares the qualitative assessment of the stepfamily's adjustment with the quantitative score obtained on the SAS. The final section of this chapter details for the reader the IFS Map of each individual participating in the study and describes how these personality parts interact to enhance or inhibit stepfamily adjustment.

#### **Overview of the Sample**

Ten remarried couples from southwestern Michigan were selected to participate in this study. Data were collected from August 1997 to December 1997 in the home or business office of the participants. An individual interview was first held with each member of the remarried couple; then a joint interview for each couple took place. Ages ranged from 29 to 66 years old, with the mean age of the participants being 40 years. All of the participants had at least attended college or vocational training after high school and nine respondents had master's degrees. Household incomes were in excess of \$35,000, with 70% of the families earning more than \$50,000 per year. Occupations were varied.

varied and included religious ministry, farming, childcare, law enforcement, environmental biology, truck driving, elementary teaching, fine arts, printing, computer engineering, office management and office support, machining, small-business ownership, innkeeping, and social work. Two participants in the study were enrolled in college, one member of the sample was retired, and several participants were self-employed.

All participant stepfamilies had at least one child from a former marriage visiting the home at regular intervals. Of these families, four of them were complex stepfamilies, with both parents bringing children from a former marriage. Only one was a compound stepfamily, where the children were part of two stepfamilies due to the fact that both of their parents remarried. None of the stepfamilies in the study were both a complex and a compound stepfamily. Nine out of the ten families had at least one child for which the parent had physical custody, and one family dealt only with the visitation of one child. One couple began their remarriage with visitation of their children every other weekend, but gained custody of the children after a lengthy legal battle. One couple was engaged in a custody dispute filed as a result of their remarriage. Another couple contemplated suing for custody and had engaged legal counsel for that purpose. The number of children in the home ranged from none (visitation only) to four children living with the remarried couple. One participant had 10 children who were out of the home and three participants had grandchildren. Two families had "ours" babies, and one family had a stepchild that had been adopted by the stepfather.

The mean number of years in the present marriage was 3.25 years, and marriages ranged in length from several months to 9 years. Among the 20 participants in the study, 14 prior marriages ended in divorce, two individuals had been divorced twice, one marriage ended in death, two individuals had prior long-term relationships and had children but had not married, and three individuals had not been married before. Years in prior marriage, for those who were married before, ranged from less than 1 year to 31 years,

with a mean of 8.5 years. Two families were dealing with the diagnosed mental illness of an ex-spouse.

The first five remarried couples who were chosen to participate in the study volunteered in response to solicitations from local churches, newsletter advertisements, and word-of-mouth communication. The second five stepfamilies were solicited personally by the researcher for the additional perspective that they offered the study. The unique characteristics of these five stepfamilies included “ours” babies, clinical referral or clinical issues presented by the remarried couple, the presence of older adolescents in the home, the richness of experience presented by leaving the priesthood to join a stepfamily, and unusual custody arrangements. Three couples originally selected to be part of the study withdrew from the study prior to any interviews, and were not included in the 10 stepfamilies. Two couples separated and thus no longer qualified for the study, while one couple chose to withdraw due to a serious illness. Seven of the 10 remarried couples who completed the study were known acquaintances of the researcher prior to the study, either through church or community activities.

### **Description of the Remarried Couples in the Sample**

As each stepfamily in the study is unique in composition and history, I found it appropriate to summarize their characteristics to begin the analysis of how they interact as a stepfamily. A summary of these descriptions are presented at the end of this section in Table 3.

#### **Couple One**

Couple One created a complex stepfamily, with the male having 10 children from a former marriage (all grown and living separately) and the female having 2 children, one of which lived full time with the couple and visited her biological father infrequently. They had been married 9 years, during which time some of the male’s children had also lived with the couple for periods of time. The female, age 43, had been married and divorced

twice, the longest relationship lasting 5 years. She had one child from each marriage. The male, age 65, had been married once before for 31 years. He was Catholic and his marriage ended in annulment. Developmentally, the couple was in transition: the female had recently begun a new career, having been ordained as a minister and accepting a position as chaplain in a local hospital; the male had recently retired from 40 years as a self-employed farmer. Both the male and female participants were grandparents. The remarried couple described external stressors on the stepfamily such as the stepchildren's lack of acceptance of the female's religious beliefs, the male's ex-spouse, and the male's former occupation. The difference in their ages also appeared to impact the relationship between the stepparents and stepchildren.

### **Couple Two**

Couple Two had been married for 1 year at the time of the interviews. The female, age 30, was divorced, with two children from her previous marriage of 9 years. The male, age 32, had never married before but had one son from a former long-term relationship. The female had full custody of her young children, who saw their father only infrequently as he was in the military and stationed overseas. The male's son visited frequently. Visits usually were determined by the father's work schedule rather than a regular visitation routine. The male was employed in law enforcement, and the female provided childcare and was a part-time college student. The couple met through a family tragedy. The female's niece was killed by the school bus in front of her house and the male was the deputy called to the scene. External stressors which came to bear on Couple Two were the male participant's ex-partner (who reportedly used the son's visitation to manipulate the male partner into behaving according to her agenda), family of origin issues, the male's occupation in law enforcement, and the abuse sustained by the female in her former marriage. Their family cultures appeared to be relatively compatible. Both came from rural families who seemed to put pressure on the stepfamily to create the appearance of a first-married family.

### **Couple Three**

Couple Three represented the only stepfamily in which the stepparent adopted a child from a previous marriage. This was also the only stepfamily in the study that was dealing with the death of a former spouse. The female's prior spouse passed away after a long illness; they had been married 10 years. The female, 40 years of age, had two children ages 2 and 12, the youngest from her current marriage and the eldest from a former marriage. She was an environmental biologist. The male, a religious minister, was 52-years-old. His first marriage of 23 years ended in divorce. He had three grown children, the youngest was an older adolescent who was attending college and visited on weekends. She had previously lived with the remarried couple and, although the couple had not been together at the time of the divorce, she blamed the stepmother for the family's loss. Further, because of the divorce and remarriage, his former church and religious organization created significant obstacles for the couple to overcome in their process of adjustment as a stepfamily. External stressors for this stepfamily were both partners' stressful occupations, lifestyle, and family culture issues. The "ours" baby was an acknowledged enhancement to stepfamily adjustment.

### **Couple Four**

Couple Four presented an interesting stepfamily dynamic, where the female partner had not been married before. She was 44 at the time of the interview, and had married her current partner at age 40. She was an elementary school teacher who did not have children of her own. The male, age 48, ended his prior marriage in divorce after 17 years. He had one child, an adolescent from his former marriage who visited in the home on weekends. He was a truck driver and was gone 5 days each week. This remarried couple had literally given up on the idea of creating a stepfamily community. They had moved to a place of tolerance with respect to the attitudes and manipulative behaviors of the teenager, which, along with difficulties from the ex-spouse, were the dominant stressor on the stepfamily situation. One of the persistent themes in this stepfamily's struggle was the pattern of

behaviors between the daughter and her biological father, which destabilized the stepfamily system.

### **Couple Five**

Couple Five was in transition at the time of the first two individual interviews and more settled for the third conjoint interview. They had sold their house and had moved into an apartment pending completion of their new house. The stress on the stepfamily presented by this temporary situation was reasonable and had resolved itself by the time of the third interview. The female was 36 years old, married once before, and divorced with no children. She was self-employed as a muralist, building a business based upon her reputation as a fine artist. She had just given birth to their first child 4 months before. The male, age 38, was a press operator who worked for a major printing company. He had not been married before but had custody of his 7 year-old son from a former, long-term relationship. The couple had been remarried 3 years and during that time had adjusted relatively well to being a stepfamily. Difficulties with the male's former partner were deflected by her parents, who were actively involved with visiting the grandson. He went to their house for visitation every other weekend, where he would sometimes come in contact with this biological mother. Stepfamily stressors focused mainly on adjusting to the different personality parts which the remarried couple presented. They both acknowledged the adaptable nature of the stepson as one of the reasons for their ease in adjusting as a stepfamily.

### **Couple Six**

Couple Six had been married the shortest period of time of any remarried couple in the study. They had married only 2 1/2 months prior to the first interviews. They were referred to the study by a local clinician. Both male and female partners had been previously married and divorced. The female was 30-years-old and had three children from a prior relationship and a prior marriage. Domestic violence was present in the prior

marriage, which lasted only 8 months. The male was 40-years-old, legally blind, and had one son from a prior marriage of 14 years. The couple had full custody of all four children although they were engaged in a custody dispute over the male-partner's son. This couple had known each other as teenagers, having attended the same church. Their religion as Mormons played a big role in the stepfamily culture, although the female and her children, had not actively practiced their religion prior to the commencement of the couple's relationship. Physical and emotional abuse in prior relationships, family of origin issues, current violence toward the stepchildren by the stepfather, and ex-spouse difficulties, including the custody suit, were the most visible stressors on the remarried couple at the time of the interviews.

### **Couple Seven**

Couple Seven described their complex stepfamily as a community. Both individuals were in their mid-40s, and had been previously married and divorced. Both had two children from their previous marriages, each having a son and a daughter. The couple came together through their children: the boys were school friends and would play together on weekends. The couple had lived together for 5 years before marrying 2 years ago. They both worked long hours. The female worked two jobs. They each admired the hard-worker quality seen in each other. The children were in their late adolescence, the female's daughter had just left for college in the Western part of the U.S., and her son still lived at home. The male's children were living elsewhere. His son lived with the couple until recently. His daughter still lived with her mother and visited alternate weekends. There were few external stressors that impacted the stepfamily in a negative way. Instead, this relatively well-adjusted stepfamily talked about acceptance of differences and enhancement of strengths. They discussed personality characteristics lovingly instead of complaining. Neither of them mentioned an ex-partner negatively, and, when there were difficulties, they described working things out collectively and calmly as a group of mature adults.

**Couple Eight**

Couple Eight was struggling with several difficult and stressful situations in creating a stepfamily. Having been married about 18 months at the time of the interviews, they were the only compound stepfamily in the study, being that the male's former wife remarried. The female was 29, and had not been married before, nor did she have children of her own. She was trained as an elementary teacher and was currently managing a Victorian inn. She entered the stepfamily situation under extreme pressure from her family of origin who objected to her marriage to a divorced man. She appeared anxious for things to seem as though they were working well, although they were not. It also appeared, however, that she was beginning to let go of her fantasies of the perfect family arrangement, and had started to look for workable solutions. The male was 33, a self-employed flooring specialist, who brought two boys to the stepfamily from a prior marriage of 5 years. The boys were young when he divorced and spent several years living with the male's parents, 3 or 4 days per week. The divorce proceedings were initiated by the male's spouse and were heated, causing anger and hard feelings on both sides. The relationship between the children's parents was volatile. Communication primarily occurred through the court system. The female had to contend not only with the angry ex-spouse and the stepchildren's loyalties to her, but also with their loyalties to their grandparents. The in-laws and the children even accompanied the remarried couple on their honeymoon so as to avoid anyone feeling abandoned by the marriage.

**Couple Nine**

Couple Nine appeared to have a good understanding of each other and their differences, but struggled with accepting those differences. The male was a former Catholic Priest, who left the priesthood to marry into this stepfamily. He was 43 years old, and had left the church about 3 years before his marriage. The couple had been married 2 years at the time of the interviews. He worked in social services and discussed the



obstacles he faced adjusting to life out of the church. He found that it was easy to hide from himself in the church. When he left the priesthood, he reported many unresolved issues from his family of origin, many of which were brought to light during painful stepfamily interactions. The female, age 41, was a clinical social worker, with two pre-teenage daughters from a prior marriage of 10 years. Both partners cited alcoholism in their family of origin as a major stumbling block to coming together as a couple and as a stepfamily. Neither one felt that they had a reasonable relational model to build upon, and the male acknowledged that his views of children and their development were unrealistic. Their struggles were heated and emotional.

### **Couple Ten**

In Couple Ten, the mental illness of the male's ex-spouse appeared to inhibit the stepfamily's adjustment. It seemed that ex-spouse's unwillingness to accept the reality of the divorce caused the stepfamily extreme emotional and financial strain. The female, age 29, and the male, age 39, lived together 4 years prior to marrying. They had been married 2 years when the interviews took place. Both had been married previously; only the male had children from the prior marriage. He had been married 10 years and had left his former wife to be in this relationship. He had three sons under the age of 10. The female had been married for 3 years before and left that marriage due to domestic violence. At the time of the separation, the male sued for custody of the children and his former spouse accused him of abuse. After a long, 5-year court battle, he finally won custody of the children, yet his ex-wife continued the case in appeal. Her negative impact on the children kept them from being able to enjoy their new home, community, or school. The stepfamily was torn by the extreme loyalty of the children to their mother, exacerbated by her mental condition. Communication and arrangements for visitation took place only through the court system. Regression in terms of adjustment occurred after nearly every visit with their mother. Couple unity, patience, and behavior management were positive coping strategies of this family.

Table 3

Description of Stepfamilies

Stepfamily	Years in Current Marriage	Years in Prior Marriage F - M <sup>a</sup>		Number of Children in the Home <sup>b</sup>	Custodial Arrangement for Children	Type of Stepfamily
Couple One	9	5	31	1/11	Full/Visiting	Simple
Couple Two	1	9	0	2/1	Full/Visiting	Complex
Couple Three	4	10	24	1/3/1	Full, Visiting and Ours	Complex
Couple Four	3	4	0	1/1	Full/Ours	Simple
Couple Five	4	0	15	1	Visiting	Complex
Couple Six	1	.5	15	4	Full	Complex
Couple Seven	2	12	5	2/2	Full/Visiting	Complex
Couple Eight	2	0	7	2	Joint	Compound
Couple Nine	2	10	0	2	Full	Simple
Couple Ten	2	3	10	3	Full	Simple

<sup>a</sup>Female and male partner's experience.

<sup>b</sup>Full custody children/visiting non-custodial children/"ours" baby.

## Findings

In this section, which details the findings of the study, direct quotations from the participant interviews are distinguished by quotation marks, single spacing, and indentation from the balance of the text. The findings consist of statements from participants regarding their stepfamily process, their internal personality parts, how these parts are triggered, and how they impact stepfamily interactions. The data were reviewed for references to characteristics which would identify the stepfamily's stage of adjustment. Statements and examples collected from the data through the coding and analysis process provided the map of the individual's Internal Family System. In the IFS model, an individual's "IFS Map" is the internal structure of the personality parts: what kind of parts were present (i.e., Manager Parts, Exile Parts, or Firefighter Parts), descriptions of their behavioral and emotional patterns, definitions of their developmental age and maturity level, how they interacted with each other, and how they impacted external relationships and behaviors. These findings were presented in response to the research questions in chapter 1 and provided detail into the richness of the internal experience of stepfamily interaction.

In chapter 3 the process for data analysis was described: transcription, coding, organizing, analyzing, and interpretation. Each interview was taped and transcribed. The data were then read along with the tapes to understand nuance and meaning in voice inflection. After this review, the interview data were entered into the Ethnograph software and organized for coding. The coding process entailed seeking out either those phrases within the transcribed data which exemplified stepfamily adjustment, or those statements which identified and described parts of the individual's IFS Map. Once the coding was complete, the data were analyzed to understand the patterns and characteristics unique to each stepfamily's adjustment process. I called upon extensive training in identification and assessment of personality parts obtained from Dr. Schwartz, Dr. Holmes, and other

members of the Internal Family Systems Association in order to identify the IFS Map, the triggering events, the systemic responses, and the consequence of these things to the stepfamily adjustment process. Finally, the patterns were interpreted to bring clarity and meaning to the data.

The Stepfamily Adjustment discussion was presented in two sections: the first section reviews of the characteristics of each stage of adjustment, which were qualitatively obtained from the data, and the second section comprises the qualitatively assessed level of stepfamily adjustment compared with the mean composite score the remarried couple received on the SAS.

The IFS Maps of the participants were presented in a final section of the findings, with a detailed discussion of each individual's personality parts that were found to be active in the stepfamily interaction. The discussion included identification of the dominant Manager Part, other Manager Parts, the Exile Parts, and, if any, Firefighter Parts, that interacted in both the internal and external systems. The IFS Map also took into account the presence of Self both in the internal and external systems. Evidence of Self in stepfamily relations was explored, along with examples of how external stressors were triggers for the internal personality parts. The exploration of the IFS Map of each individual was presented in a case-study, discussion format.

### Stage of Stepfamily Adjustment

The different stages of stepfamily adjustment were described in further detail in chapter 2 (also see Table 1). In summary, for the purposes of this study, there were essentially three broad stages of development that stepfamilies go through to become a cohesive community. Stage I is Preparation, the process of recognizing personal differences, letting go of the past, mourning losses, recognizing fantasies, and the accepting of the present circumstances. Stage II is Working It Out, a period of time in which stepfamily members resolve issues of control and authority, and explore cultural and personality differences that create controversy within the context of the new stepfamily

milieu. Stage III is Living, marked by a stable, unified remarried couple, able to become a parenting team. There is acceptance of differences in personality parts, a creation of common history, and a formation of new relationships between stepparents and stepchildren.

To determine qualitatively a stepfamily's particular stage of adjustment, references to stepfamily interactions within the interview transcriptions (i.e., feelings about the stepfamily members, feelings about former relationships, references to parental coalitions and couple unity, issues of control and authority discussed, and references to personality differences) were extracted from the data and tallied. Although adjustment is a fluid process with no clear beginning or ending point for a developmental task (Papernow, 1993), for the purposes of this study the predominance of responses that corresponded to the characteristics of a particular stage determined the level of adjustment for that stepfamily.

### **Stage I Stepfamilies**

Two couples, Couple Two and Couple Six, appeared to have the characteristics of Stage I, Preparation. They presented struggles with fantasies of family life, understanding differences in personality, shared signs of loyalty conflicts, and were dealing with division among stepfamily members along mini-family lines. Overall, there were nine references in the data acknowledging loyalty issues as common obstacles for the children to overcome, a task common to Stage I stepfamilies. Examples of those references follow:

“[Stepchild] and I had a really good relationship until we got married then there was a distinct change in how he acted towards me . . . he has like a wall that goes up [gestures form a wall]. . . . He would pull up in the driveway and the minute I'd come out the door you could see that [gestures and makes 'wall noise']. He won't let me hug him like he used to, and I think it's all about his mom.”

“Oh, I am convinced that their loyalty to their mother plays a big part in how they are able to deal with how they feel when they are here.”

“Not so much with the younger one, but the older boy is really nasty to [partner] and I think it has to do with his thinking, 'If I'm nice to her will my mom be mad?'”

Recognizing fantasies and accepting the reality of current relationships are also a key task in Stage I. Examples of this are seen in the following reflections by some of the participants of this study:

“I know why I wasn’t being observant, but I thought because my husband [had children] and he seemed to like to be around them and seemed to enjoy family, that he knew how, he wanted to be involved with kids . . . and that wasn’t true . . . and I wanted someone who really wanted to be a dad. Because I had not had that in my own life either. . . . I had this fantasy that someone would be involved in their lives, wanting to know what was happening with them and that’s not happening.”

“What did I think this [stepfamily life] would be? I thought it would be fun. I thought that the children would be able to see that I’m a pretty neat person to be with and that they would like me. But, they get angry with their friends at school for liking to see me and for doing stuff with me, but they don’t want to . . . and I feel frustrated and hurt.”

“I expected things to be more predictable and what I didn’t expect was so much doing for them. . . . I mean there is laundry and there’s dealing with his parents every weekend. There’s dealing with his children every weekend and there’s dealing with his ex-wife and the phone calls and the arguments and who wants what in their lunch and do we have clothes here . . . . I mean every weekend is just like AHHHHHHG!”

“Yes it’s like a fantasy gone bad! That’s what I’ve written in my journal! They just keep pushing my buttons and I thought we would all just get along.”

Unresolved emotions associated with past histories and relationships, and stepfamilies divided into mini-families are common responses in the data characteristic of Stage I stepfamilies, as shown in these excerpts:

“It’s different with stepchildren than it is with regular children and I’m not sure how to . . . (pause) to express my own feelings on it. . . . I wasn’t honored. . . . I stepped in here with the idea that these children needed a father and I was going to be that father and I don’t feel like I’ve been accepted in that role. They always turn to their mother.”

“She’s really jealous of [ex-partner] and I just don’t get it.”

“There are little things--a number of things --that go on that are very . . . (pause) that he doesn’t recognize, that go on with his kids with me that I pick up--that are little jabs--ways of keeping themselves separate from me as well as separate from my children all the time.”

“I don’t always pretend that I’m not angry, particularly when it involves the kids. I feel like I have to protect them from him like I had to protect them from their stepfather before.”

“Well, [partner] tries to be supportive of me but her feelings toward her children are pretty strong so it really does get in the way. . . . It forced me to just kind of back off and not be too involved.”

These examples weave a picture of poor communication, a lack of resolution of past issues in individual personality parts, and highlight characteristics of Stage I adjustment.

## **Stage II Stepfamilies**

Six stepfamilies in this study were identified in Stage II Working It Out. Several of the stepfamilies have struggled with the developmental tasks of this stage for many years. Responses categorized in this stage reflect the issues discovered in Stage I being battled in the open, frequently leading to angry discussions between the stepfamily members. At this level, they develop an awareness that fantasies held at the time of remarriage cannot come to fruition, and the family grieves this loss as shown in the following statements:

“We are constantly running into these expectations and there is all this emotion around them. I thought we had talked this out long ago . . . these unrealistic dreams about the kids and me and then the next thing I know, here we go again in this same old stuff.”

“I argue. You know, fight or flee--I fight then flee. I want to close exits when [we] start fighting, because I’m afraid [partner] will run.”

“I just made this comment to [partner] and he said some really awful things to me and then he slammed the door and then he left. It was awful.”

“I thought we had a common dream, and we do like it. But I just wonder how much, who’s willing, to pay the price of doing all this stuff! It seems that unless I go crazy, and get really mad, nothing changes. And it also seems that whenever we’re called on to give some concessions that I’m the one that’s gotta do it.”

“I can see that I need to give in some. But I need to get something too and [partner] says, ‘well you know, I’m a sort of an all or nothing type of girl and I really don’t know how to compromise.’ So what do I do with that?”

“It was one of those occasions where everything that bothers me came together at once. . . . I came in from the grocery store and everything I had bought was for [them] and they just sat there, ignoring me. So I took a box of cereal and I just tossed it in between them and the television and it hit the floor. . . . And then I looked at this jar of jam. . . . I just looked at it and thought, “this would really make a statement.” I set it down and left and went to wash my car. . . . Everything came together at that one moment and I realized that I never want to be in that spot again. I never want to let my emotions get so far out of control.”

Statements that demonstrated the remarried couples were working out these struggles also aided in defining the stepfamily’s adjustment stage as Stage II.

“Although now that I’ve said more often, ‘I can’t give you an answer right now. I want to talk to [partner] about it first.’ . . . it’s actually gotten better.”

“I would really like to get to a point where I can do some major forgiveness with them [stepchildren] . . . I find I need to heal it. That’s one of the things we are working on in therapy.”

“I know this is one of my issues, and like so I am working on this, and we have come to some understandings about how much we keep the old ways and how much I am free to build a new life for us without his parents, but it is an everyday struggle.”

### **Stage III Stepfamilies**

Two couples in this study were placed in Stage III, Living, due to the positive tone found in their stepfamily interaction. Words such as “community” and “sharing” were more frequently used. Couple interaction was characterized by discussing problems calmly, organizing family meetings, and understanding the needs of the family unit as a whole, rather than individual or mini-family issues.

“I think that my relationship with [partner] is the closest [one of the stepfamily]. Because we share our thoughts and feelings about things and we discuss a lot of things before they’re brought up to the kids. If he has a problem with one of the kids or if I have a problem with one of the kids, we usually talk about it first before we actually say something [to them]. Or we’ll talk to them together.”

“It’s like an open door community. The kids are welcome any time. They all have keys to the house. It’s a loving community. I think there’s a lot of love shared here.”

“They still have to go by our guidelines . . . what we will or won’t allow, even if they are more like adult-age children. And sometimes things come up where we have to discuss it and then bring it to their attention. Where before, it was more that I took care of my children and disciplined them. If [partner] had a problem with one of my children, he would bring it to my attention and I would discipline the children and vice versa.”

“I think that a lot of the time [living together] is fairly well balanced. I think that a lot of the time the boys are closer to [dad] but I also think that that’s a good thing. . . . It doesn’t mean they aren’t close to me. . . . If you put us on a scale of stepparents and stepchildren, we do very well. . . . I’m the stage manager. I do more of the laundry and more of the stuff in the kitchen so that [partner] can spend more time directly with the kids. And I think that in the long run that’s going to be more important for them, that will affect the rest of their lives.”

### **Stepfamily Adjustment Scale Comparisons**

For each remarried couple, comments about stepfamily life were considered and a stage of adjustment assigned. The stage of adjustment was then compared to the



quantitative score each couple obtained on the SAS to see if there was corroboration between the subjective, qualitative assignment and the quantitative score obtained by the instrument.

The SAS scores were calculated by scoring each individual's instrument and then taking the mean score for each stepfamily. SAS scores varied for each responding group of stepparents and biological parents. Although the stepparent questionnaires and the biological parent questionnaires had similar items on each instrument, the stepparent scale had more items than the biological parents' scale. For both instruments, the Likert Scale of the instrument was constructed so that the lowest scores correlate with better stepfamily adjustment. Conversely, higher SAS scores corresponded to poorer stepfamily adjustment. The lowest possible score for biological parents was 111 (if all questions are answered) and 122 (with no responses coded "does not apply") for stepparents, whereas the highest score on the SAS was 437 for biological parents (104 four-point items and 7 three-point items) and 487 for stepparents (121 four-point responses and one three-point response), again, if all questions applied. Totals varied because certain questions on the instrument did not pertain to all individuals. For example, items regarding an ex-spouse would be disregarded by an individual who was not divorced or items pertaining to multiple children in the home would not be answered by single-child families. Therefore, the highest and lowest possible score could vary with each respondent, depending upon their previous marital history and the number of children brought to the marriage, in addition to any questions that they felt did not apply.

In this study, the group mean of the SAS composite scores was 181, with a standard deviation of 65.22. In comparing the interview responses which make up the qualitative assessment to the SAS scores of each remarried couple, those stepfamilies characterized qualitatively in Stage II of stepfamily development fell within 1 standard deviation of the group mean. Furthermore, with only one exception in this study, stepfamilies wrestling with tasks in Stage I of stepfamily adjustment had a score above 1

standard deviation above the group mean, while those identified as Stage III of stepfamily adjustment had scores below 1 standard deviation below the group mean. In this study then, Stage III development corresponded to those stepfamilies with an average score of less than 116, while Stage I stepfamilies appeared to be those scoring above 246, as shown in Table 4 and Table 5. The only exception was Couple Two. In the interviews, Couple Two presented themselves with issues from Stage I, Preparation. Their score of 157 on the SAS however was much lower than would be anticipated from the pattern seen in the other stepfamilies, since a score on the SAS in excess of 246 was anticipated for those still in Stage I. The SAS scores and the qualitative impression of the stepfamily's level of adjustment are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

SAS Score Compared With the Qualitative Stage of Stepfamily Adjustment

Remarried Couple	SAS Composite Score	Qualitative Stage of Adjustment
Seven	114	3
Four	115	3
Five	130	2
Nine	145	2
Two	157	1
Three	158	2
One	219	2
Eight	222	2
Ten	240	2
Six	306	1

Table 5

Qualitative Stage of Stepfamily Adjustment Compared With SAS Score

Remarried Couple	SAS Composite Score	Qualitative Stage of Adjustment
Seven	114	3
Four	115	3
Five	130	2
Nine	145	2
Three	158	2
One	219	2
Eight	222	2
Ten	240	2
Six	306	1
Two	157	1

As previously mentioned, Couple Two's SAS score indicated a better adjusted stepfamily situation than was deduced from the interview data. It would appear that some element of *faking good* may have been present on the SAS responses of both partners, even though specific instructions regarding candor were issued. This was not to say that some degree of misrepresentation was not possible in the interviews as well. However, the interview format afforded the ability to recognize inconsistencies or evasions and to gently probe further into the response, giving greater opportunity to discover the true situation. Although further explanation of the discrepancies becomes evident when the IFS Map is presented, it appears that the functional personality part of each individual who completed the questionnaire believed that the stepfamily was further developed than was perhaps true. Couple Two aptly described their family of origin as frequently pretending to be what they are not. Perhaps the legacy of having to be what they are not is active in the

stepfamily as well. This phenomenon is explored further in the discussion of the IFS Map of Couple Two.

There were 25 individual subscales created from the SAS responses. These subscales were reviewed in chapter 2 and isolate specific factors that relate to stepfamily adjustment, such as divided loyalties, step-relational issues, relationships to former partners, and money, among others. (See Appendix E for data analysis of the subscales on the SAS.) Subscale scores were created by finding the mean of the responses on the items assigned to that subscale, utilizing the corresponding 3- or 4-point Likert scale. Scores range from 1.0 to 4.0, with 1.0 signifying more adjusted and 4.0 representing more maladjustment. A score above the possible mean score of 2.5 was considered to represent a significant factor; those below the mean were deemed to show better adjustment to that factor. A low mean score would indicate that particular factor was not an issue, or at least not an activating event, for that particular stepfamily. Conversely, a high mean score would indicate an area of difficulty for the stepfamily. Subscales were divided loosely in two subgroups: Activating Events and Relational Issues. Those which related to activating events were associated with triggering parts, and causing them to move to extreme roles. Those which were relationally oriented were not only triggering events, but were more closely associated with the presence or absence of Self in step-relations. Areas of difficulty or areas of successful adjustment for each stepfamily highlighted by the subscale results will be described along with each individual's IFS Map as it is appropriate.

Presence of Self was also detectable through the subscale scores of the SAS. As noted from the subscale data presented in Appendix E, discussed in the case study descriptions, and displayed in Table 6, those families with a Self Scale composite score above 5 had subscale scores that were predominantly below 2 and those with a Self Scale score of 1 or 2, had a corresponding larger number of subscale scores in excess of 2.5. This was particularly true of those scales pertaining to relationships, but it was also noted that there were fewer activating events indicated in the subscales, for the individual was

able to evoke Self leadership to avoid stepfamily situations triggering parts to behave in extreme ways. The two exceptions to this observation are Couple Ten and Couple Five.

In the case of Couple Ten, dealing with the fall-out from the mental illness of the ex-spouse created such havoc within stepfamily interactions that without the ability to recognize and evoke Self leadership, the stepfamily would have disintegrated. Conversely, Couple Five had explicitly abandoned the concept of forming a stepfamily, and the stepparent considered the stepchild more as an infrequent visitor than a family member. Because the stepfamily interaction was minimal, the number of elevated subscales for Couple Five was low, even though the Self Scale scores indicated an apparent lack of Self leadership. It appeared that the subscales provided helpful insight into potential activating events, and relational strengths and weaknesses, of the stepfamily, which could then be compared with those identified in the interview data.

Table 6

Self Scale Compared to the Number of Elevated Subscales on SAS

Couple	Seven	Four	Ten	Three	Nine	One	Six	Five	Eight	Two
Self Scale Score <sup>a</sup>	8	6	6	6	5	5	4	4	3	3
Elevated Subscales <sup>b</sup>	2	4	10	4	4	7	10	2	11	5
Activating Events	2	3	10	2	3	3	7	2	8	5
Relational Stress	0	1	0	2	1	4	3	0	3	0

<sup>a</sup> Self Scale: 1 - Not Apparent. 2 - Apparent not expressed. 3 - Apparent not evoked. 4 - Able to evoke Self leadership. Female Self Scale and Male Self Scale combined into one composite score.

<sup>b</sup> Total number of subscales representing activating events or relational stressors.

### Internal Family Systems Maps

The IFS Model is based upon the multiplicity theory of personality (Schwartz, 1995) as detailed in chapter 2. It is believed that the personality is multiple naturally, and that there are different parts of an individual's personality that come forward to interact in any given situation. These personality parts also interact internally with each other. They carry on dialogues, disagree, manipulate each other, polarize the system, and, at times, live in harmony. Part of the healing process of the IFS Model is understanding the role each part plays in the internal system (i.e., why it plays that role, what it believes, why it behaves the way it does) and, if the role it plays is detrimental to the well being of the person, helping it to change. The IFS Map is a key concept within the IFS model where a trained individual can assist a person in understanding the "lay of the land" so to speak -- the roles, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the parts of their internal family system. In that context, the data collected in the interviews of the remarried couples were used to create an IFS Map of the interior systems of the participants of the study.

Because of the unique nature of each stepfamily and their interactions, and the singular experience of these interactions by the individual personality parts, each couple's findings are presented individually, in case-study format. The language of the IFS Model is used in these case studies. It is unique and enhances the ability to differentiate between parts more effectively and concisely. In the language of IFS, Manager Parts are generally referred to by their roles in the system (i.e., Rescuer is a rescuing Manager Part or Controller is a controlling Manager Part), Exile Parts are usually designated by their age or their emotions, such as a 12-year-old Part, or a Fearful Part, and Firefighter Parts are frequently addressed by their behavior, such as a Rage Part (although rage can be considered an emotion, in this context rage it is used as a verb--to rage--to describe distracting behaviors), or a Compulsive Over-Eating Part. Self, in the IFS model as described in chapter 2, refers to an experience which is inherent in personality, but is not a part. Several expressions are used to denote characteristics of Self, such as Self

leadership, compassionate witness, and presence or awareness of Self, in the following case studies. These designations are used throughout the descriptions of the IFS Maps, consistent with the language of the IFS model.

Through the creation of the IFS Maps including the subjective determination of the presence of Self, a Self Scale rating was assigned to each member of the remarried couple. As described in chapter 3, the Self Scale was comprised of a four-point scale based on the following criteria from the interview data. A score of 1 equated to the internal system of individuals that had no apparent Self presence. A score of 2 represented those individuals where Self was evident to the researcher, but was not expressed or acknowledged by the individual without prompting from the researcher. A score of 3 signified those individuals who were aware of the value of Self leadership, recognized its presence in their interactions, but were not able to evoke Self leadership actively or consistently. A score of 4 designated those individuals who actively evoked Self leadership in their interactions with themselves and others.

At the end of this section I presented a summary in Table 7 that detailed the IFS Maps of each individual, their Self Scale, and provided this information in comparison to the SAS Composite Score each remarried couple obtained. This table illustrated both the functional and extreme parts presented by the individuals. The data relative to each couple was displayed in rank order according to their respective scores on the SAS.

### **Couple One**

Couple One was identified as being in a Stage II stepfamily, both in terms of the SAS Composite Score and the qualitative assessment. Their interactions were characterized by disagreements and unresolved issues. Subscales identifying difficult issues as activating events were Unresolved Emotions from Prior Marriage and Family and Divided Loyalties, Discipline by the Stepparent, and Ambiguity of the Stepparent Role illustrated in the statements and discussion that follow. The majority of difficulty relationally resulted from step-relational issues--Mutual Suitability of the Step Relationship, Quality of the Step

Relationship, and Quality of the Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent. The IFS Map of the two members of the remarried couple was markedly different. The female of the couple had an IFS Map which was complex and the detail of which she deeply explored. In contrast, the male member appeared to be just beginning the process of coming to terms with his own personality parts and their impact on the stepfamily system. In the context of stepfamily interaction, Exile Parts and Manager Parts were triggered and, in some instances, there was awareness of and access to Self.

*Female partner's IFS map.* The female partner's IFS Map in the context of her stepfamily relationship revealed a Manager Part, a Pleaser, whose main role was people-pleasing, making family interactions positive. The Pleaser was a compliant part which put on a positive face and outwardly agreed with whatever others wanted. This part potentially originated in childhood experiences, where controlling family interactions meant safety and predictability. She described the Pleaser in the following ways:

“[I prefer] to be in the flow of the thing, to just go with the flow.”

“I guess I actively seek other people's desires, doing what they want rather than what I feel . . . like I don't trust what my heart needs to happen so I'm checking outside myself for validation.”

“It [Pleaser] comes forward to just try and be pleasant, to try and make the day nice for my husband . . . put on the sweet smile and pretend nothing is wrong.”

“I would say for a long time that I was in almost a forever depression. Although I can have a very bubbly personality and be okay out in the world, on the inside it was always a gray cloud, it was always crying and like raining. . . and this part would be having fun but [inside] there this sadness that never ends. It's a forever sadness. . .unrequited grief. . .a grieving process that's never been completed.”

She herself attributed former life experiences to the creation of this part. The Pleaser's role had always been to focus on the well-being of others, to cover-up the internal grief of an Exile Part, as we heard in the above passage, and as follows:

“It was as though I was connecting to that part that longs to be home, that longs to return to the source. . . . I think that in the last moments I said, ‘Wait a minute! Wait a minute!’ I mean I did agree to come [to this life] but I agreed out of a sense of duty and obligation and responsibility. And it is interesting how that part plays out that obligation in this life, contrary to heart.”



However, in her IFS Map, the Pleaser was polarized with a more dominant Manager Part of her personality, the Controller, who needed control and organization. The Controller appeared to be a stronger, more demanding part which resented the compliant behaviors of the Pleaser, as heard in the following:

“I get angry with myself for doing that, for just pretending and making nice and ignoring their rudeness, ignoring my own feelings of betrayal.”

The Controller held the internal agendas and attempted to organize the lives of her children and her partner, as stated in these passages:

“When I see a project or an activity I see the whole of it, globally, and can see what needs to happen and how. I generally have difficulty trusting the outcome to others. But I’m definitely not into details and follow-through.”

“. . . and when [child’s] demanding part comes head to head with my directing part it’s like the Clash of the Titans.”

“I lead by vision. And I say, ‘This is the vision. These are the ways we’re gonna move and we’re gonna groove and we’re gonna go these places.’ And I get other people to do it.”

When asked about the Self, the Controller had this to share:

“Some parts are many times in denial . . . or are once again fearful . . . (pause) even of that voice. . . . You know I can do external changes, like what I’m doing right now, but sometimes, are requiring internal changes that feel scary . . . very frightening . . . and the other part . . . that is at peace now sharing with you. . . . Many times I realize the thing I am most afraid of more than anything else, is the power behind this [Self]. Not the power behind the fear, [but] the compassion. The unconditional love, and what it requires. . . . It’s wonderful on one hand and it’s frightening as hell on the other hand because it requires me to be in a space where most people have no concept. . . and try to live in the everyday world and still . . . what I’m fearful of is how to embody this [Self] in all of my parts and yet be able to function in the world I have created.”

In this passage, we were given insight into the Controller’s fears and beliefs which governed how it interacted with others. It feared internal changes, it feared giving up control to the Self, and it feared functioning differently in her world. In that passage, we were also presented with evidence of the ambivalence of the Controller at resolving internal conflicts.

Religious beliefs were an external stressor on the stepfamily, and caused the female's personality parts to polarize. A repeated cycle, a pattern of reactions was launched by this stressor as she disclosed:

**Female:** "My beliefs are very frightening for them [stepchildren] and certainly [my beliefs] being frightening for them, many times I come under attack. . . . So I feel threatened. . . they see me as occult. . . almost on the order of witch."

**Researcher:** "If you could let an image form of that part of you that feels under attack what would it look like?"

**Female:** "It would be the one that was persecuted in the witch hunts of Salem. That's the part that comes forward, that fear . . . and . . ."

**Researcher:** "Is there another part?"

**Female:** "Yes, that overcomes it . . . overrides it. It comes forward to just try to be pleasant, to try and make the day nice for my husband . . . and I get angry with myself for doing that . . . and underneath that is a little girl part feeling rejected and betrayed and abandoned and wanting to be protected by [partner] and he is oblivious."

In this particular stepfamily situation, the IFS Map of the female partner revealed a cycle of reactions triggered by parts of the stepchildren reacting to her belief. An Exile Part--a Fearful Part--felt persecuted by them, because of their reactions to her beliefs. The memory of persecution held by the Fearful Part caused strong feelings to be released into the internal system, triggering the Pleaser, hoping to manage the system and the memories of persecution. The Controller became angry at the Pleaser's behaviors, potentially because they were not sufficient to manage the pain of the Fearful part, or because the Controller, being singular of purpose (as Manager Parts are according to Schwartz, 1995), did not accept the methods of the Pleaser as valid. The Little Girl Part, described as being underneath it all, was the part triggered first by the entire experience, the part threatened by the stepchildren.

The female partner described her awareness of the experience of Self and how powerful it could be in stepfamily interactions, as follows:

"I began allowing that anger part of me to really come out, and that's what [child] engages in me . . . but if I can stay in this detached mode though, she will not [engage the angry part]. . . . If I can stay there, if I can just stay there, be there, continue to be there, however long it takes, she backs off. It's like [she says], 'I'm not getting anywhere with this'."

"I'd like to find a different way to interact with them. I think that I'm beginning to learn some of those [ways], but it takes a willingness to go beyond my own comfort

zone . . .to that vulnerable place . . . more than what I've been willing to do in the past."

*Male partner's IFS map.* The male partner of Couple One had a dominant Manager Part, the Perfectionist, that sought excellence and order in his daily activities and relationships. The Perfectionist appeared to use order to maintain a sense of well-being in the male's internal system as these statements indicate:

"I'm the kind of guy that likes things to be done a certain way. . .and I find it bothersome when I can't seem to make things go the way I see they should go."

**Researcher:** "So there is a strong part of you that sees there is a right way . . . that doing things the right way is very important. . . ."

**Male:** "Yes, that's exactly how it is and when I can't get things to go that way I'm frustrated."

"There's a right way to do things, and doing them the right way is important. And I'm frustrated. I want to get in there and make it right, and I don't feel I can."

The Perfectionist held the standards of behavior and would judge the male partner's other personality parts and their behaviors against these standards. It was also judgmental of others, as this statement shows:

"I judge hard, hard on them and myself, and I'm getting better at it but I still am. I have a long ways to go."

The Perfectionist was triggered in stepfamily interactions, where he could see what needed to be done to "make the stepfamily right" but was unable to do anything to change the situation as demonstrated by this statement:

"There's been a few places where I think I could have helped . . . where I think the girls needed help and I'm frustrated that I couldn't do what I know would work best."

To deal with the frustration of the Perfectionist, another Manager Part, the Isolator, stepped in and would take over the male's internal system in stepfamily interactions. The Isolator used distance and disengagement in an attempt to rebalance the conflict experienced in the internal system, as illustrated in these passages:

"I have my own ways that I disciplined my children, the way I would parent them and basically I have not been able to do any of that with these

[stepchildren]. . . It's frustrating. I learned to keep peace. I just have to back off."

"If I get involved, they turn to her [mother] . . . so basically it forced me early on to just kind of back off and not be too involved."

"Well, I don't ignore what's going on but I see what's going on and what needs to be done, and I can't do anything about it, and that's part of what hurts. And I tried to fight it early on, but I couldn't win so now I just back off."

The Isolator appeared to perform another function in the male's internal system, which was to protect the system from the painful feelings of the Exile Part, triggered in stepfamily interactions. I heard references to this young, Hurt Part and how the Isolator would step in to manage things internally, in the statement above, and in the following passage:

"I wasn't honored as I stepped in here with the idea that these [children] needed a father and I was going to be that father and I don't feel like I've ever been accepted in that role and it hurt. They always turn to their mother, especially if I get involved. . . . So it forced me to just kind of back off."

The Isolator was also present in couple interactions and blocked effective communication between himself and his partner, as demonstrated in these passages:

"[We] very seldom have arguments, I'm not one who cares to argue so we don't fight or anything like that. So we just tuck our feelings away and we pout or whatever, but no conflict . . . and [partner] will be the first to tell you she doesn't like it this way. . . . Oh, she'd rather get into it, but I won't."

"Well, she will pick at me, not really mean stuff, just keeps on until she gets a row going, and I hate that and I really try not to get into it with her."

The female partner described the detrimental impact of the Isolator on the stepfamily. However, the Isolator was also aware of what it was doing and why, as these statements indicate:

**Female:** "He spent years, literally years, coming in and going in his office. He ran the farm and we felt like we didn't matter."

**Female:** "I feel that when he [quit the business] it saved this marriage. He no longer had a place to hide from what was going on in the family and through therapy I have been able to get him to engage with me in this relationship."

**Male:** "It's like I put my energy where I felt I made a difference. I had a business to run, and it had to be run right. . . . I had a family to support, and frankly, it was a whole lot less frustrating to just to do that."

Evidence of Self was noted in the male's IFS map, and presented as a sensitive, caring, compassionate witness. It appeared that Self leadership was beginning to emerge, creating stepfamily harmony, as seen in the following statements:

"Some nice things are going on between us [stepchildren and stepfather] now. It's there. There are some signs that things are changing . . . when he comes out once in awhile . . . when that 'nice guy' comes out."

"She [stepchild] is trying, and I know it must be tough on her, and we're working on working things out rather than us just being in opposite ends of the house."

"I was going to be a better father, but I failed in being the kind of father I wanted to be. I've known that. And it came like real dramatically here about a month ago, I got a letter from one of my sons. . . . Basically I wasn't loving him enough. . .and it hurt, it really hurt when I got it. . . .But the more I thought about it, any one of my kids could have written that letter. . . . It's good that he wrote it because it forced me to take a look at my situation. I sat down and wrote every one of them a letter [back]. I told each of them [children and stepchildren], 'I got a letter and I expect each one of you could have written the same letter,' and apologized to them, said I wanted to do better. [I said] Don't follow my example, do better. . . . I am who I am, I want you to accept me for who I am and all I can promise is that I'll try to be a better father and grandfather."

"It's a challenge for my spiritual life, you know. There's a challenge there every day of how am I going to handle this. . . . It's an opportunity for growth for me now."

In summary, Couple One was a stepfamily in Stage II of adjustment, struggling with polarizations that for years went unresolved. The female's IFS Map, in the stepfamily context, contained a Controller (her dominant Manager Part), a Pleaser who would be triggered by stepfamily interactions, and a little girl Exile Part who felt betrayed and abandoned, fearful and persecuted. The male partner's IFS Map, in contrast, was dominated by the Perfectionist who held the standards and judged himself and others accordingly. The Perfectionist was polarized with the Isolator, a Manager Part who would distance himself from the stepfamily, and who would protect the internal system from the painful feelings of the Hurt Part, an Exile Part carrying issues of not being honored and valued. In both IFS Maps there was access to Self, and an awareness within the parts of the two partners, that the more they were able to be in Self, the more stable the family situation became. However, even though neither was able to evoke Self leadership in

stepfamily interactions consistently, there was awareness of the need for this level of interaction to move forward as a family unit.

### **Couple Two**

Couple Two was characterized as a Stage I family qualitatively by the kinds of struggles illustrated in the couple's interviews. However, there were internal personality parts of the couple which strongly denied the need for further adjustment as a stepfamily. The attitude of these parts was evident in the responses generated by the SAS, the detail of which is discussed later. Salient issues highlighted by the subscales on the SAS as activating events were Issues Related to the Children's Movement Between Households, Role Ambiguity of the Stepparent, and Decision-making Power in the Marriage. Relational difficulties appeared in subscales related to Overall Family Satisfaction, Quality of the Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent, and Quality of the Child-Biological Parent Relationship. Couple Two appeared to be holding on to fantasies of the perfect first-marriage family and were attempting to maintain a fragile balance of status-quo in their stepfamily interactions.

*Female partner's IFS map.* The female partner had a dominant Manager part, the Storyteller, who used the details of stories to keep her from facing painful emotions. The Storyteller, although engaging, would keep the internal system in balance by sharing long, convoluted accounts of situations, as seen in this passage:

**Researcher:** "How are you and your partner's personality parts different?"

**Female:** "He's very non-confrontational, and he takes a lot of crap from [ex-partner] because the less friction . . . (pause) the more agreeable she is. . . because one time I went . . . she's a nurse . . . I went to get a flu shot and she happened to be there. I didn't know . . . I knew who she was but I wasn't certain that it was there that she worked . . . and we were married already . . . and she got all mad and stormed out crying. Then when [partner] went to pick up his son she wouldn't let him have him because she said that when I was getting my flu shot, they asked if I was pregnant and I said, 'no we have enough kids,' and I meant the kids I watch and my kids, and my brother's kids and my stepkid which I consider all my kids because they're here everyday and I would protect them with my life because that is how I am."

In the interview, the Storyteller would distract from the discussion of the feelings of other parts within the female's IFS map, as these statements illustrate:

**Researcher:** "What expectations did parts of you have that have not been met in this first year of marriage?"

**Female:** "I sometimes feel that [stepson] comes before me, that he is more important."

**Researcher:** "Describe for me how this part feels when it seems like your stepson comes first."

**Female:** "Well, like I had it [our anniversary] circled in big letters and he isn't seeing it. . . . He is thinking camping and spending time with [son]. He looked again and said, 'Oh! I suppose you're right.' And I'm like, 'gee, you already have to work all day.' But he's thinking about [son] and how he's starting school and he isn't going to be spending so much time with him . . . but Dang! I was brought up--and I don't mean to make it sound like kids are any less important--but you have to work on the couple unit to be a family."

In the dynamic of the internal system, the Storyteller appeared to fear that the feelings of the Jealous part, (the part that felt jealous of the stepson) were too dangerous to be expressed, and thus used its skills as a manager to keep the feelings from being examined in any detail.

Another Manager Part in the female's IFS Map was the Controller, who orchestrated stepfamily events so as to avoid repeating painful experiences from the past. Notice the presence of the Storyteller speaking on behalf of system in this passage describing the Controller:

"My oldest brother is really my halfbrother, but I've never considered him anything but my brother . . . and my dad is not his [dad]. . . . He calls my dad, 'Dad,' and he changed his name so he is [family name] which is my dad's name. . . . But there's just that separation. . . . I know how he felt and I don't want my stepson to feel that way . . . because I know how hard that is and family is very important to me so I do everything I know how to keep things equal for all the kids."

There was little evidence of the presence of Self in the female's IFS map. It appeared to the researcher that the Storyteller and the Controller were very much in control of the internal system, and at times in the extreme, perhaps because of the losses experienced in the previous marriage. She described the hurt and confusion of the Exile Part through the Storyteller, who recounted the events and feelings from her former abusive marriage, in the following passage:

“When I was married before my husband was in the military and we moved around a lot and he kept me real close to home--no car, no money--and like I was this different person, like somebody I didn't know. I was always trying to please him and do the right thing so he wouldn't blow up. Then he was stationed in Spain and here I was with two babies and I didn't speak Spanish and we were like a really long ways from base with no car again, so I didn't have anybody to talk to . . . and I'm so stupid I'm thinking, 'This is the way things are supposed to be.' One day he just says, 'Why don't you take the kids and go home for awhile on the transport?' and I knew there was something wrong and I didn't want to go and I did everything to try and make things right, you know like sexy nighties and everything. But that just made things worse because then he said that I was bad with money and irresponsible . . . . When I called him from the States he said he didn't want to be married any more and I was really hurt and shocked, and here I was with two kids and nothing. Man, it was all really too much.”

*Male partner's IFS map.* The Male partner easily acknowledged his internal parts, and was able to call upon certain parts consciously to cope with the needs of different roles in his life. However, the Manager Part identified as the Avoider was dominant in stepfamily interactions and frequently took over management of his internal system without his conscious awareness. The Avoider refused to acknowledge difficulties in stepfamily adjustment, as evidenced by these statements:

**Research:** “Do you think that there are loyalty issues with your son, between his feelings for his mother and his feelings about this new stepfamily?”

**Male:** I don't see that at all. We all get along pretty good.”

**Researcher:** “[Your Partner] described feeling like your son had changed after you got married. Do you think that is true?”

**Male:** “Na, well he doesn't take hugs like he used to, and he won't let [Partner] do anything for him anymore, like give him medicine or tuck him in, and he used to, but I just think that it's a phase and he will snap out of it. I really don't see any real problems there.”

“I have to deal with confrontation all day long in my work and I just don't want to deal with it when I come home so I avoid it as much as I can.”

A significant external stressor for the male was his ex-partner, his son's mother. Interactions with this individual triggered a different Manager Part, the Manipulator, who would say or do anything that would get what he wanted from the ex-partner. The Manipulator readily admitted orchestrating his conversations and dealings with her to gain access to his son, in these excerpts:

“Everybody's put in situations where they have to make adjustments and that's what I do.”



“I’ve learned to play her game. As long as I call her up and make her feel halfway important then I get whatever I want. . . . As long as I make her feel important, I get him. It’s a game and I win. If I get [son] I win.”

There was an awareness on his part, however, of how the Manipulator was triggered by feelings of an Exile Part, a Fearful part deep in his internal system, as these passages show:

“Like I’m gonna call her tomorrow to get him [son]. So tomorrow all day until I tell her I’ll have a knot in my stomach because it upsets me that much having to talk to her. Because just the way she is. And it’s not so bad right now, but last month it was really bad, but I know it’s nerves or stress because as soon as I put the phone down, and hopefully have my son, it’s gone.”

“I don’t deserve the treatment she gives me, and the way I treat her is way better than she deserves, but it doesn’t hurt me and it doesn’t bother me because I know when my son is running around here it makes up for everything.”

The Manipulator appeared to control the fear that at some point she might block his access to his son. It was that Fearful Part that created the stomach knot mentioned above and caused him to re-experience the fear every time communication with the ex-partner was necessary, as seen in the statements that follow:

**Researcher:** “So is this [knot] from a part that is saying it’s afraid that she won’t let you have him?”

**Male:** “Yeah, that’s where the fear comes from . . . because you know, for the whole day I don’t know. I can’t control her. . . . She has a hold on me . . .so I gotta do what’s important.”

Although the Manipulator was able to create an environment where the Fearful Part was calmed and balance internally restored, it triggered polarizations within the stepfamily which the male partner examined in this statement:

“I know I can’t keep on doing this and something’s gonna have to give, because it’s . . . I’m getting flack around here for all the accommodating that goes on.”

The male partner was well aware of how he was able to shift from one part of his personality to another. Although not necessarily Self leadership (more akin to a Manager Part acting as director for the internal system) evoked by the male partner, evidence of the potential for Self leadership was detected by the researcher in this passage:

“It’s almost like there’s kind of like a director or a traffic cop in there or something that’s telling, like saying . . . well you know, I’m a police officer. I face a lot of situations like, where it’s hard to be nice. But I’ve got eyes on me

at all times and I've gotta watch what I say. So [I] just kind of go with the flow . . . shift into a different gear. Like I see what is needed, like how I need to be in the situation and I go there."

"Yeah, I guess I do that at home too. . . . If I see that something's needed I can shift and go there, although I'd really rather avoid conflict if at all possible."

The proactivity of the Manager Part described here is an example of positive contributions from Manager Parts in a functional role. Although the male partner lacked the perspective of compassionate witness, his parts were frequently appropriately functional.

In summary, the female partner's IFS Map displayed a Storyteller and a Controller, both Manager Parts, which struggled to keep surface appearances of the stepfamily in a positive light. These Manager Parts protected the system from the painful memories of an abusive marriage and childhood experiences, which were triggered by stepfamily interactions. The Storyteller and the Controller worked as a team to keep the Self from experiencing difficulties, and thus access to the Self was not apparent in the interview data. The male partner's IFS Map also contained two Manager Parts active in stepfamily relationships: the Avoider and the Manipulator. The Avoider worked to avoid any acknowledgment of difficulties within the stepfamily, where the Manipulator, triggered most evidently by a fear of the ex-partner's behavior, calmed the internal conflict through manipulation of external events.

Although I have described the stepfamily interactions of Couple Two as Stage I-type interactions, their scores on the SAS indicated a discrepancy between what they are truly experiencing and what they would like others or themselves to believe. In the above discussion of the IFS Map of both individuals there was evidence of Manager Parts which had as their goal to keep any hint of disagreement or difficulty from creeping into their current marriage or stepfamily community. It appeared that these parts were protecting their internal systems from fears that former relational failures may reoccur, and the protection extended to their responses on the SAS. There were discrepancies between interview statements and responses on the instrument. For example, on the SAS both

partners responded that they share equally in the care and discipline of the children; however, the female described it differently:

“I try to take care of the little fights and stuff before [partner] gets home so that things are not so hectic for him. . . . But I don’t get much relief from all these kids.”

“I see us as really one family . . . not his kids or my kids but ours, but I don’t think he treats all the kids the same. He doesn’t see it that way.”

Further, with regard to subscales on the SAS that referred to difficulties with being satisfied in the new stepfamily and decision-making power in the marriage, the couple answered as if they talk openly about everything, but in the interview, again the female partner saw it differently, as she stated:

“I want to discuss things. . . . Before I wasn’t even allowed my own friends or even my own opinions. I was kept poor, alone, and away from anybody, even my family which really took a toll on me. So I speak up now, but I don’t get much response. . . . [Partner] just doesn’t want to talk about things that are troubling.”

“I don’t know about this whole thing. . . . It’s all right for [spouse] because he doesn’t have to deal with what I have to, what with my ex being out of the picture and all and the kids here all the time, there’s no adjustment for him and so he doesn’t get it when I don’t like what’s happening around here.”

The male partner shared (as follows) that money issues are a problem for the stepfamily in this statement:

“I get angry about money. I know this is old stuff, and it’s not her fault, but I still blame her. But I don’t address it necessarily, it just goes away eventually on its own.”

However, the SAS subscale indicated that there were not financial problems in the stepfamily, with a Money Issues subscale score of 1.80 (also see Appendix E.) From these indicators taken out of the interview data, it would appear that Stage I of stepfamily adjustment was a more accurate assessment of Couple Two’s true developmental level.

### **Couple Three**

Couple Three had several unique external stressors which were triggers for internal personality parts, as well as provided opportunities for Self leadership. Among these

unique characteristics were the developmental stage of the mini-family, maturity and Self-awareness, adoption, and an “ours” baby.

Objectively, Couple Three scored in the lower range of SAS scores for Stage II which would identify them as a more well-adapted stepfamily. This is supported by the interview data, where responses had classified them as Stage II, but with clearly evident emerging Stage III behaviors. Self leadership was acknowledged but often not accessed consistently. In this couple’s interactions there were continued disagreements regarding household unification and cultural adjustment, but those disagreements were finding resolution and dissolution through couple unity. Issues with stepchildren continued to be tense, however, with the advent of the “ours” baby the issues which divided the community into mini-families seemed to have become less prominent. SAS subscales that were activating events for the couple were Unresolved Emotions Related to the Children’s Movement Between Households, Biological Parent’s Alliance with the Children, Ambiguity of the Stepparent Role, and the Effect of the Remarriage on the Child-Biological Parent Relationship. Relational subscales that appeared to be problematic areas for Couple Three were the Quality of the Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent and the Quality of the Child-Biological Parent Relationship.

*Female partner’s IFS map.* Internal personality parts of the female partner were dominated by a Manager Part--the Controller--who used routine, organization, and thoroughness both internally and externally to maintain control. This Manager Part was both functional and extreme in its internal and external interactions. The Controller internalized feelings and dealt with situations through separation and silence, which gave her the space necessary to analyze what needed to be done but also isolated her emotionally from the stepfamily. The Controller spoke it’s feelings in the interview:

“I think the issue is . . . we don’t really have a routine. The other days we have a routine . . . but we have to get the house cleaned on Saturday and that is a big pressure I think. . . . The big issue is we haven’t worked out the how of the thing.”

“What I tend to do is to not delve too much into things to try to analyze them. . . until they get to the point where it’s bothering me and then at that point I’m usually pretty introspective and I like to think about it and figure out how I feel about it and not talk out loud about it while I’m trying to figure that out.”

Underlying this Controller was another more vulnerable part which wants to be honored and recognized as valuable. This Exile Part was nurtured by the positive contributions and organization of the Controller, but it was often triggered by external stressors of her partner’s occupation and stepfamily interaction.

“I feel ill at ease sometimes and part of it is not being able to even pick what house I wanted to live in, where I wanted to live. There’s difficulties because of it being the church’s house that we can’t do things [to the house]. . . . Like I would have changed some things by now, you know, made it my own . . . an expression of myself and the family.”

“A lot of people would come up just to see how [ours baby] was doing. . . . They’ll come by and they’ll say, ‘Hi [baby].’ And don’t even acknowledge that I’m there . . . and keep walking and not say anything to me. . . . I was kind of invisible. . . . It kind of bothered me, but I’m a private person anyway.”

“For about a year, she [stepchild] would come in and go directly to her room without a word, and I felt invisible and it hurt. . . . I know they [stepchildren] were angry at me, but I didn’t really have any thing to do with it [their parent’s divorce] . . . and I didn’t know how to make it different.”

In these passages, both the vulnerable Exile Part and the protecting Controller were evident. The Exile Part harbored fears of being invisible, which are compensated for by the accomplishments of the Controller. However, this participant had access to Self and awareness of Self leadership and its effectiveness, although she admittedly was only able to be in Self infrequently. However, she recognized that when she could evoke Self leadership it significantly enhanced couple interaction, stepfamily unity, and helped her to work through these internal conflicts as well, as these statements confirmed:

“There have been times when I’ve said to him, ‘you just need to leave me alone at this point because things are just going to get worse, unless you . . . just give me time to cool off.’”

“I’ll ask him, ‘what’s happening here?’ . . . because it seems that he’s irritated over things that shouldn’t cause irritation and he keeps saying nothing. So I’ll just kind of back off and wait awhile and then I’ll ask him again.”

“Actually [we] have talked about that [Self leadership] because . . . it [stepfamily] works best when one or the other of us can be that way [in Self] depending on who needs it. . . . [When a fight starts] if the other one just

doesn't react, then we give up. And so, that's when we have the best relationship is when each of us can do that for the other one."

Finally, the female partner talked about the positive impact of their "ours" baby, and how it enabled members of the stepfamily unit to be more in Self, or at least call upon functional Manager Parts, in interaction with each other.

"I think [baby] has brought us all together because he's such a big focus of the entire time that we're together. . . . He's brought us all together because [he's] a natural centering point for them. It's like he's not part of the old stuff so we can let it go and move on."

*Male partner's IFS map.* The IFS Map of the male partner was dominated by a pair of Manager Parts, a Avoider on one hand who avoided conflict, and a Perfectionist on the other hand, who demanded that a certain standard of behavior be upheld. This polarity between avoiding conflict and wanting things to be a certain way was described in the following passages:

"I tend to be laid back until a certain point happens where then in my own way I try to exert my authority, especially when I can see how things ought to be."

"Some of the things [I] do, that I enjoy doing, I take a lot more time to do them than maybe others might, and that does create some conflict at home, but there is a level at which I am comfortable with how things are done."

There was also an Exile Part triggered in dealing with his remarried family, and he expressed how he engaged Self leadership to work with the Exile Part. The result was that an Exile Part moved to a functional role, and rather than continuing to hide the jealous feelings, he dealt with them and used them to grow individually, as described in the following statement:

"I had some difficulties with being jealous sometimes of [stepchild] and the relationship between [partner] and her. It was like she and her mom were partners and where did I fit in? There was a part of me that had to deal with that and I worked on it and tried to understand it. I think I handle it a lot better now."

This stepfather/stepdaughter relationship was different from any other in the study, because her biological father had died and she was adopted by her stepfather 2 years later. There was both the Avoider and the Self, in how he related to her, as these statements illustrate:

“I’m sure this loss of her dad is all tied up in her personality, she doesn’t talk much about him and she is very private about her feelings. I’m not real used to kids being that way with me. I mean my kids and I were always real close and easy with each other. It’s not real easy with her and I don’t want to draw her out and make problems but I would like it if she could feel like she could talk more about him and how she feels.”

“Actually, she has probably had the most adjustments of anybody in her short life, losing her dad that she was real close with, I mean he was the caretaker--stayed home with her. . . . Then moving and a new school, then me and being adopted, then moving here and a new school, then [ours baby] all in a couple of years. No wonder she stays to herself.”

Yet, their relationship was similar to other step-relationships in the ambiguity of the stepparent role, which was highlighted by the subscale score. I heard the Avoider speaking to stepfamily interactions in this passage about that issue:

“A part of me felt that I wasn’t dad even though legally I was, and I was used to being a different kind of dad than I think [stepchild] had or wanted. So even though [partner] wanted me to be dad right from the start, I sort of took my time. Even that created conflict with both of them, too much for one, not enough for the other. It was like I couldn’t win.”

Respect and caring were strongly evident in the IFS Map of the male partner. Self leadership was an important ingredient in conveying this respect and caring to members of the stepfamily, and indicated the importance of Self in stepfamily adjustment, as this passage demonstrated:

**Male:** “I was a good dad and a good pastor, but I was a lousy husband. I swore if God ever gave me another shot at it I was gonna be different.”

**Researcher:** “How are you different now?”

**Male:** “Because I work at it, everyday. . . . I see this other person as my friend and partner and I make sure that that person is, as much as I can humanly do, taken care of and loved . . . anything I can do to love her or direct my love toward her and see her confident. I’ve learned to shut up and listen and don’t try to analyze everything . . . just listen. . . . I’ve learned to draw on other aspects of my personality, on skills that I think I always had but never used before . . . and I think that has made all the difference in things coming together better between all of us.”

In summary, the IFS Map of the female partner in the context of the stepfamily was comprised of a Manager Part, a Controller, who in a functional role carefully considered potential outcomes and successfully executed those outcomes, and an Exile Part who on occasion would flood the system with fears of being invisible. The accomplishments of the Controller would rebalance the internal system by dispelling the fears of being invisible.

This was difficult, however, in the context of the remarried family, where her husband's career as a religious minister alternately placed her in the spotlight or made her invisible. The IFS Map of the male partner had two equally dominant Manager Parts, an Avoider and a Perfectionist, who were triggered through stepfamily interactions. There was also an Exile Part who had moved out of exile, who had once become jealous of the relationship between his wife and stepdaughter. The awareness of and access to Self by both partners held significant importance to both, as they realized the impact that this capacity, (i.e., the ability to remain in Self or to call upon Self leadership) had on stepfamily adjustment.

### **Couple Four**

Couple Four was identified as having evolved into a Stage III stepfamily, although they have been married only 3 years. They were unified in their goals, worked together effectively on family projects, and were conscious of their differences. They had an "ours" baby who had a positive impact on the way the stepfamily interacted. The male partner also had a very adaptable, easy-going child who eliminated much of the step-relational conflict seen in other stepfamilies. Support from external sources in the management of stepfamily stressors also contributed to calming triggered parts and enhancing stepfamily integration. Subscale scores which indicated potential activating events were Ambiguity of the Stepparent Role, Biological Parent Support of the Stepparent, and Self-efficacy with Respect to the Attainment of Family-related Needs. Relational subscales elevated in Couple Four were the Quality of the Non-Residential Biological Parent Relationship and Mutual Suitability of the Stepparent Relationship.

*Female partner's IFS map.* The female participant had a dominant Manager Part who was concerned with organization, control, and completion. This Controller was triggered by the unpredictability of the children and the behaviors of parts of her partner that were contrary to the behavior patterns of her dominant personality parts, demonstrated by the following excerpts from the interviews:



“I’m a self-doer, independent. And I like to see the finished product. If I tell somebody I’m going to be there and it’s gonna take me two days to finish, that’s what it takes . . . no exceptions. I have to stay on schedule.”

“The most frustrating thing of our whole relationship are his lingering projects . . . They go on and on and on and on. Just get done!”

“I’m just used to things being done like that (finger snap). Then we can be gone and have fun. Now it’s constant complications, especially with the kids.”

She also had a less dominant Manager Part, the Perfectionist, who she acknowledged as a very important presence in her work, but who also created agitation in stepfamily interactions, as show in these descriptions:

“That’s why my do-it-right part is so important. Because if I don’t get things done, and done right, I don’t have that time to have that free-spirited creativity. But you don’t get free time if you don’t do the things you’re supposed to do.”

“I really don’t like having to tell people what to do, not even children. . . . I prefer that they just know how to do it right and do it. I wouldn’t be a good teacher and I didn’t think I wanted to be a mom.”

“So you have things come up in that situation when [stepchild] is supposed to be going somewhere else and plans haven’t been made and it infringes on my day and I get upset.”

The female partner experienced the presence of Self in her relationships with stepfamily members. Self leadership created the environment in which parts could relax their rigid stance, indicated in the following phrases:

“I began to realize that, well, the kid doesn’t know stuff. It’s okay. And I began to intervene with [partner] when he would get down on him and said, ‘just relax, he’s just a kid.’ So I relaxed too, and we learn.”

“You know, some days I feel like I’ve got this little stranger with me and I really don’t swing with it. And other days it’s fine. It’s like, depends on my moods, I guess, like what do you say, ‘What part is out that day?’ The tough days, you know, it’s like I have no patience. So I send him to Grampa’s or daycare and he’s cool with that and so am I.”

*Male partner’s IFS map.* The IFS Map of the male participant of Couple Four was controlled predominantly by a non-confrontational Manager Part, the Avoider, who would avoid conflict and just allow things to go along status quo. He recognized the balance that the behaviors of the Avoider created in stepfamily interactions in his life and his son’s, as can be seen in this segment:

“I think for the most part . . . I’m a pretty easy-going person. I don’t like to make waves, you know, rock the boat. And [child] is a lot like me, sort of easy-going. I think that is good, because we kind of balance [partner] who is kind of high-strung like.”

Yet, there was another Manager Part, a Dad Part, that was triggered by a belief of what his role should be with his son. This Dad Part had behaviors--directing and controlling--that were quite different from those of the Avoider--laid-back and nonconfrontational--as these statements showed:

“I’ve always been, you know, everybody tells me, like my mom or something, tells me I’m too strict on him. . . . You have to mind. . . . And I don’t say things three times. . . . As far as moving into being a stepparent, it was easier for her because she didn’t have to deal with a wild child. . . . Even [ours baby] right now . . . she’s just a baby . . . but we finally just broke her into this thing of not waking up in the middle of the night. . . . It’s just like training a kid like training a dog, I guess, I mean their learning habits.”

“I think a dad has to be there on top of things and not let anything go by, like don’t let them get away with anything. . . . My dad wasn’t that way with us, he talked more . . . but it seems that I need to be more like hard on him.”

Although the male partner’s IFS did not appear to have active, conscious Self leadership in the internal system, his functional parts were able to create an accepting living arrangement and peaceful coexistence which portends the presence of Self, as these excerpts highlight:

“I just let things roll, like just roll off my back. I don’t like to, like, get upset by stuff, like stuff around here . . . like building this house and letting all the decisions, and getting stuff done, get to me. . . . I just don’t like it. So I avoid fights and stuff and just let things work out themselves.”

In summary, the IFS Maps of Couple Four showed the female partner with two Manager Parts who were activated by stepfamily interaction: a Controller and a Perfectionist. Both were triggered by the unpredictability of the children and by the different personality parts of her husband but for the most part operated in functional roles. The male partner’s IFS Map was dominated by an Avoider, a Manager Part who functioned to avoid conflict, to deny problems, and strove to keep the peace. In contrast, his Dad Part, became a heavy-handed, domineering parent with his easy-going son, behaviors which appeared to be contradictory to what the child needed. This contradiction triggered different reactions in the IFS of the female partner. She described evoking Self leadership

to intervene in the external system on the stepson's behalf. The female partner appeared to be more insightful about her own personality parts and those of her husband, and was able to move to Self leadership with ease. The male partner relied on the strengths of the functional roles of his personality parts to keep the peace in the stepfamily.

### **Couple Five**

Couple Five was unique in that they had no children living in the home and only one adolescent visited on alternate weekends. Her presence was felt, however, as she created difficulties that triggered parts in both her father and stepmother, behaviors that hindered adjustment of the stepfamily. They were identified in the data as being a Stage II stepfamily, and the SAS score corroborated that designation. Subscales indicating activating events were few: Stepfamily Satisfaction and Ambiguity of the Role of the Stepparent. The only relational subscale that was problematic was that related to Quality of the Non-residential Biological Parent Relationship. However, coming together as a cohesive community did not appear to be a goal of this couple. There was evidence that previously there had been a desire to come together as a stepfamily to create a sense of family unity but the idea had since been discarded to avoid confrontation. The situation was demonstrated in these statements by the female partner:

“I guess I would just say that it's not a community as such. . . . We will do different kinds of things . . . that she wants to do, or we want to do . . . but to say that we were a family . . . I wouldn't say that. She's more like a niece or something coming to visit.”

“I guess at one time . . . I would have liked . . . well more of a relationship [with the stepdaughter] but now, too much has happened and she is moving on and . . . well things are what they are.”

“I'm not sure there is [a relationship]. I guess I would say it's more of a friend. I hope [stepchild] considers me a friend . . . but as, there's not much of a relationship . . . and I'm not sure why that is.”

*Female partner's IFS map.* The female partner presented with a Manager Part, a Pessimist, who kept things in order in her internal and external systems, using a strong

sense of right and wrong. The Perfectionist had high standards with strong ties to the culture of her family of origin as shown in the following excerpts:

“Yes, I guess I do have a strong sense of what is right. . . . And if I thought about it, I guess I move things in my life in that direction . . . doing what’s right . . . well, yeah, that’s what I expect my kids [school kids] to do too.”

“[She] just came and sat and expected to be entertained. Well, that was not family. That’s not the way I . . . that was not my family. And maybe she felt that I expected her to do more than she was accustomed to be doing. . . . But it was difficult for me to feel like I was supposed to wait on her hand and foot. . . . That was not my background.”

“I said, ‘ . . . Kind of step back and look at this a little bit. Look at this, what you’re doing with her, it really isn’t right. She’s really too big for that stuff now.’ And then said something, you know how I felt about it. And he would start to do it again, but he watched himself, and I guess he saw it too, and he said, ‘You’re right!’ So then it was difficult because he didn’t react to those games and then that caused friction for awhile too.”

In the stepfamily interaction, another Manager Part, a nonconfrontational part, the Peacekeeper, would take over her internal system and interact with her partner and stepdaughter in equivocating behaviors designed to keep the peace, as illustrated by the following:

“She played one against the other for a long time. So, it was a matter of . . . where do I fit in, in this one against the other, without making the situation worse? So I may have backed off a little more than would have been good, now looking back. . . (pause) yeah. . . it would have been better if I hadn’t been so. . . if I hadn’t stepped back so much.”

“Part of me would say, yeah, I would like things to be a little bit different and I guess then a part of me would say that I’m not sure that could have happened and let it go at that.”

In other instances, the interaction with the stepdaughter triggered the Perfectionist to respond. The female partner described it as a Protector Part who was both on guard to protect her own vulnerable parts from hurt, and wanted to protect her husband from what the Perfectionist perceived was potentially hurtful behavior from the stepdaughter.

“She does push buttons. . . . It’s not that we ever disagreed or that we clashed. . . . I’m not sure I’m as much myself when [she] is here than when I’m in a normal situation. . . . The protective part [comes out] I think, waiting for something [from stepdaughter] that would trigger his feelings of guilt or his frustration.”

**Female:** “She [stepdaughter] hates to go to this restaurant, well, because her dad gets in there and well he starts talking to everybody. . . . It’s like she gets jealous or isn’t the center of attention or something. . . . It’s a thing the two of them do with each other. . . . So here we are in the restaurant and I’m thinking, ‘This isn’t good, because here we are in the same situation we’ve always been in.’ So I elbowed him and said, ‘you’re talking again.’ to help him realize . . . but we had a very pleasant [meal], there were no confrontations.”

**Researcher:** “So a part of you acts as mediator between them? That part of you that can see the right way to do things?”

**Female:** “Yeah, I just . . . well, like try to protect him I guess, from himself or at least what he does . . . to make him aware of behaviors that . . . well, that cause her to push the buttons that she pushes.”

The female partner’s parts did not seem to allow the Self access to the system. The Perfectionist and the Avoider appeared to have things well under control: no Exile Parts were triggered and no Firefighter Parts responded. However, even though the Self was not evident in stepfamily interactions, there was a sense of the metaperspective of the Self in these statements:

“It’s like I can. . . well there’s a shift that goes on . . . both in [partner] and in myself . . . when she’s about to be here. . . . I see it. . . more I feel it in myself . . . like I’m afraid of what may happen or what buttons . . . what she might do to him . . . and so I feel (paused) . . . changed. And I think he does too, not in a good way. . . . They do that to each other I think, like they have to be a certain way to come together . . . and I’m not certain what that’s about, and I don’t think I’ve explored it [with partner] . . . but I can see now that I step back and look.”

*Male partner’s IFS map.* The male partner’s dominant Manager Part was a Passive Pessimist, had negative thoughts and non-confrontational behaviors about changing how he responded to things presented in his life. These statements illustrated the attitudes of the Passive Pessimist:

“[I feel like] I’m just the checkbook. . . . And some of the moral leadership I would [provide] in parenting, hasn’t followed the course I would have followed. . . . I didn’t get joint custody and so I felt a lot of control was all lost there.”

“The decisions are all made and I am not consulted. And there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“I still have a problem with being real open with my ex-wife. . . . We can’t talk about things. . . . She sends me a bill and I’m expected to pay . . . I guess I might have tried a little harder [in the beginning] but boy I’m afraid of the . . . [outcome], just so tired of conflict. I just avoid it. It’s easier to pay the bill.”

In stepfamily interactions, there was a cycle of triggered parts which interacted and polarized within the male partner. He described events where the Passive Pessimist, having blocked action through its “what’s the use” attitude, triggered a judgmental Manager Part who would chastise the Passive Pessimist for letting his ex-wife and daughter take advantage of him. Also in the internal interaction, an Exile Part, who felt the guilt for the divorce and estrangement from his daughter, intermingled its feelings into the internal system. The cycle continued when a Firefighter, a Rage Part, would be called up to distract the system from the painful, guilty feelings of the Exile Part. The judgmental Manager Part perpetuated the internal turmoil through criticizing the behaviors of the Rage Part. Existence of the cycle of parts in the male’s IFS Map was deduced from the following series of statements:

“She [daughter] shows up here and just tells me what’s decided. . . . So what do I do? I feel like I don’t count for anything, like my opinion doesn’t matter. It really gets me hot.”

“Dad had a terrible temper and I’ve got a temper. I had made up my mind that I wasn’t going to demonstrate that temper and wasn’t necessarily always successful at it . . . along with the anger is this tremendous energy. . . . I can be very destructive . . . but mostly I get angry with myself . . . for not being better . . . I guess not doing a better job.”

“I make a lot of mistakes but I don’t make a lot of the same mistakes twice. I made a lot of mistakes in my first marriage and I’m probably making them again. . . . I beat up on myself I guess. I’m selfish and I’m a pretty selfish person. . . and I guess that’s what makes me angry. If you know you’ve been greedy or you know you’ve been selfish or you know you’ve been impatient. . . I know I’m doing it and I just can’t accept myself that way.”

“Well, I can see that I’ve become somewhat defensive, and I don’t know if I’m defensive or not, but I feel that when I talk about this stuff I get hot.”

“I married for life, and this divorce was awful. I mean it was for the best and my new life with [partner] is wonderful, but I feel I’ve really made a mess of things. . . . I love my new marriage but I hate the way things turned out, I feel so guilty about it sometimes.”

Yet, within this emotionally laden cycle there was an awareness of Self that could be cultivated to provide a calming influence and positive direction for resolution of conflict, as demonstrated in this passage:

“I can be fair fighting until somebody starts being unfair with me and then I don’t have. . . . I wish I had the character to be able to continue to be fair when somebody else is being unfair. . . . That a quality and I’m working on it. . . . You know I think I’ve come a long way, too.”

In summary, the IFS Map of the female partner of Couple Five contained two active Manager Parts--a Perfectionist and an Avoider, who worked together to protect her internal system and to shield her partner from what they perceived to be potentially hurtful behaviors of the stepdaughter. Access to Self in this internal system was limited to metaperspective, rather than being allowed an active presence in stepfamily interactions. The male partner’s IFS Map in stepfamily interactions was complex, with cycles of behavior patterns that had yet to be resolved, which impacted stepfamily interactions through creating triangulation with his daughter and polarizing the protecting parts in his wife. His dominant Manager Part was a Passive Pessimist who saw no ability to change things that were not positive in his life. The Passive Pessimist would trigger another Manager Part with judgmental behaviors in a cycle of actions and polarizations that included other parts: an Exile Part--a Guilty Part--who felt tremendous guilt over the divorce, and a Rage Part who would distract the system from the negative, painful guilt feelings of the Exile Part. Although not forthcoming immediately, awareness of Self as a potential calming influence in the internal system was apparent.

### **Couple Six**

Couple Six, in Stage I of stepfamily development, was the only stepfamily in the study that had children from both their previous marriages living full-time in the home. The one child visited his non-custodial parent on alternate weekends, while the other children went with their biological father 1 week night per week. One child had no contact with his biological father. The custodial arrangement caused tremendous adjustment problems among stepfamily members, and the couple struggled to maintain harmony. The adjustment process had only begun, as this couple was married only 2 1/2 months at the time of the interviews. Subscales which indicated troublesome areas in the adjustment as a

stepfamily included Divided Loyalties, Psychological Inclusion of the Stepparent into the Family, Children Inhibiting the Stepparent from Exercising Leadership in the Family, Displacement of the Elder Child by the Stepparent, Ambiguity of the Stepparent's Role, and Discipline of the Stepchildren. Relational subscales with elevated scores were Mutual Suitability of the Step Relationship, the Quality of the Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent, and Nurturance in the Step Relationship.

*Female partner's IFS map.* In the IFS Map of the female partner, there was evidence of several Exile Parts created in response to childhood and adulthood trauma, which were triggered by stepfamily interactions. The female's internal system was protected by a Manager Part, the Silent Protector, who acted to keep the system in balance. She was well aware of how the Silent Protector behaved in stepfamily relationships, as described here:

"The more he demands that I talk to him, the more I clam up. I can't. It's not that I don't want to because I would love to be able to share with him, that that could ease his tension or whatever he's feeling, but I can't. My mouth will not work. My mind goes completely blank . . . or else it's wondering off in left field somewhere wondering about the cookies I want to make the next day or whatever."

"[Partner] cornered me in the basement the other day and I panicked. . . . I said, 'Get out of my way! I need to get out of here.' . . . There was no way to get by him to get up the stairs . . . and so he instantly got upset and he ended up leaving. And then my fear of abandonment [part] kicked in and I was like, 'NO! Don't leave!' It was not fun."

"I want to talk to him about what happened but I can't. He needs me to talk to him . . . because he needs to talk things out and I need time to cool off and think about things so I can [talk]."

The following passage provided insight into the family of origin circumstances in which the Exile Parts and the Silent Protector were developed:

"I have a very hard time communicating especially sharing my feelings. . . . Growing up my mother was an emotional eliminator. If you offended her, hurt her feelings in any way you were just eliminated emotionally until she got over it which could be hours or days. My dad is someone who, if you put too much pressure on him, especially emotionally, he deserts you. Just escapes . . . so like [a part of me] has a hard time, especially if I'm angry or if I think that I'm going to hurt someone's feelings, I just become unable to speak."



“It’s like pretending, but I don’t always pretend that I’m not angry though. . . . He knows usually when I’m angry but I can’t tell him why I’m angry which is really stupid, because it upsets him and he feels like I’m pushing him away which basically I am. . . . And it would be much easier, it would hurt less probably, if I could just tell him, this is why I’m angry.”

These parts impacted how the stepfamily came together and created situations of tension and resentment in step-relationships, further dividing them into mini-families, as this passage illustrated:

“Because I’d been alone for so long and when he came into my life, I just, I kind of gently pushed him into the role of disciplinarian. . . . And then after I had done it and realized, ‘Whoa! Wait! I made a mistake’ . . . (pause) By then the damage had been done. My children resented him because he had disciplined them too soon.”

The stepfather role was a trigger for an Exile Part who held guilt from former abusive relationships that had not been resolved, as she described here:

“After I got engaged I got real scared and was having major doubts about whether or not I want to go through with this because I had already been through the stepparent thing and the reason I left was because he was abusive and neglectful of [the children]. I just was not sure I could trust anybody else to be a stepparent to my child again.”

Yet, this female participant had awareness of the positive characteristics of Self, of its calming and enhancing qualities, of its metaperspective, and of insight into how difficult it was to maintain Self in the face of remarriage and stepfamily interactions. She described those thoughts in this way:

“You know, this part that is looking at all these other parts. . . . You know, (pause) how I feel like . . . calm and can look at things differently . . . and can even talk about them, that is the part that I like best.”

“I think the reason that it concerns me [is] when I realize how differently I’m acting . . . because I’m afraid that I don’t really know who I am . . . because I change so much.”

“You know, [after] we were fighting the other day, I told [partner] when he had me trapped, I said to him afterwards--when we were calmer and I was able to talk to him a little bit--I said I felt like I was a little girl and locked in a room by herself, sitting in the corner with her knees pulled up to her chest with her arms around her knees. . . . And I think he got a better idea of what was happening between us . . . like it was me not him.”

“I think the biggest challenge has been getting [at] this side of me . . . [Self] being able to come to the forefront and stay there. Because she’s not here very often.”

“ We went for a long walk and it helped. Because this side of me was there. And this side of me . . . is much perkier . . . so it was just wonderful.”

*Male partner's IFS map.* The male partner in Couple Six had a dominant Manager Part, the Talker, who was active and motivated, and readily expressed his thoughts and feelings. The Talker assumed that other people had access to their thoughts and emotions the same way he did, and that they processed information in a similar manner as well. Consequently, when that did not happen and there were misunderstandings, the Talker became extreme in his demands for discussion. The extreme behavior of the Talker appeared to be in response to an Exile Part who is easily triggered by feeling invisible around others. The Talker and its role were described in these passages:

“One of my liabilities is I don't have defense mechanisms. When I feel really good about something, I feel really good and elated about it. And when bad stuff happens to me, I get like, 'Oh Man! What am I gonna do?' And I talk a lot. But a lot of people have these walls that they sort of throw up, including [my wife], And it's almost like armor and it deflects a lot of that negative stuff . . .and those arrows all just pierce me right in the heart.”

“I just need to talk things out . . . . That's kind of like how I am. . .thinking out loud . . . and I need others to talk. . . . How do I know what's going on with them if they don't talk? I get so frustrated with people when they just clam up . . . I mean let's talk this thing out.”

He also described another Manager Part, the Controller, that focused on the accomplishment and completion of tasks, as illustrated here:

“I'm different than [partner] in that I have to have . . . (pause) I like things done. Let's make a decision. Let's do something. Let's get it over with.”

“See, that's the problem that I have with my ex-wife. . . . I can never have anything done. It's never done! Just finish this up and just get on with our life. It just goes on and on and on.”

Further, there was turmoil in the IFS Map of the male partner which was triggered by the stepfamily system. Perhaps related to his visual impairment (the male partner was legally blind), an Exile Part feared that he would become invisible, thus

triggering the Talker. But as the Talker felt ignored, the feelings of the Exile flooded the internal system, as this passage demonstrated:

“I call it being the nowhere man . . . like no one listens to me. It’s like you’re responsible. Make things happen. Pay these bills. Go to work. But we’re not going to listen to you. . . . It feels real lonely and it feels frustrating. It’s like I’m not connecting when no ones paying attention to me. . . . [They] just ignore me and I feel real lonely and kind of sad.”

Evidence of this sadness and these lonely feelings triggering the Talker were found elsewhere in the data. The Talker would create contact with others to rebalance the internal system, as seen in these statements:

“Sometimes, when she won’t talk, it’s like I feel like I’m being punished, and I hate it. . .so I just go after her. . .try and make her talk, like get her mad so she will talk so I don’t feel so much like the nowhere man, like I’m not here or something.”

The Controller attempted to keep hurtful situations, appearing similar to former relationships, from affecting the balance of the internal system, as shown in this statement:

“When I was married before, I always gave in all the time. I never got what I wanted. I would do anything to make my wife happy. So [this time] I say to her, ‘This is my expectation and this is yours. How do we get to the middle? I can see that I need to give in some, but I need to get something, too.’ And [partner] says, ‘Well I’m sort of an all or nothing type of girl and I really don’t know how to compromise.’ . . .So what do I do with that? . . .That’s where we run into trouble, and we’re working on that.”

A Firefighter Part appeared to use rage to distract the internal system from the feelings of the Exile Part. The Controller and the Talker, having lost control with too many activating events from the stepchildren, would trigger the Rage Part. The polarization of these parts was detailed in the following statements:

“What really makes me angry is when I ask the kids to do something--I realize that they’re not going to listen to me and I can live with that--but what makes me angry is when they don’t listen to their mom and they don’t respect their mom. Then I go off.”

“The angry part’s there when I see them do things and I mentally just put up with a lot of things that are not acceptable to me because I’m trying to be flexible. . . . But then the angry part . . . (pause) when it sometimes. . . it’s just triggered like a red button. It’s like, you push that button, it’s like (yells) ‘Argh, stop it NOW!’ and when they don’t, I get real [angry] . . . and I can get physical.”

“Her kids have this habit of saying, ‘I hate you mom.’ That’s a real button for me. It makes me see red.”

However, there was a functional side to the Controller presenting a more sensitive side that was working to change stepfamily interactions as seen here:

“We talk about it in our family home evening . . . we’ve sat down and talked to each of them individually . . . talked and listened . . . and I think it helps.”

But then the impatient more extreme Controller would take over and push for immediate results, as this passage demonstrated:

“I know it takes time, but what do you? I don’t understand though what you do in the meantime. Live with the behavior that you know is wrong? And your kids are doing things that are wrong so you just live with that?”

In summary, the IFS Map of the female partner of Couple Six contained a dominant Manager, the Silent Protector, who kept the other parts of her from creating turmoil, and protected the internal system from the wounded Exile Parts, re-experiencing childhood and adulthood traumas in the present. Her IFS Map also displayed an awareness of the healing power of the Self, and its ability to create harmony in the stepfamily system when allowed to be present. The male partner’s IFS Map showed two very active Manager Parts: the Talker and the Controller. Both worked to manage the internal and external systems. He displayed difficulty in controlling the feelings of Exile Parts and discussed the behaviors of a Rage Part that would be instigated in stepfamily interactions. His awareness of Self was not apparent in the interview, but he displayed functional behaviors of the Controller and the Talker, which helped in resolving stepfamily conflict.

### **Couple Seven**

In Stage III of stepfamily adjustment, Couple Seven had an easy relationship with each other and with their children. Both brought children to the remarriage, and at another time, both had children living in the home. At the time of the interviews, only the female’s children were living with the couple. Their children were older adolescents and the stepfamily had developed a process of Self leadership as a family community that facilitated conflict resolution. Their sense of community was shared in the following:

“I think we have a close community. We communicate . . . just open.”

“We share our thoughts and feelings about things. . . . I think it evolved that way. I don’t think it’s always been that way.”

Because of the openness and acceptance within the stepfamily community, there were not the triggering events of personality parts from stepfamily interactions that had been visible in stepfamilies in either Stage I or Stage II of adjustment. Only two subscales indicated higher levels of maladjustment: Social Support and Biological Parent’s Support of the Stepparent.

*Female partner’s IFS map.* The female partner had a deep understanding of herself and her husband and showed respect for the different personality parts which dominated each of them. She described her dominant Manager Parts, the Controller and the Perfectionist --both with functional roles in her internal system--and recognized changes in her husband’s parts that positively enhanced their mutual community, as the following passages showed:

“For the most part, I’m a doer. I like to be involved and I like things to get done. I like them to be done right. It’s a little bit of a perfectionist in there. [We] both have a little bit of that perfectionist in us.”

“At first [partner] was very quiet, he didn’t communicate as much . . . but I think his self-esteem has really grown and he’ll be the first one to tell me if he doesn’t like something or wants to talk about something. . . . I think it’s really built from what we have all of us together.”

“I’m not afraid to take a risk where [partner] is more cautious. . . . He tends to be a little more conservative than I am. . . . He will think about a decision a lot more. . . . He’s going to figure it all out first before he does it. . . . I’m more of a quick decision maker, more spontaneous which can be a problem, too. . . . So that’s where our conflict is . . . I don’t want to put anything off. I’m not so much a procrastinator as he is. . . . I guess I look at it as procrastination, though you know, he may be figuring this all out inside. He’s just got a different approach.”

Even as she was describing their conflict, her Self became involved and created a more workable, perhaps compassionate understanding of how her partner views the world.

Through Self leadership she recognized the expectations the Controller and the Perfectionist placed on their children, and was able to put them in a proper perspective, as seen in this passage:

“We probably set higher expectations for our kids sometimes than what we should. We try to encourage them and get them to get on the right track and get their lives in order . . . but they’ll do that on their own time. . . . We are very accepting.”

She was also able to recognize how to create the environment for Self leadership which enhanced couple unity and stepfamily interactions, as demonstrated below:

“I think when [partner] and I have more time together we can set things aside, like all the things that I think need to be done, and things are smoother. We run things together better.”

“I stay on top of things and I try to remind him of things, but I know I can’t make him do something and I do respect his decision. . . . And you know sometimes I forget how to relax. . . . I think I should be doing something all the time. . . . I don’t want to be lazy. But then, step back and smell the roses. too.”

*Male partner’s IFS map.* The male partner described his dominant Manager Part as a nonconfrontational Avoider, yet at times there was another Manager Part, the Perfectionist, who needed order and precision, as exhibited by these statements:

“I’m laid back. Don’t want to argue. . . don’t want to get in any conflicts. . . . I still have a hard time telling her kids [they] shouldn’t do something.”

“It [my work] is very interesting, intricate, perfect for me. I really need things to be right and I really like my job because of the exact way it has to be done . . . It makes it easy to go to work.”

Self was evident in his IFS Map as well, as he described the value of couple unity and Self leadership in stepfamily adjustment, in this passage:

“I think the hardest thing for me to adjust to was not being alone. You know, with all the little problems kids have and things they go through as teenagers. . . . I guess . . . our relationship is . . . (pause) seemed to come pretty easy. I felt comfortable with her. . . . I felt secure so I could adapt to the kids.”

In summary, a Controller and a Perfectionist (both functional Manager Parts) dominated the IFS Map of the female partner. However, she was well aware of these parts, their strengths and their weaknesses, and was able to call upon Self leadership to

better use the skills and talents of these parts in the stepfamily community. The male partner's IFS Map contained an Avoider, who managed the internal system through avoiding conflict, and a Perfectionist who appreciated things being done according to a standard. Self leadership and acknowledgment of the value of couple unity were strong in both partners and contributed greatly to their advanced stage of adjustment as a stepfamily.

### **Couple Eight**

Throughout the interview, Couple Eight presented themselves as a stepfamily in turmoil and transition. They were identified as in Stage II of stepfamily development according to their SAS scores, but characteristics of Stage I were still very evident in the interview data. There was a clear disparity between the satisfaction of the members of the couple. The female was very unhappy. She wrestled with the loss of her fantasies about how the stepfamily should be, and she was beginning to come to terms with the reality of what her stepfamily life was. The male partner, in contrast, was reasonably content with how things were, with the exception of how his wife was reacting to them. Their different views were evident in these statements:

**Female:** "The marriage is great. If I had just married [him] things would be heaven but it's been a nightmare."

**Male:** "I have no complaints about how things have gone for the most part, but I know that this situation, particularly with my parents, is hard for [her]."

SAS subscale scores revealed Satisfaction with the Stepfamily, Issues Related to the Children's Movement Between Households, Divided Loyalties, Money, Family Cohesion, Happiness with the Family, and Self-efficacy with Respect to the Attainment of Family - Related Needs as dominant activating events. Relational problems also surfaced in the subscales apparent in Satisfaction with the Stepfamily, the Quality of the Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent, and the Quality of the Child-Biological Parent Relationship.

*Female partner's IFS map.* The female partner described her dominant Manager Part as the Controller, one who needs organization and structure, and demands to know the rules. The Controller was visible in the following statements:

“Structure, yes absolutely. It’s more than just a part, it’s like the core of who I am . . . I say it’s a control thing. . . . But I always look at it more as a structure . . . what are we doing? What is the plan?”

“[Partner’s] parts as you call them, don’t want to plan, they don’t want to think about problems that might occur until they do and I can’t stand it. I need to know how things are gonna be.’

“The structure is who I am and it brings me security and that’s one thing that he is just now beginning to get.”

“Sometimes it’s just so different from what is normal for me. . . . He had a routine but yet it wasn’t a routine if that makes sense. He had a loose plan of what would work for him and his parents and suddenly I’m there going, ‘What are we doing? What are we supposed to be doing . . . what are the rules?’”

She described how the Controller protected an Exile Part who was afraid that she would be punished in some way if she did not follow the rules correctly, shown in these passages:

“Knowing the rules is really big for me because of childhood issues . . . I mean what are the boundaries, what are the limits, what’s the punishment here, if something goes wrong and who’s supposed to be doing the punishing . . . and who’s going to help me if I get hurt?”

“We’ve talked about it, and he goes, ‘I can’t take sides in this. I love you, I love my parents. You guys have got to figure this out yourselves.’ and I felt betrayed, like who is gonna protect me here?”

It appears that this Exile Part was protected by the structure and rule setting of the Controller, but at times the stepfamily interactions would exceed the abilities of the Controller. At that point, the internal turmoil would trigger a distracter, a Firefighter Part, who used rage to rebalance the internal system. She described this phenomenon and also the more adaptive behaviors of the Controller, in the following excerpt:

“When it gets too much, I have temper tantrums which are not productive.”

“The last thing I have found to cope with it . . . for right now . . . is just not to go there [in-laws]. I don’t like how I feel there . . . the feelings I get there. So he goes without me.”



Stepfamily adjustment was further impeded by Exile Parts triggered in the female's IFS Map, through her partner's family of origin interactions. Attempts of the Controller to manage the conflict were evident as well, demonstrated in these statements:

"When we are with his parents at their house--which was all the time, every weekend, all weekend--he checked out. Like he is a teenager and is tuned out to everything his parents say and do. . . . All we get at his parents is the teenager . . . numbing out . . . and I'm like, 'Hello, where is my husband? Where is the person I married? I feel like lost.'"

"I mean, for me, because what I see is, we go back over there and he acts like one of the kids. He doesn't have to take responsibility for really anything. I get really fed up . . . so I like push him . . . like, 'Be the Dad here! You're the Dad, be the Dad!'"

"I can tell, too, when we are there. I look in his eyes and I can tell he is gone and it's usually when the kids are around that he's zoned out. And I'm like, 'Where are you? Don't leave me here.'"

Although Self leadership was only glimpsed briefly with this female participant, she was able to apply the more positive skills of her Controller. That part arranged structure which enabled space for stepfamily members to adjust to each other, as seen here:

"I proposed to [partner] that he and the kids go there without me. . . . We have one day when we do family things and the kids are here and then one day the kids are alone with grandma and grandpa. So far it is working."

"Like I'm observing myself, objectively, like I am observing [partner] and the kids. . . . Like I want to know how to make it better. . . . What can I do to help?"

*Male partner's IFS map.* The male partner described his dominant Manager Part as an Avoider, easy-going and conflict avoidant. He had awareness of the Avoider's behavior patterns and also how they triggered parts in his partner, as he described in these statements:

"I kind of take things as they come, where [partner] likes to be like one step ahead. This is where we come into conflict."

"She likes to know what we are doing next and how and where and all that stuff, where I just, well it's not that I don't care, it's that I just don't think about it until it's necessary to know, I guess."

"Before we were married, we saw each other less, well I had the kids and work and so we were . . . well, we would see each other . . . sometimes. All of a sudden, I'm with her 100%--listening to her all the time. Sometimes it goes

right over my head and out. . . . And she gets upset that she isn't getting my attention . . . like a little jealous . . . like a little girl would get jealous of other kids. . . . I just sort of ignore it."

This stepfamily had extreme external stressors (the male partner's family of origin interference and ex-spouse problems) which impeded the ability of the children and parents to form their own stepfamily. These stressors triggered the Avoider in the male's IFS Map as these statements demonstrate:

"I hate communicating with their mom. . . . I just avoid it as much as I can. . . . I avoid her as much as I can."

**Male:** "My parents have been a big part of their [children's] lives since the beginning . . . I can't just tell them to get lost now that we are married. . . . [Partner] doesn't get along with them and I really just get caught between them all."

**Researcher:** "Is there a part of you that deals with all of this?"

**Male:** Well, I guess I just don't [deal with it] or haven't. It's hard sometimes really hard . . . so I just take the low road and let them work it out. But that doesn't fly with [partner] either."

"I know when I get to my parent's [house] I just tune out. . . . Well my mom takes care of the kids--she always has--and with [partner] there it is so tense. . . . Before I realize it, I'm gone."

The male partner had access to Self, and provided Self leadership which assisted in the adjustment process. He described the shift from Self to parts, although not yet a conscious process, and how it impacted his ability to provide leadership to the stepfamily. He also described functional Firefighter Part behaviors, distracting the system in positive ways, in the following statements:

"Sometimes, like now, I can sit back and look and see what needs to happen, but when I'm in the thick of it, like with my ex-wife over the children, it's like I become this other guy that I don't even like."

"In order to get back to sanity, I have to distract myself, do something else, like take a walk or take a shower, like to wash it [angry part] away. . . . Then I can work it out better. . . . It's like between the kids when they are in a disagreement . . . like I listen to both of them and then help them resolve it. I guess that's what I do inside myself . . . like talk myself down."

"I was like that [in Self] with her when she was so angry with my parents, and I was able just to listen, and reflect back to her what she was sharing and leave her to figure things out for herself."

“And you know, things go so much more smoothly when I can be that way but it’s like I get sucked into her emotions and then I like get upset too and the mood shifts and I become like a different person, like angry or frustrated or sometimes I just check out.”

In summary, a Controller was very present in the IFS Map of the female partner, attempting to manage the feelings and distress of Exile Parts triggered in stepfamily interactions. Although there were self-like behaviors, the Controller appeared to keep the Self from any involvement in her internal system, particularly where the stepchildren and in-laws were concerned. The Controller was able to provide adaptive behaviors for the system to begin the process of adjusting to each other. In the male partner’s IFS Map, there was Self leadership, a functional Firefighter Part, and insight into how his Avoider interacted in stepfamily situations. The Avoider was active in ignoring conflict and managing the internal difficulties created by the ex-spouse, the family of origin issues, and conflicts between his children and his wife.

### **Couple Nine**

Stage II of stepfamily adjustment was assigned to this couple from the descriptions in their interviews, noting that they were on the verge of working through difficult issues and forming a positive community relationship. Their SAS scores indicated them to be a Stage II stepfamily as well. However, there were extreme Manager Parts evident in both the female and male IFS Maps, and these parts tended to impede stepfamily adjustment. Subscale results showed difficulties in adjustment from the Biological Parent’s Alliance with her Children, Ambiguity of the Stepparent’s Role, and the Biological Parent’s Support of the Stepparent. Decision-making Power in the Marriage also proved to be an activating event. Both members of the couple were aware of their attempts to cover up the difficulties of the stepfamily, an added dimension of stress on the system, as they described here:

**Male:** You know we [family of origin] were a “front pew” family and that’s a lot like what we [stepfamily] have now, although I think we are a lot more aware of it now which is half the battle.

**Female:** That's really true. . . . I hadn't really thought about it but you're right. . . . We pretend a lot of things aren't there.

*Female partner's IFS map.* The female partner vividly described her IFS Map, with Exile Parts, Manager Parts, and Firefighter Parts, some parts mirroring family of origin patterns. They were triggered in a cycle by the stepfamily's interactions. She characterized these interactions with a Manager Part, the Martyr, who suffered to manipulate the others and to get what the part felt the system needed, and the 12-year-old Exile Part it sought to manage. The Firefighter Part, Rage Part, became activated when the Exile appeared to be out of control. These patterns of behavior were evident in these statements:

"I take on this 12 year-old [part] and go off and pout or almost like stomp my feet I'm so angry or I might leave . . . slam the door first so he can't hurt me. . . . Then I find myself being this martyr to get what I want. . . . It's like these two [parts] go together somehow and I can see it happening but I can't do anything to stop it."

"I mean yesterday he handed me his wedding ring. That's how bizarre our disagreements become. I thought he was gonna leave. I'm thinking--like this little part again--'Oh my God, he's abandoning me' . . . and I just break down, like I become this little girl. If it gets that bad, sometimes I just get so angry, like it consumes me and takes me over and I say and do things that are just awful."

"I was just so angry at him and I couldn't hardly look at him and I just had to leave or explode and that wouldn't solve anything."

Another Manager Part, the Rescuer, was activated by the interaction, or the fear of an interaction, between her children and her partner. She attributed the presence of the Rescuer to childhood experiences, with the Rescuer protecting an Exile Part, as described in these statements:

"I plead with them to do their chores but they really just ignore me. . . . I was always making excuses for them . . . you know caretaking. . . . I'm a big caretaker. . . .and I think it's worse [now] than before [the remarriage]. I just think that he would come down on them so hard. . . . I get defensive and I start making excuses for their behavior."

"But it's like creatures of habit, so habitual at reacting, at least I am. I keep being the rescuer, just trying to make sure that everything was dealt with, don't upset dad . . . always looking over my shoulder to make sure that everything stays calm. . . . I am repeating these behaviors of when I was a child now, like

defender or like a mamma bear trying to protect them [children]. . . . Even though I can step back and say [partner's] points are so valid but I just don't take responsibility and you know it really saddens me. There is a part of me that feels real hopeless . . . like I don't know how to make it right. . . . There's an energy in there that feels so hopeless and that's real sad."

Yet, she was able to regroup, despite triggered Exile Parts, and move into being a compassionate witness, providing Self leadership to resolve the conflict created by stepfamily interaction, as seen in this passage:

"I'm so tuned into non-verbal cues that I can tell . . . like last night when he flew into a rage, and I know that the girls and I are triggering it, but I guess in another sense we are helping him to reframe this old stuff. . . . And then it came out about his dad, stuff he had never talked about. . . . I looked at him and gave him good eye contact . . . tried to just be neutral and just really listened to him. I didn't interrupt him (as I usually do) I just let him talk and then it came out. I think he is afraid to tell me things, afraid of what I will do, how I will react, abandon him, a part that doesn't trust. And that's OK. I can just listen."

*Male partner's IFS map.* Exile Parts and Firefighter Parts triggered in interactions with his stepdaughters were examined as part of the IFS Map of the male partner. Throughout the interview, the male partner candidly acknowledged the behaviors and emotions of these many parts, providing a rich, detailed account of his IFS Map in the context of being part of a stepfamily. He had a dominant Manager Part, a Perfectionist, who actively wove its presence throughout the following passages. In addition, there were Exile Parts with feelings of being ignored, and a Rage Part (a Firefighter Part) who would distract the pain of the Exiles. Those parts were evident in the following:

"I try to let the girls have a transition between the two houses but I get pissed off sometimes. . . . I mean they come back and they're not clean and they're tired . . . and I go nuts sometimes."

"I never want to let my emotions get so far out of control that I become this Dr. Jeckyl or whatever. . . . I never want to be in that spot again. They were really upset."

"There are a lot of things brewing . . . one is the TV . . . the other is not helping [around the house] . . . another is being ignored. . . . I get really mad without knowing why, and instead of talking it out this martyr part takes over and after awhile it triggers the angry, Dr. Jeckyl Part."

He was aware of the cycle that the stepchildren's behavior triggered in his internal system.

He mentioned a Perfectionist and a Martyr (both Manager Parts), feelings of an Exile

Part, and a Rage (Firefighter) Part who polarized the system internally and reacted externally, as presented in these passages:

“I have trouble differentiating between the big stuff and the little stuff. . .it’s all the same. . . . It all gets the same reaction. Like this rage . . . it’s like there are two of me, like there are more than two of me . . . this loving, sort of easy-going part, well maybe it’s more like this orderly part, kind of trying-to-create-some-order-in-the-chaos-here part. Then something happens and I become this martyr part doing everything for everybody else and then, bam! I start to resent it and I start to get sarcastic, doing the passive aggressive stuff, and if I get pushed, this rage part flies out.”

A cycle was also initiated by stepfamily behaviors that triggered patronizing behaviors of the Perfectionist. The male partner was able to give a detailed description of what transpired in his parts and those of his partner in the following:

“Sometimes I think one of the biggest obstacles is I treat her like I’m the dad. . .and that’s not what either of us wants but I wind up dictating things . . . it’s like there is this frivolous adolescent crying out to be controlled, and that is the part of her that I love too, though, but I don’t honor it, I dominate it, tell it what to do. And we want to change this interaction. We’ve been talking about changing things but she keeps going back to her way of relating that is more comfortable and more immature. And it’s that same one [the adolescent part] who like wants to be protected by somebody and she knows that I’ll protect her. Sometimes I think we do this dance, this pattern, she acts like a spoiled adolescent, then I get parental, then she rises up and recriminates me, then I get mad then I stomp out. It’s like a cycle and she starts it like to test me. She’s got these issues of abandonment that I trigger that without really trying. It’s as though we put ourselves in these spots to test each other. And it’s not good for the girls.”

The male partner had tremendous insight into the impact of the Perfectionist’s behaviors on the stepfamily. His ability to become the compassionate witness with a metaperspective on his IFS Map was evident in these statements:

“But when this [Perfectionist] part is triggered, my behavior is so irrational that I almost get embarrassed sometimes and I say stuff like, ‘I’m gonna get rid of the car. . .I’m gonna sell the house. . .I’m gonna get rid of all the animals.’ And of course, I lose all credibility. It’s like abusing adult authority, using it as a weapon because they wouldn’t pay attention to me.

**Male:** “Then sometimes I throw it in her face: ‘I will defer to you everything. . . . You can have full financial responsibility for these kids.’ And that’s not fair fighting . . . but part of me just wants to win, needs to always be right. . . . I think it’s that part of me that doesn’t feel valued or approved of. . . .”

**Researcher:** “Tell me more about that part of you that doesn’t feel valued. If it had a name what would it be?”

**Male:** (pause) “I would kind of call that part, ‘His Majesty.’ His Majesty doesn’t do it [unfair fighting] but there is somebody that does it for His

Majesty. . .to protect him . . . like a Jamar in me . . . like in Aladdin. . . . He's the sarcastic part that protects His Majesty. He starts the unfair fights to get attention away from the part of me that doesn't feel validated . . . or adored and listened to like an important king should be listened to and consulted."

"There is some of the baggage that I said I didn't realize [was there]. . . . What a big step it was leaving the priesthood! You know, being kind of one of the most honored and respected male adults in their [children's] lives. You know they would almost melt if they saw me in the grocery store and they were always on their best behavior. In contrast with [stepchildren] it doesn't matter if they even say hello or not. It's like a part of me feels like I'm being rejected . . .like I am the person doing the positive things for this family and nobody acknowledges them, at least not the kids."

In all of this emotional upheaval there was also a calm, compassionate Self who was able to reframe what was happening in the stepfamily. That calm perspective is heard in these passages:

"And you know, they are just kids. I don't think I want anything to change in them. I just want growth and improvement and to encourage them to be themselves."

"You know that spontaneous part of me is really my better part, it is a truer part of who I really am and I feel like it is stuffed way back in there somewhere. . . . I feel like I [structured orderly part] get used and manipulated and taken advantage of to bail her out, when I know on a deeper level that that is who we are and what draws us together . . . that I provide structure to her chaos, and she and the girls bring me joy, sometimes. . . . I also know that I have a lot to learn from her about being more flexible and spontaneous and that's good."

In summary, the IFS Map of the female partner was characterized by a dominant Rescuer, a Manager Part, who would run interference between step-relationships in a feeble attempt to keep the peace in the stepfamily. She also described interactions of the Rescuer in the context of young Exile Parts and her need to save them from being hurt. To manipulate the system, a Martyr Part would emerge to move her environment to a safer plane. Further, a Rage Part (Firefighter Part) would become activated when the Rescuer or the Martyr could no longer manage the Exiles and their sadness. She used Self leadership to understand herself, and to bring a resolution to the conflict in her stepfamily. The male partner's IFS Map was detailed and was explicit in describing the inner workings of the parts of his internal system and how they were impacted by the behaviors of members of his stepfamily. He described and named internal parts, Jamar and His Majesty, and

candidly described how these parts polarize to protect the system from the pain of the Exile Parts. Access to Self, perceiving his own internal system with a metaperspective, and leading with Self in stepfamily interactions were positive enhancements to stepfamily adjustment.

### **Couple Ten**

Couple Ten presented an unusual situation in terms of characteristics of stepfamily adjustment. Qualitatively they showed many of the positive characteristics of Stage III stepfamilies: rituals established, strong couple unity, losses grieved, and individual differences honored. However, there was one major stumbling block to their adjustment: the mental illness in the ex-spouse which impacted both the qualitative rating and their SAS score, and placed them clearly in Stage II of stepfamily adjustment. Contrary to what they had hoped when they won custody of the children, stepfamily life was encumbered by the ex-spouse's erratic behaviors, as these statements revealed:

“For two hours before their mom picks them up, they come honestly unglued . . . like they just don't want to go and leave here but could never bring themselves to tell her or even to speak it out loud.”

“She is truly amazing in the devious sense. . . . There is no comprehending the lengths she has gone or will go in the future. . . . I'm convinced of it.”

They were in constant legal battles impacting the financial stability of the stepfamily. It is to the credit of the internal systems of these individuals that the stepfamily has adjusted as well as they have. These findings were supported by the SAS subscales where activating events were highlighted by elevations on Issues Related to the Children's Movement Between Households, Satisfaction with the Stepfamily, Displacement of the Elder Child by the Stepparent, Ambiguity of the Stepparent Role, Happiness in the Family, and Social Support. Relational issues were limited to difficulties in the Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent.

*Female partner's IFS map.* The female partner described her dominant Manager Part, the Perfectionist, as orderly, structured, and detailed.



“I like organization and I like to know that there has been forethought and that there is structure. That’s where my skill is and where my comfort lies. I can take what we have, time, finances, all in minimal quantities these days, and generally create a working scenario.”

This part was often frustrated by stepfamily life and the strains put on the stepfamily system by the stepchildren, described here:

“There just isn’t [structure] when you’re raising three kids. I mean truly sometimes the most taxing thing I do is getting them out to the car, which who would guess, that if you have a professional job that the bitch of the day would be getting the kids in the car.”

“I can honestly say that this 10-year old can piss me off quicker and more, than anything at work ever possibly could. And there’s a part of me that is realizing how manipulative he is, how he has learned to be from his mother, beyond anything we anticipated or could have ever imagined. . . . He is very good at pushing buttons, and I think that a lot of his anger is directed at me. . . . I don’t know that it’s directed at me, I think that it’s funneled through me, that I receive it, so I think that he can push my buttons more rapidly than anyone I’ve probably ever met. So I think that I’m really learning, too, like how to deflect and stay centered, but then some days I am only just a human.”

In this stepfamily process, she had Exile Parts triggered and the Perfectionist would take on a pattern of behaviors to protect them. The Exile Parts appeared to be triggered by the interaction with one stepson in particular, as she described here:

“Now we are beginning to see that this may be the beginning of his mother’s mental illness, and yeah he is acting out now, but that it’s going to be difficult as long as he lives in our house. But into his adult life, he will have a difficult time making good decisions. He can be absolutely surly, just nasty and has no problems getting in my face. And not when his dad is here, or at least in the room. But when this happens, I get this real hopeless feeling, like rolling the rock up the hill just to see it roll back down to start the process all over again.”

Although the Perfectionist provided structure, which was sorely needed by the stepchildren, alternatively, if that part could have relaxed and stepped back somewhat it may have lessened the stress on the stepfamily system. However, that part had a strong hold on the female partner’s internal system, constantly triggered by the lack of consistency and disrespectful behavior by the stepson, as demonstrated in this passage:

“When I’ve absolutely had enough, more than enough, then I go bitch at [partner] about it and try to get rid of the toxins that come from internalizing it. . . all the muscle ticks and stress headaches that I think that come from that hopeless part getting caught into, ‘If I could just get this in order but is this really our mess?’ I understand that this isn’t a choice, but I refuse to be treated that way! I try reasoning with him when he isn’t in that mode, basically, ‘You

can't get through life treating people like shit! Especially not people that you're living with, or people fixing you meals.' I try not to take it personally, but how can I not sometimes, and I just feel at the end of the rope every day. And then we wake up and do it again, and for this I spent my vacation money for the next ten years in lawyer's fees?"

"It goes in cycles, like if he's having a bad day, it's everyday for weeks. . . . And that can be just like the den of despair when every day you're driving home thinking, 'Oh my God!' The flip side of that is his manic swings are just as intolerable . . . equally intense and searing so it's almost as hard to be around him on good days as bad."

The humor of the cynical side of the Perfectionist, couple unity, and her ability to move to a place of metaperspective were her coping mechanisms, seen in these statements:

"In some ways I think that it has made us closer as a couple because we've had to work closely as a team and there's other times when you just get so sick of all of this, and ask why can't we be normal and boring?"

"We're low-key people. Scrabble is exciting to us. We don't need all the melodrama and it just isn't who we are by nature so I think that it's probably more stressful because we aren't manic people to begin with."

"Yeah, there probably is a part of me that shuts down the system and doesn't let me feel the disillusion, I mean how much can one person take and still do laundry? I mean, good days, bad days all whiz by and there's not time for reflection or introspection to find out if I am depressed, and still have early bathtime . . . I don't want it to sound like I don't feel but I don't have time for Monday night at the movies and box of Kleenex. My saving grace is commuting. I have 45 minutes every day to process and put things into perspective. Besides truly, there is such a constant emotional rollercoaster at our house that all I have to do is get in a car and ride, I don't have to expend any energy of my own."

*Male partner's IFS map.* The male partner's IFS Map consisted of a dominant Manager Part, a Peacemaker, who is easy-going and low-keyed, as seen from these statements:

"I'm really an easy guy. I guess that is good given what we have to deal with, with the boys and their mother. And maybe that's my gift to the family to kind of roll with whatever comes and go with the flow."

"I really am not good with all the schedules and I tend to forget a lot of stuff, but I'm getting better about it. When there is conflict, if it's uncomfortable, I shift and try to acquiesce to make things turn out right. She got enough stress with the boys so I try to make it as easy on all of us as I can."

He also described a cynical sense of humor, Self leadership, and awareness of his strengths, that helped in coping with the stepfamily problems. He described them in the following:

“We joke around. I mean when he [son] blows up and hurts her feelings and she’s mad and that hurts my feelings and I feel discouraged, what good is it for me to get emotional? So like I make cynical jokes and we both laugh. Like the other night, she was in tears and I looked at her really serious like, and said, ‘He’s gonna get it. Tonight’s the night. Tomorrow when they ask where [son] is, we haven’t seen him.’ Then we both laughed and added to the story, like where we buried him and danced on the dirt and stuff like that. It’s a little bit warped and it’s a little bit sarcastic but it works, gets the anger flowing in appropriate ways. And not in front of them, it’s just a private thing between [partner] and I.”

“I think sometimes, I’m seen as difficult, like hard to get along with or whatever. It’s like, when I’m not doing anything at all or maybe, not doing things that are on the list or the priority--you know those things that we had maybe talked about and agreed that I would do, but then I didn’t do--and that sets up conflict. Because instead of saying, ‘I’m not gonna do this’ or ‘I changed my mind,’ I just get distracted and then things get tense. But I think that, although my inconsistency can be a source of irritation, it is also my strength, that I can be flexible and not get all caught up in the small stuff. That makes us a good balance. [Partner] is pretty much big into small stuff and I just go with the flow.”

In summary, there was a Perfectionist (a Manager Part) who dominated the IFS Map of the female partner in both functional and extreme ways. There were varied behaviors of this part that aided in coping with the volatile extremes of the stepchildren. Exile Parts were also described as part of her IFS Map, which saw the current situation as hopeless to manage. The male partner, in contrast, had a Peacemaker (Manager Part) who engaged in behaviors that sometimes triggered the Perfectionist in his wife’s IFS Map, but who also was flexible and resourceful in dealing with the difficulties in their stepfamily’s interactions. Self leadership through humor and compassion was a key element in both IFS Maps of the couple and encouraged stepfamily adjustment.

### **Summary of IFS Maps and Access to Self**

The IFS map’s of each individual and their access Self in the context of stepfamily interactions was summarized in Table 7. Each couple’s SAS Composite Score was placed on the top of the table for reference, and the IFS parts described in the above passages are

entered into the table as either in functional roles or in extreme roles. Again, ascertaining the difference between functional and extreme roles of parts and the ability to distinguish between the two is part of the training process of becoming proficient in the IFS Model. It is from this training that I was able to listen to the interviews initially, then to read them, to listen to them again, and ultimately to make this determination. The assessment therefore entered into the table as either in functional roles or in extreme roles. Again, ascertaining was not made in a vacuum, however, there are limitations to these evaluation, and to the Self Score, in that they were not subjected to an outside evaluation.

By definition, functional personality parts were those that use their talents and abilities to enhance the progress of the internal and external systems (Schwartz, 1995). Conversely, IFS parts in extreme roles inhibit the internal and external systems by not allowing other parts, (or members) or the Self, to share in the daily functioning of the system. It was apparent from the interview data, as shown in Table 7, that participants from stepfamilies in early stages of development experienced personality parts in extreme roles, and an awareness of Self was generally not present. Whereas, those remarried couples whose stepfamily was in Stage III of adjustment showed the ability to evoke Self leadership, and displayed generally functional personality parts in their stepfamily interactions. It was noted that those stepfamilies with lower SAS scores in Stage II of adjustment, also had higher Self Scale scores.

### **Review of Research Questions**

In chapter 1, several research questions were posed to provide framework and direction to the study. Those research questions were detailed as follows:

1. What was the nature of the individual participant's internal family system? That is, what was their internal map of personality parts, in the context of the stepfamily? How were their individual personality parts impacting the adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole?

**Table 7**

**Individual IFS Map Compared to SAS Composite Score of Stepfamily Adjustment**

Couple	Six		Ten		Eight		One		Three		Two		Nine		Five		Four		Seven	
SAS Score	306		240		222		219		158		157		145		130		115		114	
IFS Map <sup>a</sup>	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
<b>Manager Parts</b>																				
Extreme	X	XX	X	X	XX	X	X	XX	X	X	X	X	XX	XX	X	XX				
Functional	X	XX	X	X			X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	XX	XX	XX	X
<b>Exile Parts</b>																				
Extreme	XX	X			X	X	XX	X			X	X	X	X		X				
Functional			X	X			X	X	X	X										
<b>Firefighters</b>																				
Extreme	X	X	X		X								X	X		X				
Functional			X						X											
Self Rating <sup>b</sup>	3	1	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	1	2	3	3	2	2	4	2	4	4

<sup>a</sup> X=One Manager, Exile, or Firefighter Part identified. XX=Two different Manager, Exile, or Firefighter Parts identified. Female and male partner.

<sup>b</sup> Self Scale ranges from 1-4: 1=Self not evident; 2=Self apparent but not expressed; 3=Self apparent and expressed; 4=Able to evoke Self leadership.

2. Did the individual have access to Self? That is, did they have the capacity to be compassionate witness to their own and other's interactions, in the context of stepfamily development?
3. What were the interactional patterns--polarizations, coalitions, triangles, positive feedback loops--within the internal family systems which were mirrored in stepfamily interactions? How did these patterns contribute to, or deter from, the development of the stepfamily?
4. What external stressors common to stepfamilies in different stages of development acted as triggering events for internal personality parts of the remarried couple? What impact did these external events have on the overall adjustment of the stepfamily?

The above section described the IFS Map of each individual in stepfamily interaction and provided participants' statements and reflections regarding how their unique personality parts impacted stepfamily adjustment. Each member of the remarried couple was assessed as to their ability to access Self and to provide Self leadership to the system. In response to the second research question, the Self Scale was developed as a means of more clearly defining the participants' access to Self in stepfamily adjustment.

Important findings, after globally assessing the interviews and SAS Composite and subscale scores, suggest the following:

1. The stepfamilies in this study could be classified qualitatively into stages of adjustment as a stepfamily by statements identifying developmental tasks.
2. The SAS was a useful instrument in identifying stages of stepfamily adjustment.
3. Stepfamily adjustment appears to be directly related to the ability to evoke Self leadership in stepfamily interactions.
4. External stressors common to stepfamilies are triggers for personality parts to move to extreme roles in early stages of development where Self leadership is not present.
5. The extent to which Manager Parts behave in extreme roles negatively impacts stepfamily adjustment.

6. Exile Parts present in the internal systems and interactions of the remarried couples create a cycle of polarizations internally and externally.
7. Participants identified personality parts present in extreme roles in stepfamily interactions which were not experienced before.
8. Firefighter Parts behaving in extreme ways are equally as devastating to the external system as they are to the internal system of the individual.
9. Stepfamilies that struggle in their adjustment process appear to be headed by a remarried couple that is struggling with chaos in their individual internal family system.
10. The IFS Model appears to lack an explicit description or explanation of personality parts in functional roles, particularly Firefighter Parts and Exile Parts.

### **Summary**

In chapter 4 I reviewed the demographic make-up of the participants, discussed the sample and how it was secured, and described the unique characteristics of each of the remarried couples in the study. The findings of the study were examined, comparing the qualitative and quantitative classification of the stepfamilies into stages of stepfamily adjustment. The IFS Maps of each remarried couple were identified, examining how these personality parts impacted stepfamily adjustment, whether they were triggered by stepfamily interaction or common external stressors, and whether the presence of Self impacted upon stepfamily adjustment. Important findings of the study, summarized in Table 7, were presented followed by a review of the research questions discussed in chapter 1.

In this chapter, I have discussed important findings of the study. Those findings included the ability to classify stepfamilies into stages of stepfamily adjustment, both qualitatively and quantitatively, as shown in Tables 4 and 5. Also, the interview data showed that stepfamily adjustment was on a continuum, with no clear beginning or ending point. From the interviews, I was able to determine that stepfamily adjustment was more of a dance, moving with the rhythm of daily life, rather than an event. I found that there

was a reciprocal interaction between the internal family system and the external stepfamily system: stepfamily relationships triggered internal parts and vice versa. It was evident from the interview data, and shown graphically in Table 7, that each individual interviewed had a separate IFS Map that existed in the context of the stepfamily. These parts, additionally, that were triggered in the context of stepfamily interaction might not have been present, or at least the individual may not have been aware of them, in other daily circumstances. The interaction of these personality parts, coupled with the added stress of external events and individuals, was seen to both inhibit (in the case of parts in extreme roles, emotions or behaviors) and enhance (as with functional parts) stepfamily relationships. Clearly, the Self--the awareness of Self, the presence of Self, and Self leadership--had the most significant impact on stepfamily adjustment.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Man's main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort is his own personality.  
Erich Fromm

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study of the Internal Family Systems Model Applied to Remarried Couples of Stepfamilies in Different Stages of Adjustment, including a summary of the findings and the conclusions that were drawn from those findings. In addition, this chapter offers recommendations for clinicians dealing with stepfamilies in therapy, suggestions for further study, and conclusions regarding the methodology of the research study, how the qualitative process was essential to obtaining these conclusions.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Stepfamilies are fast becoming the norm in the United States. Because they have been predicted to become the largest single family type in our society by the year 2000 (Glick, 1989), research to determine factors that encourage the resolution of difficulties between stepfamily members is essential. Although stepfamilies are a large segment of the current population, they are frequently compared to first-married families and thus cast in a negative light. The negative social stigma frequently impacts the foundations of an already shaky alliance between the remarried couple, their mutual children, and families of origin. The more that can be done to illuminate the differences and uniqueness that are characteristic to stepfamilies, the less of an effect the negative stigma will have.

It was the stated intent of this study to examine the reports of remarried couples and their ensuing stepfamily arrangements in the context of the Internal Family Systems model. Each individual's internal system was to be looked at within the context of the larger stepfamily system. This type of study of remarried couples or stepfamily life was not found in the literature. The study hoped to respond to research questions which sought to understand the IFS Map of each individual member of the remarried couples, the external stressors which might be triggering events for personality parts, the presence of Self and its impact on the development of the stepfamily, and whether or not there were parallels in the systemic interactional patterns between internal and external family systems.

The IFS Model is the result of the work of Richard Schwartz at the University of Illinois at Chicago during the 1980s. As detailed in chapter 2, he conducted outcome studies in family systems therapy with bulimic clients in which he began to see the patterns of internal personality parts with thoughts and behaviors who then impacted the external systems in similar ways. From this beginning the IFS Model evolved into what is now the identification and exploration of personality parts: Manager Parts--those providing the executive function of the system, managing the pain and emotions of the Exile Parts, and protecting the Self, whom Manager Parts perceive to be vulnerable to external attack; Exile Parts--immature, child-like parts who hold the memories of childhood experiences or traumatic events history; and Firefighter Parts--those parts who take over to distract the system from the chaos of the Exile Parts if the Manager Parts fail to control them (see Table 2). The second important element of the IFS Model is the differentiation of the Self. Different from other models oriented in the multiplicity theory of personality, the Self is not considered to be the union of the whole of the parts. Rather, the Self is a separate entity, the presence of compassion, confidence, curiosity, and capability which is the true leadership of the system. The Self leads from its metaperspective (its ability to see the whole of the system) once allowed to take leadership by the parts.

Stages of Stepfamily Adjustment were derived from the work of several researchers on stepfamily functioning (Keshet, 1987; Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher 1990) in which it was shown that stepfamilies follow a process of development, unique from first marriages, and characteristic unto themselves. The three stages of stepfamily adjustment I defined from this research (see Table 1) and which were applied to the stepfamilies in this study were Stage I Preparation, Stage II Working It Out, and Stage III Living. The characteristics of each stage of development are fully discussed in chapter 2.

The research data for this study were provided by 20 individuals, comprised of 10 remarried couples, each forming a stepfamily. The couples were interviewed individually and then jointly. The interview tapes were transcribed, and the data were analyzed with specific references and conclusions drawn in order to respond to the research questions. Qualitative methodology was chosen for its ability to access the thoughts and emotions of personality parts and the flexibility to probe deeper into areas appearing fruitful to the study. This methodology proved to be exceedingly successful in securing the data necessary to understand the IFS of the individual participants. The qualitative data were analyzed for patterns of interaction in personality parts, triggering events, and the presence of Self in stepfamily interaction.

Research questions posed in chapter 1 and answered in the study were as follows:

1. What was the nature of the individual participant's internal family system? That is, what was their internal map of personality parts, in the context of the stepfamily as a whole?
2. Did the individual have access to Self? That is, did he or she have the capacity to be compassionate witness to his or her own and other's interactions, in the context of stepfamily development?
3. What were the interactional patterns--polarizations, coalitions, triangles, positive feedback loops--within the internal family systems which were mirrored in stepfamily interactions?

4. What external stressors common to stepfamilies in different stages of development acted as triggering events for internal personality parts of the remarried couple? What impact did these external events have on the overall adjustment of the stepfamily?

The responses to these questions were addressed in detail in chapter 4. Each individual's internal map of personality parts in the context of stepfamily interactions was explored, along with his or her ability to access Self. The implications and impact of parts and Self were described and supported by statements from the interview data. Interactional patterns, such as polarizations between personality parts, were found in the IFS Maps and in the external stepfamily interactions. External stressors were highlighted in the responses and displayed as well in chapter 4, supported by subscale scores from the SAS as presented in Table 6. The IFS Maps compared with the stage of stepfamily adjustment were presented in Table 7.

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions were deduced from the interview and quantitative data, and are supported by the statements from the interviews with the remarried couples provided in chapter 4. The conclusions are listed here, and are described and discussed in the next sections.

1. Stepfamily development is identifiable in specific stages defined by developmental tasks but also remains a fluid process.
2. The SAS can be a useful instrument in the determination of stepfamily stage of adjustment, and the subscales contributed to understanding a stepfamily's activating events and relational difficulties.
3. The stage of stepfamily adjustment and the development of a stepfamily into a bonded, caring community of individuals, are directly related to the presence of Self in remarried couple's IFS Map, and their ability to provide Self leadership in stepfamily interactions.
4. External stressors common to stepfamilies are triggers for personality parts in the remarried couples in early stages of development.

5. Ex-spouses and ex-partners far outweigh any other external stressor as a trigger for personality parts in stepfamily life.
6. Manager Parts, extreme in their behaviors, negatively impact stepfamily adjustment.
7. Exile Parts, triggered by stepfamily interactions, create a cycle of internal polarizations, which in turn polarize external family members in similar ways.
8. There were personality parts present in stepfamily interactions, who may have existed before in the IFS of the individual, but were not known to the participants before the stepfamily experience.
9. Internal Family System interactional patterns--polarizations, triangles, coalitions--are mirrored and replicated in the external family system and inhibited stepfamily adjustment.
10. The Internal Family System of each member of the remarried couple directly impact the adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole.
11. Firefighter Parts are equally as devastating to the internal family system as they are to the external stepfamily.
12. Stepfamilies who struggle in their adjustment to each other appear to be headed by a remarried couple who is struggling with chaos in their own internal family systems.
13. Individuals had a dominant Manager Part in their internal systems, who had significant influence on how they viewed the world.
14. It appeared from the study that the IFS model could be expanded to include explicit description of personality parts in functional roles, particularly what Firefighter Parts and Exile Parts become in a balanced internal system.

## **Conclusion 1**

*Stepfamily development is identifiable in specific stages defined by developmental tasks but also remains a fluid process.*

In the process of analyzing the interview data and comparing them to the results and responses on the SAS, it was concluded that stepfamily development does indeed have

discernible stages and specific tasks to those stages. However, those tasks are not necessarily completed in a linear fashion, nor are certain tasks completed before others are commenced. For example, Couple One and Couple Nine were Stage II stepfamilies, yet there were certain tasks, such as mini-family resolution and acceptance of fantasies, which were still being resolved in Stage II. The preponderance of evidence, however, placed them in Stage II of development, which was corroborated by their mean score on the SAS.

On the SAS, certain individuals would respond strongly on items related to Stage I tasks, such as items asking about relationships to biological children or decision-making in the marriage, yet their overall score placed them in Stage III of development. This was evident in the responses of Couple Four.

It appears, then, according to the results from this sample, that stepfamily development is a continual process, ebbing and flowing with the issues and external stressors of each day. As stepfamilies develop through the tasks of each stage, they become more able to cope with their new family form. The issues or tasks, however, remain a part of the process until they are resolved.

## **Conclusion 2**

*The SAS can be a useful instrument in the determination of stepfamily stage of adjustment, and the subscales contributed to understanding a stepfamily's activating events and relational difficulties.*

It was rewarding to find that the determination of the stage of stepfamily development in this study was aided by the SAS score in a significant number of the couples in the study. Nine of the 10 stepfamilies in the study (see Tables 4 and 5) had a score on the SAS which corroborated the qualitatively assigned stage of stepfamily development. It was noted that stepfamilies in this study that had scores above 1 standard deviation above the mean were Stage I stepfamilies, and those below 1 standard deviation below the mean were Stage III stepfamilies. Accordingly, Stage II stepfamilies fell within one standard deviation of the mean. Further, of these Stage II stepfamilies, there was a

range of scores which could be further qualified by the interview data, as those stepfamilies which were accomplishing Stage II tasks and those who were just beginning. From the interview data, those families that were transitioning out of Stage I tasks and beginning Stage II tasks had higher scores, those who were mastering Stage II tasks had lower SAS scores.

As with any survey instrument, it was noted that individuals have the ability to manipulate the data on the SAS by understating the true situation in their stepfamily. In this study, it was found that certain individuals were in denial of problems related to the adjustment of the stepfamily and reflected that denial in their responses. We saw this evidenced in Couple Two, where the SAS score reflected Stage III of development but the issues reported in the interview data and the tasks described by the interviewees clearly placed the stepfamily in Stage I. It was found that, for this study, the SAS scores were reliable and valid indicators for the stage of stepfamily adjustment in 9 of the 10 stepfamilies. Reliance on qualitative data for confirmation and verification of the SAS score was appropriate.

The individual subscales provided important corroborative data as well, indicating those areas which were activating events for IFS parts, and those relational situations which were inhibiting adjustment. It was found by reviewing the data provided in Appendix E for the sample SAS subscale scores, that several things were also true about the subscales. Those couples who actively evoked Self leadership in the stepfamily interactions had fewer elevated scores on the subscales. Reviewing the number of elevated subscales, for example, Couple Eight was a Stage II family, with a Self Scale of 1 and 2 for the female and male partners respectively, and there were 11 subscales with scores above the mean of 2.5. In contrast, Couple Seven, a Stage III stepfamily, with a Self Scale of 4 for each partner, had only 2 subscales that exceeded 2.5.

### **Conclusion 3**

*The stage of Stepfamily Adjustment and the development of a stepfamily into a bonded, caring community of individuals, are directly related to the presence of Self in the remarried couple's IFS Map, and their ability to provide Self leadership in stepfamily interactions.*

In the responses provided by the stepfamilies in the study it was noted that the presence of Self in interpersonal interactions was responsible for creating the environment through which they could come together functionally. Fifteen of the 20 respondents made a specific reference to Self in the sense of a calm quality of being, different from what was usually present in daily life. They attributed this quality to the experience of being able to adjust to each other as a living community. Although the examples and words used to express the experience of being in Self were frequently different, the experience itself was clearly a shared one. Schwartz (1995) defines the experience of Self as the presence of "compassion, perspective, curiosity, acceptance and confidence" (p. 57). Participants were less specific but similar in their definition, often describing just a "knowing," "that space," "inner peace," or "that calm part that is speaking now." Self was also described by four couples as the space where they were able to connect to each other in the most meaningful way. One described it as "the feeling of when you know why you married them, that bonded, 'in love with them' feeling." In the interview data, the remarried couples who achieved the quality of being in Self with each other and their children, showed that they were able to cope more effectively with stepfamily life.

Generally, the individuals were unable to share this feeling spontaneously. However, when probed by the interviewer, without hesitation, the respondents could share an example of when interactions were better, and could pinpoint specifically how they felt different within themselves at that time. It was an experience that three couples expressed as the element missing in day-to-day management of the stepfamily. Four couples acknowledged that the process of evoking Self leadership frequently required time to create: time together interacting intimately, time to get parts to relax and to allow the Self to lead,



time away from work (and Manager Parts), or time out from external stressors to allow Exile and Firefighter Parts to relax extreme behaviors and emotions. Three participants viewed their Self as a resource waiting to be tapped, available anytime they could. As one said, "clear the space for it." Those participants who were able to express their feeling of Self were able to describe in so many words what Schwartz (1995) called getting the parts to step back and to allow the Self to take over leadership of their interactions. Participants described the feeling as "healed," "centered," "in balance," "spiritual and connected to God," "feeling confident." All of these expressions of Self carried a similar sense of capability, clarity, and, above all, leadership, which when extended to the stepfamily system resulted in similar reactions from their children and stepchildren.

It was evident in the data that when the remarried couple could experience Self, and lead from that experience, external interactional patterns dissolved and adjustment was possible. According to Schwartz (1995), leadership in any system, whether it be family, community, nations, companies, or relationships, is critical to the success and stability of that system. "All systems function best when leadership is clearly designated, respected, fair, and capable. Internal families are no different" (p. 58). When an individual can incorporate those leadership qualities internally, the Self leads the internal system by valuing individual parts, honoring their gifts and talents, and celebrating the unique qualities of each individual part of themselves. This leadership is then felt and emulated by the members of the stepfamily community. Four individuals were able to comment on the improved ability to cope with the external stressors of stepfamily life, if their partner was not reacting strongly to a particular issue. Rather, if they could "observe it, take it in, and ponder the possible outcomes" before reacting, stepfamily interactions became pleasant.

Presence of Self was also experienced as a catalyst to move beyond mini-family coalitions to form new relationships. It was noted in the data by three individuals that when they came to a place of acceptance and understanding in their own internal personality parts, acceptance of other stepfamily members was a logical and present result. Two

mothers expressed that when they showed Self leadership by including their spouses in decisions regarding their children, the resulting coalition helped to dissolve biological boundaries. Seven of the stepparents in the study noted that when they asked their parts to put personal agendas aside and listen carefully to their stepchildren, a new kind of relationship emerged—perhaps not a biological parent-child relationship but a connected, special friendship or kinship, that was separate and in addition to the biological relationship with their parents. Closing biological boundaries and opening to the potential of new step-relationships was made possible through Self leadership.

#### **Conclusion 4**

*External stressors common to stepfamilies are triggers for personality parts in the remarried couples in early stages of development.*

Several researchers of stepfamilies have identified external stressors as the most significant stumbling block to stepfamily adjustment (Kelly, 1996; Keshet, 1987; Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1990). Not only was this opinion upheld by the findings of this study, but those external stressors were found to be key triggers of personality parts, causing extreme reactions, which inhibited stepfamily development. Visher and Visher (1990) describe external stressors common to stepfamilies as loss and grief, families of origin of the remarried couple, ex-spouses and ex-partners, lifestyle and family culture, social stigma, family life cycle and each individual's developmental stage, and a lack of stepparent empowerment. These external stressors were present in one form or another in each of the stepfamilies in the study. However, as there was such an overwhelming concurrence among participants that ex-spouses and ex-partners were a consistent external stressor, particularly those in early stages of development, ex-spouses and ex-partners are discussed separately in greater detail in Conclusion 5.

This study found that in each case where a stepfamily was characterized in Stage I or Stage II of stepfamily adjustment, there were specific external stressors which triggered personality parts and which in turn impeded stepfamily development. Meddling from an

in-law, unresolved losses or guilt, irreconcilable differences in religious beliefs, jealousy of former relationships, and even differences in household cleanliness were described by participants as activating events for parts of these internal systems. Manager Parts, Exile Parts, and Firefighter Parts were equally present in the data triggered by external events.

In contrast, those remarried couples of stepfamilies characterized as in Stage III of adjustment--Couple Four and Couple Seven--had worked through the emotions and memories that were triggered by external events, and were no longer allowing external stressors to impact how the stepfamily interacted with each other. Rather than describing internal conflict as a result of an interaction with others, these stepfamilies shared working on issues using their coping mechanisms of mutual communication, openness, understanding, and compassion for themselves and others. They held a grounded sense of reality about what was possible and impossible for stepfamilies to achieve in terms of the expectations from society at large. These remarried couples were able to call upon the positive traits of their individual personality parts and to provide Self leadership to cope with events negatively impacting the stepfamily experience.

### **Conclusion 5**

*Ex-spouses and ex-partners far outweighed any other external stressor as a trigger for personality parts in stepfamily life.*

Nine remarried couples reported that dealings with the ex-spouse or ex-partner of the one or both partners exceeded any other detriment to development that the stepfamily encountered. Ten individuals described the most difficult, feared, or hated parts of their personality being triggered by weekly, monthly or even yearly encounters with their former partners. In Couple Ten it was the primary factor that inhibited the adjustment of the stepfamily. It was the single most consistent trigger for the personality parts which polarized the stepfamily system as a whole. Without contact with the ex-spouse, for example, if the ex-spouse was out of town and inaccessible to the children, there were few difficulties within the stepfamily that could not be calmed by Self leadership.

Ex-partners were disclosed to trigger unresolved issues of Exile Parts, those negative memories from childhood or adulthood experiences. The emotions and burdens of these memories were triggered by the ex-partner or ex-spouse and the Exile Part appeared to be revictimized with every contact from them until the issues were resolved. In addition, there were four women in the study with Exile Parts physically battered and emotionally abused in these former relationships who were yet to be healed and released from the burdens of rage and shame. When these emotions were released by triggering events initiated by the ex-spouses into the arena of the stepfamily community, adjustment was inhibited. When there were children living in the home who visited ex-spouses frequently, these issues were reopened weekly and sometimes daily.

## **Conclusion 6**

*Manager Parts, extreme in their behaviors, negatively impacted stepfamily adjustment.*

Manager Parts are essential to the well-being of the individual's internal family system and bear the talents and gifts which make this person unique (Schwartz, 1995). However, when these parts became triggered by stepfamily interactions, it was evident from the interview data that these Manager Parts could bring havoc among newly forming step-relationships. Many times these Manager Parts were described to be triggered by outside events or by behaviors of stepchildren which went against the previously held beliefs or cultural norms of these parts from family of origin or life experiences. Consequently, the response to these infractions by the Manager Part, in the extreme frequently detracted from the development of the community as a whole.

The participants described Manager Parts, such as the Perfectionist, the Denier, the Controller, or the Rescuer in the extreme, which demanded change from partners and stepchildren in their behaviors, and when change was not forthcoming, they felt frustrated, betrayed, and angry. This interaction was particularly evident in Stage II stepfamilies such

as Couple Eight and Couple Nine. When these parts were activated by their interpretation of a potentially dangerous external event, their response became extreme. Participants described verbally and physically abusing stepchildren, arguing or fighting with partners, and becoming an altered person whom they did not like in response to environmental stimuli. Manager Parts in the interview data were described in their extreme roles, where their talents and abilities were used to protect the system. However, these parts had positive talents to share as well, and could be invigorating, motivating, stimulating, and even fun in both the internal and external system when led by the Self (Schwartz, 1995).

### **Conclusion 7**

*Exile Parts, triggered by stepfamily interactions, created a cycle of internal parts polarizing each other, which in turn polarized external family members in similar ways.*

Goulding and Schwartz (1995) describe the cycle of parts triggering other parts thus creating repeated patterns of behaviors of personality parts. These cycles were evident in this study when Exile Parts were triggered by stepfamily interactions. In review, the cycle would begin with some event triggering an Exile Part--whose emotions were perceived as being a danger to the system by the Manager Parts, causing them to react in an extreme manner. Ultimately, when the Manager could not control the Exile Part, a Firefighter Part (or several Firefighter Parts) is called into action. It was at this point, when drastic measures were taken by the system, that the cycle appeared to complete itself and the behavioral and emotional patterns were put on hold, cooling down until the next flare-up.

In each report of the cycles of parts' interactions in the data, Exile Parts were at the root of the initiation of the cycle. The Manager Parts experienced their presence in the system as so detrimental that they had to be contained at all cost (Schwartz, 1995). The evidence of this experience of cycles provided in the study by Couple One, Couple Two, Couple Five, and Couple Nine supports this statement. The ultimate goal of the parts was to eliminate the source of hurt, anger, frustration--whatever was triggered by event or

emotion—and return the system to status quo. This internal containment often required imposing the extreme behaviors of the Manager Parts on the members of the stepfamily, by controlling, caretaking, or creating order in partners and stepchildren, as seen in these couples mentioned above.

### **Conclusion 8**

*There were personality parts present in stepfamily interaction, which may have existed before in the IFS of the individual, but that participants had not experienced before.*

Five participants disclosed that there were parts of them that were present in stepfamily interactions that they had never experienced before. These descriptions were couched in both positive and negative terms and indicated that stepfamily interactions called out a new form of coping that individuals had perhaps not needed before. One stepfather reported having to “shift gears” and become a different kind of father than he had intended to be. Another described uncontrollable rage (Firefighter Parts) that he had never allowed to be expressed before and that frightened him. Other participants shared feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment, and one male shared he felt self-esteem and confidence that came from the stepfamily relationship, giving him a position in life that he had not been able to attain before.

Other individuals shared a lack of ability of expression of “who they really are,” of having to protect vulnerable parts of themselves from attack from stepchildren or others in the new step-community. One participant described this experience as feeling “like the best part of me is stuffed way back in there somewhere, crying to come out but scared of what will happen if he does.” He went on to share that he had not felt this way prior to the remarriage and the relationship with his stepchildren.

Work was a trigger for Manager Parts in many individuals, parts which were not effective interacting with the stepfamily. Four participants described how these Manager Parts created difficulty and tension between them and their spouse, their own children, or their spouse’s children. When they were able to take time to allow the Manager Part to

relinquish control of the internal system to the Self, as described by Couple Seven, interactions were more satisfactory and adjustment as a stepfamily unit was enhanced. Three individuals were aware of the negative interaction created by the clash of the work-related Manager Part's behaviors and the stepfamily's needs, and described how they created a buffer zone through commuting and using the time to relax this part. Others used task orientation to refrain from conflict, such as making dinner alone or sitting alone to watch the news or to read the newspaper before beginning the day's stepfamily interaction.

### **Conclusion 9**

*Internal Family System interactional patterns--polarizations, triangles, coalitions--were mirrored and replicated in the external family system and inhibited stepfamily adjustment.*

Within the IFS, just with external family systems, there are interactional patterns which destabilize the system. Polarizations in the IFS model are defined by Schwartz (1995) as personality parts, being forced into extreme behaviors or positions to overcome or balance other parts.

As one part shifts to an extreme role and unbalances the distribution of resources, influence, and responsibilities, another [part] will take an opposing or competing role. . .these polarizations are likely to escalate in the absence of effective leadership. That is, the negative assumptions each part has about the other are continually confirmed, as each part becomes more extreme to try to counter or defeat the other. (pp. 58-59)

Cycles of these behavior patterns are repeated and recycled until leadership is restored (Schwartz, 1995). These triggered parts, polarizations, and cycles of interaction were evident in the data, not only in the descriptions by individuals of what went on inside their own IFS, but on how that interaction, triggered by an external event, created a reaction internally, which was then translated back into stepfamily dysfunction. One participant described how an Exile Part called "His Majesty" was hurt by the stepchildren, triggering a series of polarizations, patterns of compensating behaviors, many of which were mirrored in the stepfamily. Internally it is the Self that must ultimately provide the leadership to

resolve the differences and bring the parts back into a more centered position relative to each other. In the stepfamily, it was the mother of the children who intervened, using Self leadership. She enabled the extreme positions of the individuals to come back to a more centered, understanding position in the stepfamily system. This is only one example of a cycle of interactions demonstrating the impact of the interactional patterns on the adjustment of the stepfamily. There were six other examples of internal and external polarizations in the data.

Triangulation was frequent between biological parent, child, and stepparent in these stepfamilies. For example, external triangulation mirrored internal triangulation between an Exile Part, a Control Manager, and a Rescuer in Couple One, or an Exile Part, a Passive Pessimist, and an Avoider in Couple Five. The triangulation in both cases was with the daughter.

Positive feedback loops were visible in several of the stepfamilies. One example was where the stepmother persisted in interjecting herself into the children's personal lives, even though they expressed their dislike of her being involved with them so closely. By her own admission, the more caretaking she did, the angrier they became and the worse they treated her. In this stepmother's IFS Map there was a similar pattern of behavior and emotions between the Controller and Exile Parts. The IFS parts, like the stepfamily members, were locked in what they had always done to protect the integrity of the system, even though it no longer worked (Schwartz, 1995).

## **Conclusion 10\_**

*The Internal Family System of each member of the stepfamily directly impacted the adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole.\_*

Although the data collected were entirely focused on the remarried couple of the stepfamilies, both parents and stepfamilies frequently described their children and parts of their children's personalities that impacted the remarried couple as well as the adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole. Angry Parts or Rage Firefighters of children unleashed on



stepparents were commonplace descriptions of difficulties which caused the stepparents to reconsider whether the remarriage had been the right choice for them, as in Couple One, Couple Six, and Couple Ten. On the contrary, children with personality parts described as “adaptable” and “easy-going,” as in Couple Four and Couple Seven, enhanced the adaptability of all members of the stepfamily, thus augmenting the adjustment of the stepfamily. When the stepparent’s parts were able to feel comfortable and relaxed with their stepchildren, the adjustment process developed more quickly and smoothly.

### **Conclusion 11**

*Firefighter Parts' behaviors were equally devastating to the internal family system as to the external stepfamily.*

Schwartz’s (1995) definition of Firefighter Parts explains that they “react automatically whenever an Exiled Part is activated. . . . They do whatever they believe necessary to help the [system] dissociate from or douse dreaded, exiled feelings, with little regard for the consequences of their methods” (pp. 50-51). It was evident from the data that when a Firefighter Part was activated, external and internal damage in relationships was caused. Although Firefighter Parts can take on many forms--substance abuse, addictions, violence, rage--only Rage Parts were evident in the interviews of the remarried couples. In each instance, however, when these parts were unleashed in the internal system, their negative behaviors were felt by members of the stepfamily as well. There were frequently severe consequences which further polarized and destabilized the stepfamily unit. Behaviors of one Rage Part in Couple Six included violence against a stepchild that resulted in the involvement of Children’s Protective Services. The Rage Part also destroyed any trust built in the relationship with that child or his siblings, and caused the creation of a deep emotional separation between the remarried couple. These behaviors were regretted by the personality parts of the perpetrator, which berated him internally as much as he was isolated and mistrusted externally.

**Conclusion 12**

*Those stepfamilies that were struggling in their adjustment to each other were generally headed by a remarried couple that was struggling with chaos in their own internal family system.*

Eight stepfamilies in the study were headed by individuals who were internally conflicted. They were constantly dealing with exiled feelings from the past, triggered in stepfamily relationships. Those individuals were ineffective at leading the stepfamily through the developmental process. Several partners became polarized in their remarried relationship, constantly triggering each other's parts, and were unable to move to a position of neutrality with respect to their own needs to allow the needs of the whole to supersede. For example, in Couple Nine, when the male partner could get the demanding nature of the Perfectionist to step back and observe, the stepchildren were then able to complete tasks without being prompted. In Couple Eight, when the biological parent could quiet his angry feelings toward a child's other parent, the loyalty issues of the child with respect to the stepmother dissipated. By getting the Controller to step back in Couple One, and allow the stepparent and stepchildren to form their own alliance without interference or dictation of how the alliance should be created, the Controller found enormous relief. The Controller transformed into a more relaxed, fun part who organized and enjoyed stepfamily events. In each case, the process of effectively leading their own internal experience of the stepfamily was paramount to providing leadership to the external stepfamily system.

**Conclusion 13**

*Individuals had a dominant Manager Part in their internal systems which had significant influence on how they viewed the world.*

Each member of the remarried couples in this study had a dominant Manager Part with specific behaviors and personal characteristics, that were both triggered to extreme behaviors, or interacting functionally in the internal system of the participant. It was also noteworthy that, in many instances, the characteristics of the dominant Manager Part of one

partner were in direct contradiction to those of their partner. This element created activating events which triggered extreme behaviors in and of themselves. Examples of this were seen in the interview data of all of the couples in the study, with the exception of Couple Seven. In the IFS literature (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995) no particular mention of the phenomenon is made of a dominant Manager Part, nor has there been studies that have highlighted this observation or identification until now. However, it was evident that this particular Manager was predictable and consistent in the way it interacted in the stepfamily system. Exploring this further and expanding the IFS model to include dominant Manager discussions appear to be indicated. It remains to be seen if this is particular to stepfamily interactions or if it can be generalized to more general life experiences of the individual such as work or other social interaction.

#### **Conclusion 14.**

*It appeared from the study, that the IFS model could be expanded to include explicit description of personality parts in functional roles, particularly what Firefighter Parts and Exile Parts become in a balanced internal system.*

Throughout the analysis of data, there were references to healing old psychological wounds, working on old issues, or just “working on it.” In the language of IFS this translates into working individually with the personality parts to understand the reasons for extreme behaviors in Manager Parts, Exile Parts, and Firefighter Parts. Several participants spoke of healing the inner child parts--Exile Parts--yet there is no framework within the model for the description or classification of parts once this work was done. There was reference to rescued Exile Parts in Schwartz (1995) and Goulding and Schwartz (1995), yet there is no discussion as to what to call Exile Parts who become functional. Couple Three’s male partner described a functional Exile Part who had overcome allowing jealousy to take over his system, feelings that were held by an Exile Part. Still, there were jealous feelings from time to time that would creep back into his conscious awareness. When the needs and pain of an Exile Part were brought to conscious awareness and dealt

with, the Exile Part was no longer hidden away, controlled by the Manager Parts--no longer in exile. Therefore, a descriptor for that part who has become functional (i.e., evoking the jealous feelings as an indicator of intrapsychic work that needs to be done in a balanced system) appears to be necessary. I propose that perhaps the descriptor could be the Feelings Guardian, for example, describing both the current role of watching out for the feelings, and also the part who is carrying and maintaining the emotional capacity of the individual, and providing stimulus for the individual to grow.

Similarly, for Firefighter Parts, once the internal system is balanced and Exile Parts placated and healed, can possibly become functional as well, providing healthy distractions to the system so that Manager Parts do not become polarized into extreme roles. This functional role does not appear in the literature, and although it may not need its own classification or parts label, acknowledgment of the continued participation of Firefighter Parts in functional roles appears to be needed. Examples of Firefighter Parts in a functional role were seen in Couple Two's male partner, where he described taking a shower or a walk or playing music to distract him from painful exchanges with his ex-spouse.

### **Recommendations for Clinical Practice**

Based on the results of this study, I offer the following insights and suggestions for clinicians, human service workers, pastoral counselors, and other trained individuals attempting to help stepfamilies.

1. Encourage remarried couples to work with their individual personality parts through psychotherapy individually and together before attempting to resolve the issues of the stepfamily as a whole.
2. Obtain a detailed history of the stepfamily system, having the family complete an SAS to get a well-rounded picture of their interactions; genogram both families of origin and the ex-partner network in order to understand the extent of external stressors on the family.

3. Perform an IFS assessment to understand the personality parts which are triggered by stepfamily interaction, external stressors, and remarried couple interaction.
4. Identify the interactional patterns both internally and externally which are impacting the stepfamily adjustment as a whole. Understand fully which members of the stepfamily are polarized with each other, and determine the accompanying internal personality parts which are equally polarized. Likewise, clearly understand other systemic dynamics such as triangulation and positive feedback loops, internally and externally.
5. Redefine the history that is provided by the remarried couple in terms of IFS language, which will assist in disarming defensive, projecting behaviors of the Manager Parts present in the interview.
6. Begin the process of gently helping the individuals to understand their own personality parts: how these parts are impacting the ability of the stepfamily to come together as a unit; how their behaviors may be stimulating the behaviors they are most anxious to eliminate in their mutual children; and how practical, systemic interventions can impact internal and external family systems.
7. Assist the individuals of the remarried couple to understand how they are uniquely impacted internally by external stressors. Safely allow Exile Parts to share the history that is triggered by these events and understand that these Exile Parts and their cohort Manager Parts need to be able to cope with the stressors differently than they have in the past.
8. Through Gestalt techniques, guided imagery, reframing, and the structural family technique of boundary making (Schwartz, 1995), the remarried couple can be taught to differentiate the Self from the parts and can be assisted in reaching that place of compassion and acceptance purposefully.
9. Enhance the adults' ability to distinguish between the behaviors of the personality part when they are in Self, particularly when they are interacting with their children.

10. Encourage the creation of stepfamily support groups and teach the group members how to recognize Self leadership when it is present in each other, and parts interaction when it is not.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

This study, being the first to examine the internal experience of remarried couples, offers many provoking challenges for further research into the IFS Model, and into the stepfamilies in the context of the IFS Model. Possible ideas for further study include the following questions:

1. What are the Internal Family Systems Maps of the children of remarried families?
2. How are children's parts triggered by stepfamily interaction?
3. How does the introduction of the IFS Model into the awareness of the remarried couple impact stepfamily adjustment?
4. What part does the IFS Map of the individual play in the dissolution of a remarriage, or the choosing of multiple partners for multiple remarriages that fail?
5. What impact does IFS Therapy with one individual member of a stepfamily have on the adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole?
6. How could the ability to control Firefighter Part behavior enhance a stepfamily's ability to develop?
7. Is it possible to predict the ultimate adjustment of the stepfamily, or perhaps failure of a remarriage, based upon an IFS assessment?
8. Is there a Manager Part of an individual's IFS that is the dominant Manager Part in most interactions of the individual? In other words, is there a part of an individual who is an inherent part of personality, in essence, the Manager Part that engenders the natural temperament of that individual, where other Manager Parts are developed in response to the environment?

## **Conclusions About Methodology**

As this study was based upon interviews and, to a lesser extent, on self-report pencil-and-paper-generated data, it is relevant to discuss some conclusions about the methods employed in conducting this research study. It is apparent from the analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn that the research questions posed in chapter I were answered by the methods employed to collect the data.

Two elements were key in the success of the methodology of this study. First was the formal training received by the researcher in both IFS assessment and Self leadership. Second, was the educational introduction given to the participants at the beginning of the interviews (see Appendix C) to orient their thinking to the language and the multiplicity theory of personality of the IFS model. Through the training in the IFS model, I was able to guide the interviews and encourage the exploration of personality parts in ways that proved fruitful to gathering meaningful data. The educational introduction led participants into the language and conceptual framework of IFS, enabling them to aptly disclose their IFS Map sufficiently to be understood. In instances where the interview data were less fruitful, upon reflection I realized that a part of me was conducting the interview, rather than encouraging the flow of information through Self leadership. When my own personality parts were not present in the process, the interviewees were more comfortable, more confident, and more forthcoming with their own personal histories.

## **Summary**

This study of the IFS Model applied to remarried couples of stepfamilies in different stages of development has contributed to the understanding, awareness, and knowledge of the Internal Family Systems Model and, more specifically, to the understanding of the internal experience of the stepfamily process by the remarried couple. In this study, the qualitatively assessed stages further confirmed the validity of the SAS, as well as increased the knowledge about using the IFS model with stepfamilies. Questions leading to further study also arose.

Conclusions drawn about the study included:

1. Stepfamily development is identifiable in specific stages defined by developmental tasks but also remains a fluid process.
2. The SAS can be a useful instrument in the determination of stepfamily stage of adjustment, and the subscales contributed to understanding a stepfamily's activating events and relational difficulties.
3. The stage of stepfamily adjustment and the development of a stepfamily into a bonded, caring community of individuals, are directly related to the presence of Self in remarried couple's IFS Map, and their ability to provide Self leadership in stepfamily interactions.
4. External stressors common to stepfamilies are triggers for personality parts in the remarried couples in early stages of development.
5. Ex-spouses and ex-partners far outweigh any other external stressor as a trigger for personality parts in stepfamily life.
6. Manager Parts, extreme in their behaviors, negatively impact stepfamily adjustment.
7. Exile Parts, triggered by stepfamily interactions, create a cycle of internal polarizations, which in turn polarize external family members in similar ways.
8. There were personality parts present in stepfamily interactions, who may have existed before in the IFS of the individual, but were not known to the participants before the stepfamily experience.
9. Internal Family System interactional patterns--polarizations, triangles, coalitions--are mirrored and replicated in the external family system and inhibited stepfamily adjustment.
10. The Internal Family System of each member of the remarried couple directly impact the adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole.
11. Firefighter Parts are equally as devastating to the internal family system as they are to the external stepfamily.



12. Stepfamilies who struggle in their adjustment to each other appear to be headed by a remarried couple who is struggling with chaos in their own internal family systems.
13. Individuals had a dominant Manager Part in their internal systems, who had significant influence on how they viewed the world.
14. It appeared from the study that the IFS model could be expanded to include explicit description of personality parts in functional roles, particularly what Firefighter Parts and Exile Parts become in a balanced internal system.

This chapter also contained recommendations for clinical practice, suggestions for further study, and, finally, conclusions about the methodology of the study. The results of this research will need to be considered in future studies of stepfamilies and of the IFS model, and its conclusions reconfirmed with application to other stepfamilies before the implications can be extended. However this information is used subsequently, this study and others like it should provide new insight and direction for clinicians into the reasons both for stepfamily dysfunction and the successful adjustment of the stepfamily as a whole.

**APPENDIX A**  
**CORRESPONDENCE**



**ANDREW**  

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**University**

July 29, 1997

Susan Carter  
522 River Rd.  
Paw Paw, MI 49079

Dear Susan:

**RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

HSRB Protocol # : 97-98 : 166      Application Type : Original      Dept : Ed & Couns Psyc - 0104  
Review Category : Exempt      Action Taken : Approved  
Protocol Title : *The Internal Family systems Model Applied to Remarried Couples of Step-families in Different Stages of Development*

On behalf of the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) I want to advise you that your proposal has been reviewed and approved. You have been given clearance to proceed with your research plans.

All changes made to the study design and/or consent form after initiation of the project require prior approval from the HSRB before such changes are implemented. Feel free to contact our office if you have any questions.

The duration of the present approval is for one year. If your research is going to take more than one year, you must apply for an extension of your approval in order to be authorized to continue with this project.

Some proposal and research designs may be of such a nature that participation in the project may involve certain risks to human subjects. If your project is one of this nature and in the implementation of your project an incidence occurs which results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, such an occurrence must be reported immediately in writing to the Human Subjects Review Board. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Loren Hamel, by calling (616) 473-2222.

We wish you success as you implement the research project as outlined in the approved protocol.

Sincerely,

Human Subjects Review Board

c: Elsie P. Jackson

**SUSAN M. CARTER, MA LLP**  
522 River Road  
Paw Paw, MI 49079

[date]

Dear [participant stepfamily],

I am writing to formally thank you for your participation in the research study that I am conducting on stepfamilies. I honor your thoughtful sharing of time, energy, and family interactions in order that others may learn and grow in their awareness of the difficulties that stepfamilies share and endure.

I am well aware of your busy schedules and am grateful that you were able to take some of your precious free time, usually reserved for your family, to help me with this project. I acknowledge each of you for your courage and your willingness to take this step to learn more about yourselves in the process.

If I can be of assistance to either of you, or your stepfamily, in the future, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Carter, MA LLP  
Andrews University  
Doctoral Student



July 2, 1998

Susan Carter  
522 River Road  
Paw Paw, MI 49079

Dear Ms. Carter:

The purpose of this letter is give you permission to use the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale to collect data for your dissertation study. While you may not include the instruments in your final dissertation manuscript, you may include a few sample items. You may also include the tables of psychometric properties in the manuscript.

I wish you the best in your future scholarship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "M. Crosbie-Burnett".

Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor and Chair  
Department of Educational and Psychological Studies

School of Education  
P.O. Box 248065  
Coral Gables, Florida 33124-2040  
305-284-3711  
Fax: 305-284-3003

**APPENDIX B**

**INFORMED CONSENT**

## INFORMED CONSENT

### **A Study of the Internal Family Systems Model Applied to Remarried Couples of Stepfamilies in Different Stages of Development**

I have been told that the primary reason for conducting this research is to find out if the process of becoming a stepfamily brings out personality parts in the remarried couple which could hinder the development of the stepfamily as a whole. Further, the researchers will be seeking to understand more about how individual personality parts of the remarried couple impact the interactional dynamics of the stepfamily process.

I have been told that we will each complete a Stepfamily Adjustment Scale prior to the interview. I understand that this scale will be scored and these scores used in the process of this research. I understand further that these responses will be forwarded to the University of Miami, Florida, to be included in a database of prior and subsequent responses to this scale. I have been told that all of our responses will be kept anonymous and will be used solely for research purposes to further expand the understanding of the dynamics of stepfamilies.

I have been told that the researcher will interview myself and my spouse alone, that the interview will be conducted in my home or in a private office, and will consist of an approximate 2-hour in-depth interview. The interview will consist of questions with respect to our adjustment as a stepfamily and questions about how I react to being a part of a stepfamily. Questions about all the members of the family will be asked along with questions on the history of the divorce (or death) of a former spouse, custody arrangements, the courtship period of the present couple, and the current stepfamily situation. I have been told that the interview session will be audio-taped solely for the purposes of transcription and then will be erased.

I have been told that a second session will take place with my spouse and I together, in order for the researcher to share some of the preliminary conclusions of the study and to confirm these observations. I have been told that this information could benefit our whole family by giving us insights into our individual personality functioning, the developmental stages of the stepfamily, our particular reaction to the tasks inherent in the stage of development of our stepfamily, and what we may expect to encounter as we move into further levels of development as a stepfamily unit.

I have been told that the researcher will also help to define parts of my personality that are functioning in the stepfamily arena. I have been told that this information could benefit me individually, and our marital relationship and stepfamily adjustment collectively, by identifying emotional and behavioral characteristics that may be detrimental to the developmental process of becoming a well-adjusted stepfamily.

I have been told that a number will be assigned to each stepfamily and that each member of the remarried couple will be identified as male (M) and female (F) respondent of that stepfamily number code. I have been told that no names will be used to identify any stepfamily in the study, for the purpose of maintaining as much anonymity and confidentiality as possible for all the stepfamilies involved in the research.

I have been told that individual or marital counseling will be made available to me and my spouse should I experience emotional discomfort resulting directly from the interview process.

I have been told that the benefits to me and my stepfamily include awareness of the potential limitations on development as a stepfamily unit, increased understanding of myself and my unique personality parts, of each other as individuals, and of our stepfamily collectively as a community of individuals, and the gain of knowledge regarding the patterns of adjustment of stepfamilies, and how our stepfamily fits in those patterns.

I have been told that there may be some discomfort experienced by either of us due to the memories or feelings such discussions may bring out. I have been advised that my participation is completely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate at any time without experiencing negative consequences.

I have been told that if I wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any complaint that I may have about the study, I may contact Dr. Elsie Jackson, Andrews University, Educational and Counseling Psychology Department, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, telephone number: 616-471-3308, for information and assistance.

I may also contact the researcher, Susan M. Carter at 616-657-5800 or her advisor, Dr. Nancy J. Carbonell, at Andrews University, Educational and Counseling Psychology Department, Berrien Springs, MI 49104, telephone number: 616-471-3472 should I need further information, assistance, or have any questions.

I have read the contents of this consent form and have listened to the verbal explanation give by the researcher. I understand that my refusal or the refusal of my spouse to participate in the study excludes the other from participating in the study. I agree that I will not disclose the content of the interview with my spouse or members of my immediate family, until both myself and my spouse have completed the interview process. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. I have also been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adult Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adult Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## **APPENDIX C**

### **INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE STUDY**

## Interview Instrument

### Education About Study

This study is about understanding personality and it's connection with how we view the world and our own personal circumstances. I'm going to ask you to talk about yourself in the context of your stepfamily. We will begin with just some basic information about yourself, your spouse, and your mutual children. In the process of that interview, I will become progressively more detailed about how you think and feel about situations and circumstances in which you find yourself in the stepfamily.

The Internal Family Systems Model, which is the basis of this study, looks at personality in a unique way. It says that we all have a multiple personality, naturally and that there are many parts to who we are. For example, I'm sure that you may have thought something like, "I don't want to go to work today." But somehow you get up and get there on time. So in that sense, we would say that there is a part of you who is overwhelmed or tired or bored with work, and another part of you that feels a sense of obligation to be there.

In this context, I will be looking at the parts of you that interface with your spouse and your children to determine how your parts get activated and what keeps you in this more agitated state. I will not be assuming what your parts are, you will assist me in confirming if my observations are correct, and describing what you feel in more detail to complete my sense of what is occurring.

I'm sure this sounds a little confusing right now, but as we proceed I'm certain that it will begin to make more sense to you. Let's get started and you can ask questions as we move ahead.

### Interview Questions

#### Demographics:

Age

Gender

Educational Level

Family Income Level (Under 10,000; 11-25M; 26-35M; 35-50M; above 50M)

Profession

Years in Current Marriage

Years married prior to this marriage

Ending of prior marriage: Death or Divorce

Number of Children and Ages

Visitation Schedule/Custody Arrangement

#### Questions to Identify Stage of Stepfamily Adjustment:

1. How are loyalties expressed in your family?
2. How is membership in the family defined?
3. Who lives in the remarried home?
4. What differences have you noticed in your two biological family's lifestyles?
5. What accommodations have you had to make that perhaps you didn't anticipate?
6. How do your different family lifestyles complement/contrast with each other?
7. What is similar/dissimilar in your family histories/families of origin?
8. How long did you and your current spouse court each other before marriage?
9. How were your children involved in the courtship?
10. What was your courtship like?
11. What has changed since marriage that was contrary to what you had expected?
12. Who claims the authority in your home? With your children?
13. Is control shared, how?

14. Who creates the most conflict for you within the stepfamily? Outside of the stepfamily?
15. In what form do you experience the conflict?
16. What would you say about disagreements--are they, for example, more frequent between you and your spouse than you had expected?
17. What do you disagree about most frequently?
18. How do you talk about stepfamily tension?
19. Are there times when the children are the source of tension between you as a couple? Describe them.
20. What happens when there are disagreements between stepfamily members?
21. What rituals or routines have been created in your new stepfamily?
22. What things are you doing differently in this relationship/stepfamily that were not practiced in your prior marriage?
23. What would you change in your stepfamily right now?
24. What do you find difficult to accept in your stepchildren?
25. What are the rules regarding discipline of the children?
26. Who corrects the children?
27. Who is responsible for follow-through on discipline?
28. What kind of relationship do you have with the other biological parents of the children in your stepfamily?
29. What kinds of arrangements are there to ease the children's transition from one home to another?
30. What traditions are you aware of that are developing in your new stepfamily unit?
31. What hobbies or interests do you share as a stepfamily?
32. What are the financial issues, and how are they dealt with?
33. Is money a problem topic in your stepfamily?
34. Is there one issue that is sensitive that seems to resurface between you and your spouse?
35. Do you find that your stepfamily is more often separated into mini-biological families rather than becoming more unified?

### **IFS Questioning:**

Intermingled with the developmental questions above, I will be actively listening and probing for client descriptions of personality parts in the participant's presentation or responses. Identification of these parts will be further clarified in the following manner:

So when this happens (describing the situation or circumstance) in your stepfamily, a part of you responds (describing the response provided). Does that make sense? In other words, only a part of you feels or acts this way; you don't always respond in this manner, is that right?

What do you feel about yourself when this occurs?

Is there a shift in your body when you remember this incident or situation? Where is that physical sensation located? Do you often feel it?

What do you say to yourself when this happens? What does the voice sound like?

If you could associate a name or a label with this feeling or physical sensation or voice, what would that label be?

How do you feel about yourself when this occurs? How do you react to your family members? What other behaviors do you have?

How do you think things might be different in your stepfamily if you could change how you respond to this type of situation?

Access to Self (ability to act as compassionate witness) is determined through the participant's ability to respond to the above questions in an objective, observer stance toward themselves and their family members.

## Stepfamily Adjustment Scale

### Sample Items

Because of the length of the instruments, and the nature of the copyright on those documents, it was not possible to publish them here for reference. However, permission was obtained to provide sample items from each of the SAS instruments used in the study.

#### Bioparent Form

1. How happy am I with my family life?  
 A.....B.....C.....D                      E\*  
 Happy    Unhappy
2. My relationship with my ex-wife is  
 A.....B.....C.....D                      E  
 Friendly    Business-like                      hostile    no contact
3. I feel caught in the middle between my children and my [spouse].  
 A.....B.....C.....D                      E  
 True        Often        Rarely Not  
                  True        True        True
4. When I think about including my [spouse] into our family, I  
 A.....B.....C.....D                      E  
 am glad    wish she were  
 she is with us.                                      not with us.
5. When it comes to discipline, [my spouse] does  
 A.....B.....C                                      E  
 too        just        NOT  
 much    right        do enough
6. Compared to before my remarriage, my child and I are  
 my oldest:    A.....B.....C                      E  
                  not as close    same    closer
7.        second child:    A.....B.....C                      E  
                  not as close    same    closer
8.        third child:    A.....B.....C                      E  
                  not as close    same    closer

#### Stepparent Form

1. I resent the loyalty that my stepchildren have for their biological mother when I'm doing the day-to-day [parenting].  
 A.....B.....C.....D                      E  
 True        Often        Rarely Not  
 True        True        True

---

\*E designates that the question does not apply to that individual.

2. Overall, the message I get from my stepchildren is  
 A.....B.....C.....D E  
 we're so glad we wish you  
 you are with us. were not with us.
3. To me, my stepchild is mostly  
 (oldest) A B C D E  
 Just another friend another child taking the  
 person place of my biological children
4. (2nd oldest) A B C D E
5. (3rd oldest) A B C D E
6. Ideally, to what extent SHOULD I be disciplining my stepchildren?  
 A.....B.....C.....D E  
 It is really Fully, the  
 not my job. same as a  
 biological parent.
7. The money spent in this household is spent  
 A.....B.....C.....D E  
 fairly unfairly

**APPENDIX D**

**STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SCALE RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY  
TABLES**

**Table 1**

Reliability Measures: Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistency Correlations, and Test-Retest Correlations of Subscales

**Biological Parent Form**

N=98

	<u>M<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Skew -ness<sup>b</sup></u>	<u>Mean rho<sup>c</sup></u>	<u>Mean r<sup>d</sup></u>	<u>Test- retest r</u>
Unresolved emotions	2.1	.7	.3	.66	.63	.72
Rela w/ other biopar	2.2	1.0	.4	.86	.85	.77
Visitation <sup>e</sup>	2.1	.7	.8	.66	.67	.85
Divided loyalties	2.2	.8	.4	.80	.81	.86
Inclusion of steppar	1.3	.4	1.8	.79	.73	.86
Biopar side w/ adoles	1.7	.5	.5	.71	.66	.54
Kid inhibits steppar	1.5	.6	1.5	.79	.78	.93
Eldest adol displaced	2.1	.6	.3	.71	.68	.44
Step relationship	1.7	.7	1.0	.82	.81	.88
Steppar discipline	1.8	.7	1.0	.75	.78	.90
Biopar supports stepp	1.9	.6	.5	.77	.75	.84
Biopar-adol relation	1.4	.4	1.1	.72	.68	.35
Eff of rem on bio-adol rel	1.7	.6	1.0	.78	.78	.70
Steppar's children <sup>f</sup>	2.2	.9	.5	.81	.80	<sup>g</sup>
Self efficacy	2.0	.4	.1	.71	.65	.22
Money	1.2	.4	3.0	.78	.72	.09
Social support	2.5	.8	.3	.81	.81	.85
Power in marriage	2.2	.4	1.3	.65	.64	.85
Marital happiness	1.6	.6	1.5	.74	.77	.90
Family cohesion	1.8	.7	.8	.76	.75	.77
Family happiness	1.7	.5	1.1	.77	.77	.91

<sup>a</sup> Possible range in scores is 1-4 with low scores denoting adjustment and high scores denoting maladjustment.

<sup>b</sup> A value of zero reflects a completely symmetric bell-shaped curve. A positive score reflects clustering of subjects' scores to the left of the mean; in this sample, this is toward the well adjusted end of the continuum.

<sup>c</sup> Mean item score to subscale score Spearman correlation coefficient rho.

<sup>d</sup> Mean item score to subscale score Pearson correlation coefficient r.

<sup>e</sup> n=85

<sup>f</sup> n=37

<sup>g</sup> In the test-retest subsample there was only one family in which the stepparent's children visited.

**Note:** Used by permission: Crosbie-Burnett, M. (1989c, November). *SAS The Stepfamily Adjustment Scale: The development of a new instrument designed to measure the unique aspects of stepfamilies*. Paper presented at the Theory Construction & Research Methodology Pre-Conference Workshop of the National Council on Family Relations, New Orleans, LA.

Table 1 (Reliability Measures Continued)

Stepparent Form N=104						
	<u>M<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>SD</u>	Skew - ness <sup>b</sup>	Mean <u>rho<sup>c</sup></u>	Mean <u>r<sup>d</sup></u>	Test- retest <u>r</u> n=14
Unresolved emotions <sup>b</sup>	2.1	.7	.4	.68	.67	.77
Rela w/ other biopar	2.0	.8	.4	.82	.79	.84
Visitation <sup>e</sup>	2.1	.7	.6	.62	.60	.99
Divided loyalties	1.7	.7	.9	.83	.76	.81
Inclusion of steppar	1.9	.7	.7	.84	.85	.87
Biopar side w/ adoles	2.0	.8	.6	.79	.78	.80
Kid inhibits steppar	1.7	.6	.6	.81	.76	.55
Eldest adol displaced	2.2	.6	.4	.76	.75	.82
Step relationship	1.7	.5	1.4	.78	.78	.85
Step nurturance	2.4	.8	.4	.86	.86	.92
Steppar discipline	2.0	.8	.6	.79	.79	.64
Biopar supports stepp	1.9	.7	.8	.83	.84	.94
Steppar's children <sup>f</sup>	2.1	.8	.8	.72	.62	<sup>g</sup>
Self efficacy	2.2	.6	.6	.78	.76	.88
Money	1.6	.4	.8	.71	.66	.82
Social support	2.5	.8	.4	.86	.85	.67
Power in marriage	2.4	.5	1.1	.68	.72	.99
Marital happiness	1.7	.6	1.2	.76	.77	.97
Family cohesion	1.8	.7	.6	.83	.81	.79
Family happiness	1.8	.7	1.0	.80	.82	.82

<sup>a</sup> Possible range in scores is 1-4 with low scores denoting adjustment and high scores denoting maladjustment.

<sup>b</sup> A value of zero reflects a completely symmetric bell-shaped curve. A positive score reflects clustering of subjects' scores to the left of the mean; in this sample, this is toward the well adjusted end of the continuum.

<sup>c</sup> Mean item score to subscale score Spearman correlaton coefficient rho.

<sup>d</sup> Mean item score to subscale score Pearson correlation coefficient r.

<sup>e</sup> n=85

<sup>f</sup> n=37

<sup>g</sup> in the test-retest subsample there was only one family in which the stepparent's children visited.

<sup>h</sup> n=68.

**Note:** Used by permission: Crosbie-Burnett, M. (1989c, November). *SAS The Stepparent Adjustment Scale: The development of a new instrument designed to measure the unique aspects of stepfamilies*. Paper presented at the Theory Construction & Research Methodology Pre-Conference Workshop of the National Council on Family Relations, New Orleans, LA.



Table 2

Concurrent Validity Measures: T-Tests between Happy and Unhappy Subsamples for SAS Subscales and for Experimenter's Judgment of Subject's Tension; Correlations between Subscale Scores and Card Sort Scores

	Bioparent		df	t <sup>b</sup>	r <sup>c</sup>
	Happy <sup>a</sup> M(n)	Unhappy M(n)			
Unresolved emotions	2.1(97)	2.5(7)	102	1.7 *	.46
Rel w/ other biopar	2.2(88)	2.1(7)	93	.3	.37 <sup>d</sup>
Visitation	2.1(79)	2.4(6)	83	.9	.55 <sup>e</sup>
Divided loyalties	2.1(97)	3.2(7)	102	4.0 ****	.59
Inclusion of steppar	1.2(97)	2.2(7)	102	7.4 ****	.69
Biopar side w/ adoles	1.6(97)	2.2(7)	102	2.9 **	.32
Kid inhibits steppar	1.5(95)	1.5(7)	100	.1	.17
Eldest adol displaced	2.0(97)	2.4(7)	102	1.6 *	.52
Step relationship	1.6(97)	2.8(7)	102	5.1 ****	.72
Steppar discipline	1.7(96)	3.0(7)	101	5.2 ****	.72
Biopar supports steppar	1.8(97)	2.8(7)	102	4.3 ****	.60
Biopar-adol relation	1.3(97)	1.9(7)	102	4.4 ****	.42
Eff rem /biopar-adol rel	1.6(97)	2.5(7)	102	4.2 ****	.50
Steppar's children	2.2(34)	2.4(3)	35	.5	.85 <sup>f</sup>
Self efficacy	1.9(97)	2.5(7)	102	3.7 ***	.47
Money	1.2(97)	1.8(7)	102	3.8 ***	.34
Social Support	2.5(97)	2.2(7)	102	.9	
Power in marriage	2.1(96)	2.7(7)	101	3.6 ***	.34
Marital Happiness	1.5(97)	2.9(7)	102	8.1 ****	.79
Family cohesion	1.7(97)	3.1(7)	102	6.1 ****	.58
Family Happiness					.79
Mutual Suitability-Step Rel					
Stepparent-adol	1.8(97)	1.7(6)	101	.5	
Stepparent-bioparent	2.1(97)	2.5(7)	102	2.8 **	
Bioparent-adol	2.1(97)	2.4(7)	102	1.2 *	
Family (all 3)	1.9(97)	2.0(7)	102	.9	
Stepparent role ambiguity					
Stepparent-adol	2.1(97)	2.2(7)	102	.6	
Stepparent-bioparent	2.0(97)	2.1(7)	102	.5	
Bioparent-adol	2.5(96)	2.4(7)	101	.5	
Family (all 3)	2.0(97)	2.1(7)	102	.4	
Relaxed-Tense+	1.6(96)	2.1(7)	101	2.1 **	

<sup>a</sup> Possible range in scores is 1-4 with low scores denoting adjustment and high scores denoting maladjustment. The Sample was divided into a happy and an unhappy subsample by dividing the sample along the midpoint between 1 and 4.

<sup>b</sup> One-tailed.

<sup>c</sup> Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between the subscale score and the subject's rating of the description of the subscale. N=104 for bioparents and stepparents.

<sup>d</sup> n=80.

<sup>e</sup> n=85.

<sup>f</sup> n=68.

\*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001. \*\*\*\*p<.0001.

+Experimenter's subjective rating of each subject on a 4-point scale from relaxed (1) to tense (4) during the home visit.

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## Stepparent

	Happy <sup>a</sup>	Unhappy	df	$t^b$		$r^c$
	M(n)	M(n)				
Unresolved emotions	2.1(60)	1.8(8)	66	1.1	*	.58
Rel w/ other biopar	2.0(88)	2.5(12)	98	2.2	**	.37 <sup>d</sup>
Visitation	2.1(76)	2.5(13)	86	2.0	*	.55 <sup>e</sup>
Divided loyalties	1.6(90)	2.3(13)	101	4.1	****	.59
Inclusion of steppar	1.7(91)	3.0(13)	102	7.7	****	.69
Biopar side w/ adoles	1.9(91)	2.8(13)	102	4.7	****	.32
Kid inhibits steppar	1.6(89)	2.1(13)	100	2.9	**	.17
Eldest adol displaced	2.1(91)	2.7(13)	102	3.8	***	.52
Step relationship	1.6(91)	2.3(13)	102	4.7	****	.72
Step nurturance	2.3(89)	3.2(13)	100	4.0	****	.72
Steppar discipline	1.9(90)	2.8(13)	101	3.8	***	.60
Biopar supports steppar	1.8(91)	2.4(13)	102	3.0	**	.42
Steppar's children	2.0(41)	2.2 (9)	48	.4		.50
Self efficacy	2.1(91)	2.7(13)	102	3.9	****	.85 <sup>f</sup>
Money	1.5(91)	2.1(13)	102	3.4	***	.47
Social Support	2.5(91)	2.3(13)	102	.9		.34
Power in marriage	2.3(90)	2.8(13)	101	4.0	****	
Marital Happiness	1.6(91)	2.6(13)	102	7.4	****	.34
Family cohesion	1.7(91)	2.8(13)	102	6.0	****	.79
Family Happiness						.58
Mutual Suitability of Step relationship						.79
Stepparent-adol	1.8(91)	2.3(12)	11	3.0	**	
Stepparent-bioparent	2.1(91)	2.5(13)	102	3.2	***	
Bioparent-adol	2.1(91)	2.4(13)	102	1.8	*	
Family (all 3)	1.9(91)	2.3(13)	102	3.6	***	
Stepparent role ambiguity						
Stepparent-adol	2.0(91)	2.5(13)	102	3.5	***	
Stepparent-bioparent	2.0(91)	2.1(13)	102	1.0		
Bioparent-adol	2.5(91)	2.5(12)	101	.0		
Family (all 3)	2.0(91)	2.2(13)	102	1.2		
Relaxed-Tense+	1.8(90)	2.5(13)	101	2.7	**	

<sup>a</sup> Possible range in scores is 1-4 with low scores denoting adjustment and high scores denoting maladjustment. The Sample was divided into a happy and an unhappy subsample by dividing the sample along the midpoint between 1 and 4.

<sup>b</sup> One-tailed.

<sup>c</sup> Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between the subscale score and the subject's rating of the description of the subscale.  $N=104$  for bioparents and stepparents.

<sup>d</sup>  $n=80$ .

<sup>e</sup>  $n=85$ .

<sup>f</sup>  $n=68$ .

\* $p<.05$ . \*\* $p<.01$ . \*\*\* $p<.001$ . \*\*\*\* $p<.0001$ .

+Experimenter's subjective rating of each subject on a 4-point scale from relaxed (1) to tense (4) during the home visit.

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**Table 3**

Construct Validity Measure: Comparisons between Marital Happiness Subscale of the SAS and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale

	Marital Happiness <sup>a</sup> M	Marital Unhappiness M	df	t <sup>b</sup>	r <sup>c</sup>
<b>Bioparent n=17</b>					
	n=13	n=4			
Dyadic Adjustment Scale <sup>d</sup>					
Total	125	109	15	3.1 **	.61
Dyadic Consensus	54	47	15	2.1 *	.54
Dyadic Satisfaction	43	38	15	2.7 **	.54
Dyadic Cohesion	18	15	15	2.4 *	.37
Affectional Expression	11	9	15	2.3 *	.48
<b>Stepparent n=17</b>					
	n=11	n=6			
Dyadic Adjustment Scale					
Total	121	105	15	4.9 ****	.75
Dyadic Consensus	52	46	15	3.6 ***	.65
Dyadic Satisfaction	42	36	15	4.7 ***	.76
Dyadic Cohesion	17	14	15	2.9 **	.53
Affectional Expression	10	9	15	1.1	.30

<sup>a</sup> The sample was divided into happy and unhappy subsamples by dividing the sample along the midpoint of the Marital Happiness subscale of the SAS.

<sup>b</sup> One-tailed.

<sup>c</sup> Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between the Marital Happiness subscale score and the DAS score.

<sup>d</sup> Higher scores denote better dyadic adjustment (Scores on the SAS were recoded such that high scores denoted more happiness, in order to be consistent with the DAS.)

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .0001$ .

*Note:* Used by permission: Crosbie-Burnett, M. (1989c, November). *SAS The Stepfamily Adjustment Scale: The development of a new instrument designed to measure the unique aspects of stepfamilies*. Paper presented at the Theory Construction & Research Methodology Pre-Conference Workshop of the National Council on Family Relations, New Orleans, LA.

**Table 4****Construct Validity Measure: Comparisons between Family Happiness Subscale of the SAS and the Family Satisfaction Scale**

	Family Happiness <sup>a</sup>	Family Unhappiness			
	<u>M(n)</u>	<u>M(n)</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>t<sup>b</sup></u>	<u>r<sup>c</sup></u>
<b>Family Satisfaction Scale<sup>d</sup></b>					
Bioparent	3.6 (16)	2.9 ( 3)	17	2.1 *	.72
Stepparent	3.6 (13)	3.0 ( 6)	17	2.2 *	.70
Adolescent	3.6 ( 9)	2.9 (10)	17	3.2 **	.73

<sup>a</sup> The sample was divided into happy and unhappy (Table 4) and high cohesion and low cohesion (Table 5) subsamples by dividing the sample along the midpoint of the Family Happiness and Cohesion subscales of the SAS.

<sup>b</sup> One-tailed.

<sup>c</sup> Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between the Marital Happiness subscale score and the DAS score on Table 4, and the SAS Cohesion subscale score and the FACES III Cohesion score on Table 5.

<sup>d</sup> Higher scores denote greater satisfaction (Table 4) or more cohesion (Table 5). (Scores on the SAS were recoded such that high scores denoted more satisfaction, in order to be consistent with the Family Satisfaction Scale and FACES III.)

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .0001$ .

Note: Used by permission: Crosbie-Burnett, M. (1989c, November). *SAS The Stepfamily Adjustment Scale: The development of a new instrument designed to measure the unique aspects of stepfamilies*. Paper presented at the Theory Construction & Research Methodology Pre-Conference Workshop of the National Council on Family Relations, New Orleans, LA.

**Table 5**

Construct Validity Measure: Comparisons between Cohesion Subscale of the SAS and the Cohesion Subscale of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III).

	High Cohesion <sup>a</sup>	Low Cohesion				
	<u>M(n)</u>	<u>M(n)</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>t<sup>b</sup></u>	<u>r<sup>c</sup></u>	
<b>FACES III<sup>d</sup></b>						
Bioparent	39 (28)	32 ( 5)	31	3.1	**	.60
Stepparent	32 ( 9)	32 ( 6)	31	2.2	*	.54
Adolescent	30 (12)	30 (12)	18	3.1	**	.59

<sup>a</sup> The sample was divided into happy and unhappy (Table 4) and high cohesion and low cohesion (Table 5) subsamples by dividing the sample along the midpoint of the Family Happiness and Cohesion subscales of the SAS.

<sup>b</sup> One-tailed.

<sup>c</sup> Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between the Marital Happiness subscale score and the DAS score on Table 4, and the SAS Cohesion subscale score and the FACES III Cohesion score on Table 5.

<sup>d</sup> Higher scores denote greater satisfaction (Table 4) or more cohesion (Table 5). (Scores on the SAS were recoded such that high scores denoted more satisfaction, in order to be consistent with the Family Satisfaction Scale and FACES III.)

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .0001$ .

Note: Used by permission: Crosbie-Burnett, M. (1989c, November). *SAS The Stepfamily Adjustment Scale: The development of a new instrument designed to measure the unique aspects of stepfamilies*. Paper presented at the Theory Construction & Research Methodology Pre-Conference Workshop of the National Council on Family Relations, New Orleans, LA.

**APPENDIX E**

**DATA ANALYSIS: STEPFAMILY ADJUSTMENT SUBSCALES BY  
COUPLE**

## Couple One

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	3.50	0.24
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	3.00	1.41
Visiting Stepchildren	2	3.00	0.00
Divided Loyalties	2	2.96	0.41
Quality of Step Relationship	2	2.75	0.35
Unresolved Emotions	2	2.67	0.00
Discipline by Stepparent	2	2.67	0.00
Nurturance in Step Relationship	1	2.67	NA
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.63	0.06
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	2.50	0.24
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.40	0.57
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	2.40	0.57
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	2.33	0.47
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.25	0.35
Marital Happiness	2	2.25	0.12
Effect of Remarriage	2	2.17	0.71
Self-Efficacy	2	2.17	0.71
Money Issues	2	2.17	1.18
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	2.08	0.12
Stepfamily Satisfaction	2	2.00	1.41
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	2.00	0.47
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	1.87	0.18
Displacement of Elder Child	2	1.83	0.24
Social Support	2	1.25	0.35
Issues with Moving	0	0	0

## Couple Two

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	3.33	0.47
Stepfamily Satisfaction	2	3.17	1.18
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.92	0.59
Issues with Moving	2	2.83	1.18
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.60	0.57
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	2.50	2.12
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.35	0.03
Unresolved Emotions	2	2.33	0.47
Displacement of Elder Child	2	2.33	1.41
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	2.29	1.36
Self-Efficacy	2	2.17	0.71
Social Support	2	2.00	0.00
Visiting Stepchildren	2	1.87	0.18
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	1.83	0.24
Money Issues	2	1.80	1.13
Quality of Step Rel	2	1.75	1.06
Divided Loyalties	2	1.67	0.94
Marital Happiness	2	1.58	0.59
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	1.50	0.71
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	1.50	0.24
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	1.50	0.14
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	1.42	0.12
Effect of Remarriage	1	1.33	0.00
Discipline by Stepparent	2	1.21	0.06
Nurturance in Step Relationship	2	1.17	0.00



## Couple Three

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	4.00	0.00
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	3.17	0.24
Unresolved Emotions	2	3.08	0.59
Effect of Remarriage	1	2.60	0
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	2.50	0.71
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	2.33	0.94
Nurturance in Step Relationship	2	2.33	0.71
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.30	0.42
Divided Loyalties	2	2.25	0.35
Self-Efficacy	2	2.17	1.18
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.10	0.32
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.08	0.59
Displacement of Elder Child	2	2.00	0.00
Social Support	2	2.00	0.71
Money Issues	2	1.97	0.52
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	1.90	0.42
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	1.83	0.24
Marital Happiness	2	1.83	0.71
Discipline by Stepparent	2	1.67	0.47
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	1.67	0.47
Visiting Stepchildren	2	1.62	0.53
Quality of Step Relationship	2	1.58	0.12
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	1.42	0.59
Stepfamily Satisfaction	0	0	0
Issues with Moving	0	0	0

## Couple Four

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	4.00	0.00
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	3.00	0.47
Nurturance in Step Relationship	1	3.00	0
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	2.87	0.53
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.58	0.12
Self-Efficacy	2	2.50	0.24
Stepfamily Satisfaction	2	2.33	0.47
Quality of Step Relationship	2	2.33	0.00
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.33	0.00
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.30	0.42
Displacement of Elder Child	2	2.25	0.35
Social Support	2	2.25	0.35
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	2.10	0.99
Unresolved Emotions	1	2.00	0
Discipline by Stepparent	2	2.00	1.41
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	2.00	0.00
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	1.83	0.71
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	1.67	0.47
Effect of Remarriage	1	1.67	0
Divided Loyalties	2	1.50	0.71
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	1.33	0.47
Marital Happiness	2	1.33	0.00
Money Issues	2	1.25	0.35
Issues with Moving	0	0	0
Visiting Stepchildren	0	0	0

## Couple Five

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	4.00	0.00
Stepfamily Satisfaction	0	3.75	0.35
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	3.00	0.00
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.42	0.25
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	2.33	0.94
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.33	1.41
Issues with Moving	0	2.25	0.35
Unresolved Emotions	2	2.08	0.82
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.04	0.41
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	2.00	1.41
Self-Efficacy	2	2.00	0.00
Nurturance in Step Relationship	2	2.00	0
Money Issues	2	1.83	1.18
Social Support	2	1.75	0.35
Displacement of Elder Child	2	1.58	0.12
Divided Loyalties	2	1.50	0.71
Effect of Remarriage	1	1.50	0
Marital Happiness	2	1.50	0.47
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	1.50	0.71
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	1.33	0.00
Discipline by Stepparent	2	1.25	0.35
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	1.20	0.00
Quality of Step Relationship	2	1.17	0.24
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	1.00	0.00
Visiting Stepchildren	0	0	0

## Couple Six

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Displacement of Elder Child	2	3.67	0.00
Divided Loyalties	2	3.33	0.94
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	3.22	1.10
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	3.20	0.28
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	3.17	1.18
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	3.17	0.24
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	3.15	1.21
Discipline by Stepparent	2	3.03	0.75
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	3.00	1.41
Nurturance in Step Relationship	2	2.89	0
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	2.83	0.24
Self-Efficacy	2	2.83	0.24
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.47	0.51
Money Issues	2	2.42	1.53
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	2.33	0.47
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	2.33	0.47
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.25	1.06
Marital Happiness	2	2.25	0.12
Social Support	2	2.25	1.06
Quality of Step Relationship	2	2.22	0.16
Effect of Remarriage	1	2.22	0
Stepfamily Satisfaction	0	2.00	0.47
Visiting Stepchildren	2	2.00	0
Unresolved Emotions	2	1.83	1.18
Issues with Moving	0	1.83	0.24

## Couple Seven

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	4.00	0.18
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	2.75	0
Social Support	2	2.75	0.35
Nurturance in Step Relationship	1	2.33	0
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.25	0.71
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	2.17	1.18
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.17	0
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.08	0.59
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	1.92	0.00
Money Issues	2	1.83	0.82
Displacement of Elder Child	2	1.75	1.06
Visiting Stepchildren	1	1.75	1.18
Effect of Remarriage	1	1.67	0.94
Self-Efficacy	2	1.67	0.35
Marital Happiness	2	1.58	0.57
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	1.50	0.35
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	1.40	0
Divided Loyalties	2	1.25	0.35
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	1.25	0.59
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	1.25	0.24
Stepfamily Satisfaction	0	1.17	0.24
Quality of Step Relationship	2	1.17	0.24
Discipline by Stepparent	2	1.12	0.18
Unresolved Emotions	2	1.00	0.00
Issues with Moving	1	1.00	0

## Couple Eight

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	4.00	0.00
Nurturance in Step Relationship	2	3.50	0
Stepfamily Satisfaction	2	3.17	1.18
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	3.00	0.71
Divided Loyalties	2	2.87	0.88
Issues with Moving	2	2.83	1.18
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	2.75	1.77
Visiting Stepchildren	2	2.67	1.89
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	2.60	1.41
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	2.54	0.29
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	2.50	1.18
Self-Efficacy	2	2.50	2.12
Money Issues	2	2.50	2.12
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.49	0.25
Quality of Step Relationship	2	2.42	0.12
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.37	0.88
Unresolved Emotions	1	2.33	0
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	2.33	0.24
Displacement of Elder Child	2	2.33	0.94
Social Support	2	2.25	0.35
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	2.17	0.24
Discipline by Stepparent	2	2.00	0.00
Marital Happiness	2	2.00	0.94
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	1.67	0.94
Effect of Remarriage	1	1.67	0

## Couple Nine

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	3.50	0.71
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	3.37	0.88
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.75	0.35
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	2.67	0.94
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	2.67	0.94
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.43	0.81
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.18	0.01
Unresolved Emotions	1	2.00	0
Marital Happiness	2	2.00	0.24
Social Support	2	2.00	0.00
Nurturance in Step Relationship	2	2.00	0
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	1.75	0.35
Money Issues	2	1.75	0.35
Stepfamily Satisfaction	2	1.67	0.94
Issues with Moving	2	1.67	0.94
Effect of Remarriage	1	1.67	0
Divided Loyalties	2	1.62	0.88
Self-Efficacy	2	1.58	0.12
Quality of Step Relationship	2	1.51	0.49
Displacement of Elder Child	2	1.50	0.24
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	1.40	0.28
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	1.33	0.47
Discipline by Stepparent	2	1.30	0.42
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	1.17	0.24
Visiting Stepchildren	0	0	0

## Couple Ten

Subscale	N	Mean	SD
Stepfamily Satisfaction	2	4.00	0.00
Relationship with Non-Res Bio Parent	2	4.00	0.00
Happiness with Stepfamily	2	3.80	0.00
Issues with Moving	2	3.33	0.47
Role Ambiguity of Stepparent	2	3.17	0.24
Displacement of Elder Child	2	3.00	0.00
Unresolved Emotions	2	2.83	1.18
Self-Efficacy	2	2.50	0.24
Social Support	2	2.50	0.71
Inhibited Leadership of Stepparent	2	2.44	0.16
Nurturance in Step Relationship	2	2.33	0
Power Issues in Remarriage	2	2.25	0.35
Mutual Suitability of Step Relationship	2	2.21	0.77
Bio Support of Stepparent	2	2.17	1.18
Quality of Bio Relationship	2	2.17	0.55
Bio-Alliance with Children	2	2.00	1.41
Discipline by Stepparent	2	1.99	0.33
Quality of Step Relationship	2	1.83	0.08
Money Issues	2	1.83	1.18
Divided Loyalties	2	1.67	0.47
Effect of Remarriage	1	1.67	0
Marital Happiness	2	1.67	0.47
Inclusion of Stepparent	2	1.50	0.71
Stepfamily Cohesion	2	1.50	0.24
Visiting Stepchildren	0	0	0



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- Zinker, J. (1977). *Creative process in gestalt therapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

## Vitae

Susan Marie Carter

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### Education

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan  
Ph.D. Counseling Psychology  
Specialty: Child and Adolescent Mental Health  
1998

Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan  
MA Counseling Psychology  
1994

Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan  
BA Spanish and French (with High Honors)  
1976

L'Universite du Tourain, Tours, France, 1976

El Colegio de las Madres Bethlemitas, Medellin, Colombia, 1972-1973

### Clinical Experience

#### Employment

Center for Change & Growth, P.L.C., *Psychological and Counseling Services*, Paw Paw, Michigan  
Owner and Practitioner (1994-present)  
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Treatment

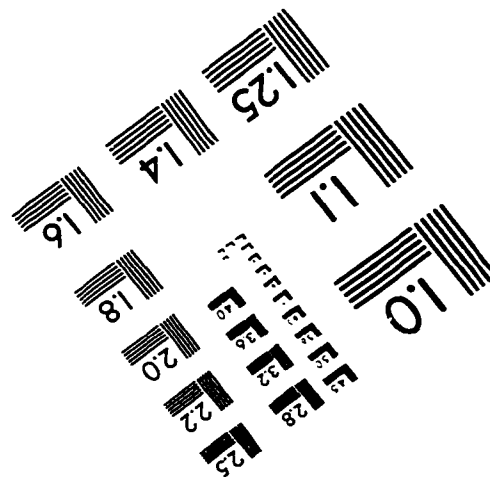
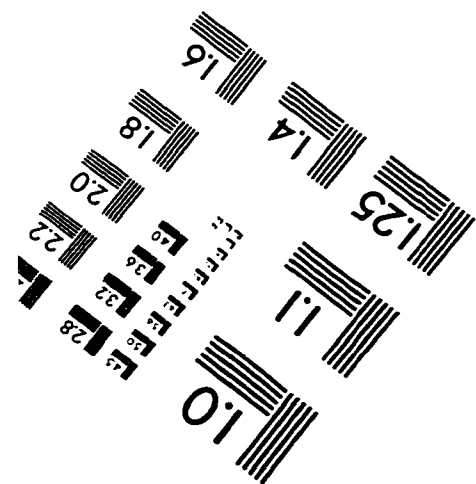
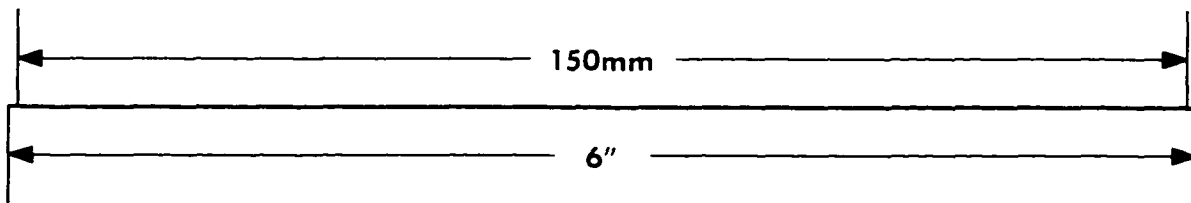
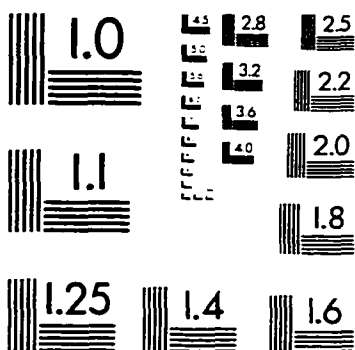
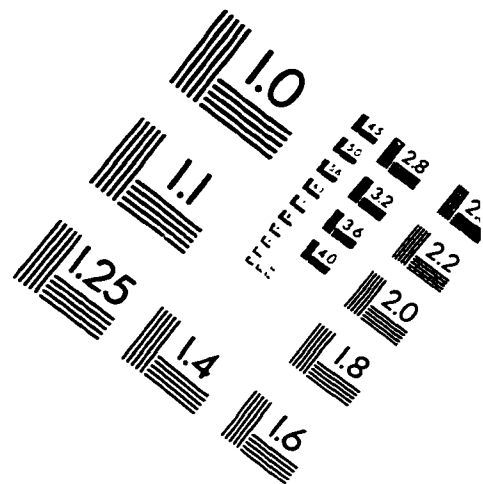
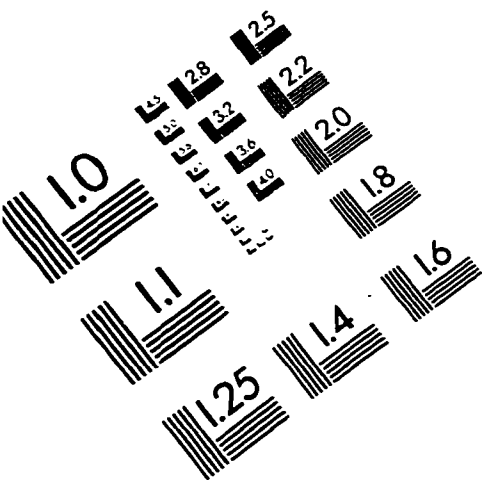
#### Training Sites

- Mercy Hospital, Behavioral Medicine Services, , Detroit, MI 1997-1998
- Pre-Doctoral Internship, 2000 hours, Children's Day Hospital and Out-Patient Services Center for Change & Growth, P.L.C., Paw Paw, MI (1994-present)
  - Doctoral Practicum, 1000 hours, children, adolescents, families, couples, adults.
- Andrews University, Counseling and Psychological Services Center (1995-1996)
- Doctoral Practicum, 500 hours, adolescents, couples, adults
- Van Buren County Community Mental Health (9/93-6/94)
- Masters Internship, 600 hours, children, adolescents, families, couples, adults.

### Professional Affiliations

American Psychological Association (Student) 1992-present  
American Counseling Association (Student) 1995-present  
Michigan Association of Professional Psychologists 1994-present  
Internal Family Systems Association (Charter Member) 1996-present

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