

**THE DIFFICULTIES OF STEPMOTHERHOOD:
A COMPARISON BETWEEN STEPMOTHERS WHO
HAVE NO CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN AND
STEMOTHERS WHO HAVE THEIR OWN CHILDREN.**

A thesis submitted to the Department of Psychology,
University of Cape Town, in fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology.

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"my first baby was born in Manhattan, where my husband and I were working for a year, and my obstetrician passed on to me the accumulated folk wisdom of the upper East Side. 'There will be times during the first three months when you'll want to flush the baby down the toilet. Perfectly normal! We've all been through it'. He was right, of course, but I wonder what he would have said if I had expressed a similar wish to wash my stepchildren out of sight".

Brenda Maddox 1975

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ABSTRACT

Relatively few studies have examined the difficulties of the stepmother, but research suggests that compared to other stepparents, stepmothers without their own children have the most difficult task. This preliminary study describes the difficulties of the stepmother by comparing two groups of stepmothers: those who have no experience of their own children, with those who have children of their own, either from a previous marriage or from their present marriage, or from both.

A convenience sample of thirty-one volunteers, who are full-time stepmothers, constituted the sample. Subjects were limited to white middle class South Africans. A two-part, semi-structured interview was conducted on each subject: Part one consisted of open-ended questions intended to provide an overall view of the particular circumstances of the stepmother, part two consisted of information elicited by means of psychometric testing. The McMaster Family Assessment Device is used to assess the family functioning and thereby investigate the difficulties of the stepmothers. The Rutter Child Behaviour Questionnaire is used to determine the range of behaviours with which the stepmother might need to cope. Information regarding the stepmother's early childhood relationships is elicited by means of the Adult Family Relations Test. After the interviews and tests had been

scored, the subjects were divided into two groups: One comprised of twelve stepmothers who had had no experience of mothering prior to their stepmother status; the other comprised of 19 stepmothers who had either one or two children of their own.

Statistical analysis was conducted on the scores derived from The Rutter Child Behavior Questionnaire (t-test) and The McMaster Family Assessment Device (Hotellings T²). The Family Relations Test was analysed by means of percentages and standard deviations. The demographic details were presented as percentages, and where applicable, Chi squared tests were conducted.

Findings suggest that stepfamily functioning in the situation where the stepmother has no children of her own is different and less healthy from that in the family where the stepmother has children of her own.

These results are largely consistent with the literature, but as regards the actual difficulties that contributed to the differences between these groups, findings remain tentative.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION.

1.1 Situating the Study

The earliest recorded descriptions of stepmothers are to be found in fairytales and myths of many different cultures. The stepmother is usually depicted as the ultimate bad or wicked mother: Snow White's narcissistic, jealous stepmother has her banished from her home, and later, with the intent of murder, has her poisoned. In the myths the stepmother's offspring are frequently also depicted as evil: Cinderella's stepsisters are ugly, to the point of deformity; they are lazy, selfish, lacking in empathy, and entirely overindulged. But while the stepmother is depicted in myths as the antithesis of the good mother, her stepchildren are depicted as suffering no later psychological trauma. They are seen as generally overcoming their hardships and living happily ever after. (Bettleheim, 1975).

The myth of the wicked stepmother has increasingly drawn the attention of a number of researchers, starting with the work of Deutsch (1944) and more recently Bettleheim (1975), Visher and Visher (1979) and Schulman (1981). While the fairytales end happily, in reality this is not always the

case with the stepfamily situation. According to Esther Wald (1981) and Willard and Gasser (1982), large numbers of stepfamilies in America are reported to be attending health facilities. While definitive statistics of the number of stepfamilies involved are as yet unavailable, with the rise in divorce rates in many countries, the remarried family is an ever-increasing phenomenon. Furthermore, Esther Wald (1981), found that the divorce rate among remarried families was 4% higher than the rate of divorce for first marriages. Wald's (1981) pilot study of remarried families revealed that stress between stepparent and stepchild, as well as between siblings, was the most frequently reported problem of stepparents.

With the notable exception of Price-Bonham and Balwick (1980), the majority of researchers consider stepmothering to be more problematic than stepfathering (Bohannon and Eriksen 1978, Duberman 1973 and Visser and Visser 1979). Bowerman and Irish (1962), in studying the relationships of stepchildren with their parents and stepparents, found affectional bonds between stepmothers and stepchildren were less close than the bonds between stepfathers and their stepchildren. They consider the stepmother's role to be less socially acceptable because of the myth of the wicked stepmother, and hence her role receives less support than does the stepfather's role. According to Lucille Duberman (1973), the stepmother has a more difficult role than does

the stepfather, for she is more likely to spend more time with her stepchildren.

Researchers furthermore consider that the stepmother without her own children has the more difficult role (Duberman 1973, Visher and Visher 1979). However, as Visher and Visher (1979) note, this finding is a result of impressions by clinicians working in the area, rather than as a result of formal research.

This study intends to examine both the extent and nature of the difficulties of stepmothering. That is, it will examine whether stepmothers do indeed commonly have difficulties in coping and will consider the areas in which these difficulties might lie. This will be done by comparing those stepmothers who have their own children with those who have no experience of children prior to their stepmother status.

1.2 Defining the Stepmother

The position of the stepmother arises from the death or divorce of the biological mother and the subsequent remarriage of the widowed or divorced father with a woman who may herself be a divorcee with children. Analogies may be drawn between the stepmother, the adoptive mother, and the foster mother, in that all three are non-biological stepmothers of children in their care (Williard and Gasser, 1982). Hence both foster mothers and stepmothers frequently act as substitute mothers to children whose biological mothers are still alive. This being the case, Willard and Gasser (1982) define the stepmother as

"the non-biological female parent of the child, excluding adoptive parents, foster parents and relatives" (page 245)

and so draw no distinctions between the three. However, unlike foster and adoptive mothers, the legal rights of stepmothers regarding their relationship with their stepchildren are unclear and tenuous. Upon the death of her husband, the stepmother has no automatic legal rights to custody of the stepchildren (Robinson, 1980). Indeed, Maddox (1975) states that the stepparent

"is someone who has married a parent" (page 32)

This is the defining characteristic of the stepmother and places her in a unique situation: In the case of children in adoptive families, foster families and stepfamilies, one or often two parents are absent. In the stepfamily however both the parents and the children have experienced the psychological loss of separation. (Visher and Visher, 1979).

Many authors have addressed the situation of the stepmother, usually from a historical or fictional viewpoint. As George and Wilding (1972) note, motherless families are not a new phenomenon. However, in the past, where there was a stigma attached to divorce, the motherless family, and subsequent stepmother situation arose largely from the death of the biological mother rather than from divorce. Indeed, the mortality rate for childbirth was high for both mothers and offspring. Figures for the number of stepmothers arising from the death of the biological mother are decreasing as the mortality rate decreases. Today, however, the stepfamily arises largely through the divorce of the original nuclear family. With the changes in legal practices, custody of the children in the event of divorce is no longer automatically given to the mothers, but may frequently be awarded to the fathers. Hence there is an increase in the number of stepmothers with the concomitant rise in the divorce rate (Bitterman, 1968 and Cherlin and McCarthy,

1974). Furthermore, George and Wilding (1972) consider that the extended family of the past contributed to alleviating the problems of a motherless family, whereas the predominantly nuclear family today is considered to provide little support for the single parent. (Beck and Beck, 1984).

1.3 Review of the Literature on Stepmotherhood.

Despite the increase in the phenomenon of the stepmother, and the reported difficulties with this position, a review of the literature reveals the need for further research into the area.

1.3.1 Stepfamilies have unresolved feelings from previous marriages.

Unlike the original family unit, the stepmother enters into an already established family with its own past, and the stepmother may herself have a past family history of divorce. As discussed by Schwartz (1968), Bitterman (1968) and Duberman (1973), stepfamilies have unresolved feelings from previous marriages which may be carried over into remarriage by both parents and children. A couple, once married and having had children together, are forever bound by their experience and through their children, making it difficult to begin a new family unit (Schwartz 1968). Upon remarriage the new partner must concurrently become a newly married person as well as a parent (Bitterman 1967). These factors must thus be taken into account in exploring the difficulties encountered in this regard.

It is only fairly recently that, marriage laws determined

that a couple wanting to terminate their marital union had to declare one partner guilty of a matrimonial offence. The guilty partner then became liable for the financial costs incurred in the legal process. As noted, custody of the children, was generally awarded to the mother (Lee et al, 1983). New legislation now allows a couple to divorce on the grounds of "irretrievable breakdown".

"If the relationship between parties has disintegrated to such an extent that there is no reasonable prospect of the re-establishment of a normal marriage relationship between them".

(Lee and Honore, 1983, p124).

Clearly the court is defining the term broadly and adultery is now just one of the many events which provide prima facie proof of such breakdown. (Lee and Honore, 1983).

This advance in legal practice has served to lessen the difficulty of obtaining a divorce. There is, however little indication that the psychological trauma suffered by the divorced person and their family has been substantially affected. (Hart, 1976)

1.3.1.1 The Problems of Adult's Adjustment to Divorce

As Barbara Thornes and Jean Collard (1979) note,

"since divorce on any sizable scale is relatively recent, little is actually known about the impact of divorce either upon marriage parties, their children or upon society." (page 6).

Recently a number of researchers have looked to the problems of divorce. According to Goode (1956), physical and emotional illness can follow divorce. Thomas and Collard (1979) note that suicide rates for divorcees are relatively high. Hart (1976) points out that divorce is more than just an experience of financial and social difficulties. Certainly, financial difficulties may beset the single parent family which is suddenly reduced to one income supporting two homes. The divorced person must however, also reorganise his/her entire network of interpersonal relationships. Hart's study examined motherless families both at the time of divorce and at intervals thereafter. It strongly indicates that although feelings about the divorce undergo a number of changes with time, the wounds are slow to heal: Loneliness and depression are feelings prevalent long after divorce. Price-Bonham and Balswick (1980) review the literature pertaining to divorce adjustment. Factors which are associated with poor post divorce adjustment are:

- (i) Not wanting to divorce.
- (ii) Having economic problems after divorcing.
- (iii) Although women with young children or a number of

children tend to become depressed after divorcing, men who do not have custody of their children experience more post divorce stress than do men who have custody of their children.

(iv) Being without a family and friends for support.

(v) Showing little interest in social participation.

If the husband of a stepmother has not fully adjusted to his divorce, these feelings of stress or depression will interfere with the marriage (Messinger et al 1978).

Furthermore, while some relationships between former spouses might be centered around friendship, often this relationship is fraught with tensions. Thoughts of reconciliation or hostility might be prevalent between ex-spouses. The examination of this relationship when considering the position of the stepmother's husband is essential, because such feelings exist between former spouses irrespective of the existence of a new attachment (Price-Bonham and Balwick, 1980). Such unresolved feelings would indeed place a strain on the subsequent remarriage of the wounded partner.

1.3.1.2 The Children of Divorce

Far more research has been conducted into the children of divorce. Anna Freud (1965) argues that the child's needs are paramount as it is in society's best interests to help a child become a future, capable parent.

The importance of adequate mothering for the development of the individual, and thus for society at large has been stressed by a number of psychological theorists, most notably by Bowlby (1973, 1979). In the case of divorce it may be assumed that the child has experienced a psychological loss (Rutter 1972, Goldstein et al 1973, Fraiberg 1959, Bowlby, 1953 and Winnicott 1971). Bowlby's research (1953) has revealed the often serious consequences of separation from a mother in a child's later emotional state and behaviour. The trauma of the separation may vary in individual cases, this depending on a number of factors: for example on the age of the child at the time of separation (Kalter and Rembat 1981) and on the nature of the relationship with the departed parent (Little 1982). In general, the younger the child at the time of separation from its mother, the more serious and lasting the effects. (Kalter and Rembat 1981). The stepmother's role may be most difficult when she is dealing with a child who manifests pathology (Fraiberg 1962, Ambinder et al 1962). Bowerman and Irish (1962) indicate that injury of the stepchild is done in the breaking up of the nuclear family rather than by later remarriage. Heilpern (1943) in "The Psychological Problems of the Stepchild", confirms the idea that one cannot look at the relationship of the stepchild and stepmother without considering the stepchild's past. Indeed, she concludes that the severity of the trauma a child can suffer before becoming a stepchild may be better

resolved by transferring the child away from the home entirely.

1.3.3.3 Death versus Divorce

There is some debate as to whether the death of a parent or whether divorce has a more serious effect on the family, and on the later stepfamily (Visher and Visher 1978). The sense of failure frequently accompanying the divorced person may be less prevalent in the case of death. For the child, the effect of separation due to death may be important but, as noted, this would be just one of a number of factors needing consideration. Bowerman and Irish (1962) found that children from divorced homes adjust less well to stepparents than to those who have lost a parent by death. They point out, however, that this finding is extremely tentative due to the difficulty of isolating all the extraneous variables such as the nature of their previous mothering experience. Visher and Visher (1978) note that while competition between a mother who is still alive and a stepmother may be painful, competition with a dead mother who is perceived as a saint may be impossible for the stepmother. It cannot be said, therefore, that the death of a spouse makes stepparenting easier.

1.3.1.4 The Length of Time Separating Divorce and Remarriage

Another important fact to be considered is the length of time which separates the break up of the nuclear family and the subsequent remarriage. (Messinger et al, 1978). While this period may never be long enough to resolve the feelings of the breakup, the single parent family may develop patterns of functioning to cope with the situation. Hence in the case of a lengthy period of time separating the break up and remarriage, an older daughter may assume a role of substitute mother to siblings, thus alienating the subsequent stepmother. (Messinger et al, 1978).

It is clear from the above that when exploring the difficulties of stepmotherhood considerations of the preceding families histories is essential: Most important, there is the question of whether the break up of the family was due to death or divorce (Visher and Visher, 1978, Bowlby, 1953, Little, 1982); the age of the children at the time of the separation; the period separating the divorce and subsequent remarriage; (Messinger et al, 1978, Bowerman and Irish, 1962) and the culminating resultant behaviour of the stepchild. Whether the stepmother has her own past family history of divorce is also important, for a very complex set of relations exist for the stepmother in this situation (Wallerstein, 1972). Experience of motherhood

may, however, stand her in good stead when remarrying (Shulman, 1981). Aside from the effects of the families' pasts, further difficulties arise once a woman becomes a stepmother. The stepfamily today is structured in the same way as is the biological family, although there are a number of important differences between the two (Visher and Visher, 1979).

1.3.2 The Evolvement of the Stepfamily

1.3.2.1 Onset

From the onset, the evolvement of the stepfamily differs from the normal development of the biological family (Visher and Visher, 1979). Unlike the process whereby the nuclear family develops out of a relationship between two people, the stepfamily becomes instantly involved, both instrumentally and emotionally (Maddox, 1975). Even during courtship, children may make a one to one relationship difficult to establish. (Booth et al, 1984) and the honeymoon may be fraught with anxiety surrounding the children (Visher and Visher, 1979). The stepmother without children of her own has no time to adjust to motherhood through pregnancy, and this may further complicate matters (Deutsch, 1944).

Raphael-Leff (unpublished paper), in researching mothering styles, stresses the role of pregnancy in the future interaction between mother and child. While not all mothers come to terms with motherhood during pregnancy it is a time in which a woman may relive the Oedipal progression from a dyadic to triadic relationship, and thus work through her own relationships she had as a child with her parents (Chodorow, 1978). This work prepares the mother for her future role, and helps her develop a relationship with her children (Benedek, 1956). For the stepmother without children of her own, such an opportunity is not available. On the other hand, the stepmother who has children of her own may quickly and without regret, overcome the problems elicited by such an instantaneous rearrangement of the family (Deutsch, 1944). Stepsibling rivalry may, however, contribute further difficulties to her situation (Duberman, 1973).

1.3.2.2 Financial difficulties

Financial difficulties may beset the couple who must immediately bear the added cost of having a family while setting up home (Weiss, 1984). Indeed, Bachrach (1983), in comparing children from biological, step and adopted families, found them similar in most demographical details except in regard to finances, where the stepfamily was found to be the worst off economically.

**1.3.2.3 The Stepfamily and its similarity
 to the nuclear family**

Visher and Visher (1979) are amongst researchers who consider that the problems that the stepfamily must deal with are often the same as those found in most other families, but that they are merely exacerbated by added pressures. Schulman (1972) suggests that although all stepmothers have difficulties, they do all share certain characteristics making them vulnerable to experiencing problems. In all situations complex emotional interactions must be quickly established and old destructive patterns may need to be given up (Visher and Visher, 1979). Emotionally the stepfamily may have great difficulty in adjusting (Maddox, 1975). Unlike the original nuclear family, where love between members in the family may be taken for granted, this cannot be assumed in the stepfamily (Visher and Visher, 1978). For the stepmother, the lack of a secure relationship with her stepchildren may render discipline problematic (Schulman, 1981). Furthermore, the stepmother must consider the biological father's attitudes to the disciplining of his children, while wishing also to satisfy her own standards. The stepmother without children of her own may find this area particularly difficult, especially if the stepchild is an adolescent (Fraiberg 1962).

1.3.2.4 Role difficulties

As mentioned, stepmothering is considered more difficult than stepfathering. This is largely attributed to the stereotypic nurturing role of the mother in a society where the nuclear family predominates (Bowerman and Irish 1962, Shulman 1972, Fanshel 1986, Duberman 1973). The stepmother may be expected to assume the role of substitute mother to the children as well as having to do the general household duties, and may also have a career of her own. Once again the stepmother with children of her own would fare better having experienced such a position before.

Many researchers have devoted their attentions to the role difficulties encountered by the stepmother. As Visser and Visser (1979), Fast and Cain (1966) and Schulman (1972) note, there are many myths surrounding the stepmother, but no clearly articulated understanding of her role. Indeed, as will later be considered, these myths may hamper her role. Fast and Cain (1966) argue that

"The role definition of the stepparent in this society is both poorly articulated and implies the contradictory functions of "parent", "stepparent" and "non-parent". (page 486)

The stepparent is discouraged from taking the role of "stepparent" by the myth of the wicked stepparent, and the role of the "parent" is encouraged, although legally

denied, which results in the stepparent also being a "non-parent". The question of how much to be a "parent"? thus remains unanswered. This is further complicated in the case of a stepparent whose position arose subsequent to divorce rather than subsequent to the death of a spouse. In the former instance, the stepmother could not assume the role of substitute mother, as the biological mother would remain a central figure in the child's life. Draughon (1975), who also considers that a major contribution to the difficulties encountered by a stepmother is the conflicting roles she must assume, extends this notion: She suggests that the stepmother assumes a role which is structured by her step-child's needs. She may act as a "primary mother" when the child is dependent on her; as "other-mother" if the child has a mother; and as "friend" if the child is dependent on the other mother. But Draughon notes that the role of the "other mother" does not seem beneficial in any of the case studies examined, and may, indeed, be a poor model to adopt when dealing with stepchildren. As noted, however, today divorce is most frequently the root of the family breaking up, and hence the "other mother" role may frequently or necessarily be adopted by the stepmother, regardless of the difficulties involved. It is thus strongly suggested that role difficulties may be central to the stepmother's problems.

1.3.2.5 The Myths surrounding stepmotherhood

As mentioned above problems may be exacerbated by the myths surrounding the role of the stepmother. As Box (1979) demonstrates, a myth may be used as a front by family members to defend against an avoided theme. Deutsch (1944) notes furthermore, that the myth of the wicked stepmother must unconsciously effect the woman who later becomes a stepmother. Visher and Visher (1979) consider that aside from the myth of the wicked stepmother, there are a number of current myths which seem particularly important when working with stepfamilies. Some of these are: Stepfamilies are nuclear families; death of a spouse makes stepparenting easier; stepchildren are easier when not living in the home; love happens instantly. (Strictly speaking these are not myths, but commonly held beliefs about stepparenting which have no evidential basis. For our purposes, however, they amount to the same thing).

As discussed earlier, stepfamilies cannot be seen as stereotypical nuclear families, and the death of a spouse may not necessarily make stepparenting easier. Regarding the assertion that stepchildren are easier when not living at home, Visher and Visher (1979) point out that it may be more difficult to deal with problem behaviours in a constructive way when a child has another home. In this instance, the issue of whose child it is, and of who will

take responsibility for the child may lead to emotional problems. Stepchildren's difficulties in the area of loyalties may be exaggerated by a part-time arrangement. Brenda Maddox (1975) concludes that there is no such thing as a part-time stepmother.

Regarding the myth of the wicked stepmother, Bruno Bettelheim (1976) describes the psychoanalytical connotations of this decidedly wicked woman. He considers that, rather than being an accurate appraisal of a stepmother, the wicked stepmother epitomises the 'bad' mother. By being unrelated to the 'good mother', the stepmother is a convenient literary tool used to preserve the image of the good mother and hence the child need not be devastated by experiencing the good mother as being capable of such evil. As Visher and Visher (1979) state, however, fairies do not exist, but stepmothers do. Hence, the myth of the wicked stepmother has real significance.

A number of authors refer to the pressures placed on the stepmother by her own idea of the wicked stepmother, and by those around her accusing her of being one, (Cooper 1979, Schulman 1981, Visher and Visher 1979, Maddox 1976), Deutsch (1944) holds that the effect of the wicked stepmother myth cannot be underestimated. For children, fairy tales stimulate fantasy activity, providing an outlet for unconscious impulses. When the stepmother

enters the life of a child, these impulses no longer have an outlet and may lead to conflict.

Freud described the family romance as being a common child fantasy in middle childhood. Children feeling frustrated and threatened by their parents, have the conscious fantasy that their parents are not their true parents, but their adoptive or stepparents. This fantasy represents a brief stage, and once children have resolved the normal ambivalent feelings towards their parents, they will generally abandon it (Freud 1977). But for the stepchild, this is not a fantasy. He/she has two sets of parents and, as Swartz (1970) outlines, may in extreme cases continue to focus all positive feelings on the fantasised "good" natural parents, and all negative feelings on the stepparents. In his study of adoptive children, however, Swartz (1979) found no evidence of these dynamics. Nevertheless, adoptive and stepparents cannot be considered in the same light. The stepmother, as Deutsch (1944) notes, herself has feelings and fantasies from her early life, which must become involved in her later position of stepmother. Hence is the potential to become the wicked stepmother ever present.

Schulman (1972) has done a more detailed examination of how the myths of the wicked stepmother, and that of instant love, intrude on the adaption of the stepfamily. He notes

that the myth of instant love, when found to be untrue, may leave the stepmother and stepchildren hurt and rejected, and facilitate the occurrence of the myth of the wicked stepmother. Schulman (1972) notes further that there are some cases in which this has occurred, and in doing so he highlights the psyche of the stepmother herself. He notes that it is by no means true that all stepmothers have serious problems, and argues that if the woman who marries a man with a child has sufficient ego strength and has the genuine support of a husband, the stepmother-stepchild relationship can grow into a mutually enriching and satisfying one.

1.3.3 The Stepmothers Psychological Make-Up

Thus far the stepmother's psychological make-up has not been considered, and little research has been done in this regard, some researchers ignore this aspect altogether.

Draughon (1975) argues that the stepchild's varying needs for dependency can structure the stepmother's ambivalent role, and thereby alleviate her own difficulties. Research revealed however, that the role choice in terms of the child's dependency needs was frequently inappropriate. She argues that this is because the stepmother opted for a socially acceptable role rather than structuring her role on the needs of the stepchild. One could argue, however,

that few stepmothers may be capable of adopting an appropriate role. As Deutsch (1944) points out, a great deal of maturity is required of the stepmother - that is, there must exist a less infantile transference of her own primary mother relationship. The stepmother may carry an unresolved infantile transference into her new relationship which would affect her ability to be able to adopt the role most appropriate. It is clear that in an adequate explanation psychological factors cannot be ignored.

In keeping with Deutsch's view on the psychology of women, and with psychoanalytical theory in general (Freud 1977), one must examine the stepmother's past as well as her present situation in order to understand her difficulties. According to Deutsch (1944), the act of becoming a stepmother may be profoundly determined by the past. Deutsch (1944) holds that the stepmothers early childhood relations contribute to her difficulties.

1.4 Theoretical Viewpoints on Stepmotherhood

In reviewing the literature, two theoretical approaches to understanding the stepmother have been postulated: Fast and Cain (1966) adopt the role theory perspective; Helene Deutsch (1944), the classical psychoanalytic viewpoint.

1.4.1 The Role Theory Perspective on the Stepmother.

Parsons and Bales (1955) describe role theory as centering on the functioning of the family and on the families place in the structure of society. However, the original theory of Parsons and Bales (1955), writing as they were within the functionalist paradigm, has undergone considerable revision. Indeed, Parsons has subsequently turned to the structural-functionalist viewpoint and has focused on the relationship between sociology and psychoanalysis, in an attempt to draw the two disciplines together. More recently, Biddle (1979) defines the role theory as

"a science concerned with the study of behaviours that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain or are affected by these behaviors."

(page 4).

Biddle (1979) discusses the key concepts of the theory as being those of behaviours, roles, social positions, expectations, the context in which the role is being played, the effect or function of that role and, lastly, the social system. Biddle (1979) notes that thus far the theory has had no formal criteria to enable one to define these terms specifically, as different theorists stress different aspects. Although there is much debate surrounding the basic notions of the theory, the theory according to Biddle, Twyman and Rankin (1968) is concerned with the cognitions held about the characteristics common to persons and groups of people, which are called positions, and is concerned with the effect which cognitions and positions have on each other. Discrepancies between positions and cognitions are referred to as role conflicts, and are seen as the root of problems. Roles are considered to be performed in the family by each member. The infant, in time, learns role behaviours deemed appropriate for it's

sex, social, ethnic group and social positions. These behaviours are learnt through a variety of means, for example, by role playing or by role taking, (here the theory incorporates behaviouristic principles). These learnt behaviours become internalised, (here the theory incorporates phenomenal and cognitive theories), and thus, the individual develops a self concept that is composed of a set of role expectations to be assumed in different social contexts. As a result of role conflicts a person might be subjected to incompatible role expectations and as a result be required to behave in conflicting ways. He or she would be suffering role overload (Biddle and Thomas, 1966).

Fast and Cain, (1966), utilising role theory as a model, have examined disturbances in stepfamily functioning. They consider problems in stepfamilies to vary in degree, but to be inevitable, since the role definition or position of the stepparent is poorly articulated. As mentioned, the cognitions surrounding the concept of the stepparent imply contradictory functions of "parent", "stepparent" and "non-parent". According to Fast and Cain (1966) clinical examples indicate that to resolve conflicts, stepparents either adopt one role or opt for a combination of all three. All these options, however, lead to role conflict, which they contend is manifested in the family functioning. Fast and Cain (1966) conclude that the cure for the

stepfamily cannot lie in approximating the nuclear or extended family, but in forming a role for the stepparent based on a completely alternative approximation.

It can thus be noted that role theory considers it possible to change the role by outlining alternatives. Presumably these can be taught to stepparents. Biddle (1979) mentions that role theorists hold the premise that the subject is aware of expectations, and she is viewed as rational and thus able to change these expectations.

It is clear from the above that role theory provides a sociological and rationalistic explanation. Biddle (1979) stresses the distinction between Role Theory, and Behaviorism Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis and Marxism, but holds that role theory is eclectic and incorporates all these theories.

In terms of definition, the area of adequate role expectations is considered the most problematic aspect of the theory. Individual and shared expectations, and overt and covert expectations, are among the categories. Biddle (1979) argues that covert expectations are central in understanding roles and role conflicts. This might suggest that the theory incorporates Psychoanalysis, but role theorists, while claiming to account for dynamic factors, deny the existence of the unconscious or of any other

hypothetical constructs of the mind. As noted, they believe that subjects are aware of their expectations, but that this remains a controversial area due only to the lack of empirical support. Empirical support is viewed as sufficient evidence for already adequate theoretical propositions. Biddle (1979) outlines some serious criticisms of the theory, but argues that the theory has broad appeal and since it can contribute to alleviating human misery, it must be applied despite its lack of integration.

1.4.2 The Psychoanalytic Perspective on the Stepmother.

Fundamental to all psychoanalytic theories is the acceptance of the unconscious, the effects of which are pervasive and manifest in the symbolic life of the individual and in the individual's behaviour. The theory thus stresses the individual's past as a primary determinant of behaviour. Hence, in examining the psychology of the stepmother, an analysis of her development is essential. (Deutsch, 1944).

According to Deutsch (Deutsch, 1944; Fleiss, 1984), women are motivated to mother by their past. She considers that in development, girls, unlike boys, negotiate their Oedipal phase by adding their father to their world of primary objects and thus defining themselves in a relational triangle. This Oedipal triangle lasts through the girl's development. Therefore a woman's relation to a man requires

a third person for emotional asymmetry, since it was originally established in a triangle. Hence a woman being a mother completes the relational triangle, and she achieves emotional satisfaction. As Chodrow (1978) notes, it is "psychologically logical" for a woman to have a family and the development of women thus perpetuates their sex roles of the primary care-takers of children.

According to Deutsch (Deutsch, 1944; Fleiss, 1984), while women are driven by unconscious motives to mother, the mother-child relationship, once acquired, recreates the mother's infancy - that is recreates the primary relationship she had with her own mother. Thus a crucial determinant of a mother's functioning is the quality of maternal nurture she herself experienced through infancy to adolescence, and is a major contributing factor in her capacity for mothering (Walker, 1971). Research in the area of foster mothering strongly suggests the importance of the foster mother's psychological make-up for her capacity to mother (Babcock, 1965; Fanshel, 1986; Senzel and Yeakel, 1969-70; Solomon, 1969; and Walker, 1971).

While factors in the history of the stepmother overdetermine her motivation and capacity to stepmother,

Deutsch (1944) stresses that

"the stepmother must not be considered an isolated phenomenon; we must try to understand her psychology from the point of view of the relationships between her and the rest of the family"

(page 438).

Becoming a stepmother may be profoundly determined by past experience, but the development of stepmotherhood may be as determined by the choice of a husband and by the stepchildren's psychology. This is, for example, the case when a stepmother is strongly motivated to mother so as to regain a primary relationship, and is thus attracted to a man who has orphaned children so as to become a mother instantly. The husband may, however, have married as he himself wished to be mothered. Such a couple risk inducing the stepchild's jealousy due to the nature of their loving relationship. The stepmother facing rejection from the "orphaned children" may turn into the wicked stepmother. On the other hand, if the husband was attracted to the stepmother because he desired a mother for his children, this difficulty may not arise, and the stepmother may fulfil her wishes of mothering.

Deutsch's view is best illustrated by case studies, since it involves an in-depth appraisal of the entire stepfamily, as factors are over-determined. This view has been subject

to criticism both from within psychoanalytic theory and from without: On the one hand, Mitchell (1974) considers Deutsch to resort too frequently to biologisms, on the other hand, Bowerman and Irish (1962) demand experimental evidence. Ackerman (1956) suggests that a demonstration of dynamic interplay between the factors of the past and present is necessary in order to frame further questions.

Since one cannot observe the unconscious itself, but only its effects, the validity of the theory does not and cannot rest on empirical evidence but on its ability to explain phenomena. Indeed, Freud considered clinical evidence to be more important than experimentation (Misiak and Sexton, 1966).

Both theories use the term "role", but it is clearly used in different ways. As regards study of the stepmother, the role theorists stress circumstantial difficulties with the role, while the psychoanalytic viewpoint asserts that the stepmother's past is an important consideration. This highlights the need for research to be theoretically founded if we hope to understand the complexities involved.

However, since the study of stepmothering is in its early stages, this study is primarily of a descriptive nature.

1.5 Summary of the Literature

The aforementioned literature reflects the lack of sufficient research into stepmotherhood. As mentioned, large numbers of stepfamilies are reported to be attending health facilities (Willard and Gasser, 1982) and clearly there is a need for such research. In order to formulate adequate criteria for the therapy of stepmothers, it is necessary to clarify those factors which contribute to difficulties. Furthermore, the importance of adequate mothering to the well-being of the individual, and thus for society at large, cannot be underestimated. Walker (1971) demonstrates the importance of the foster mother's functioning as a variable in the psychological well-being of the foster child; and Draughon (1975) suggests that the stepmother's role is equally critical to the stepchild's development.

It seems reasonably clear that stepmothering is a unique role which presents particular difficulties of a wide and varying nature. Studies of stepmothers have yielded many suggestions regarding the exact nature of these difficulties but few provide anything more than tentative conclusions. It appears that important problem areas are those of the stepchild-stepmother dyad, as well as the stepmothers own past and present circumstances. Regarding the stepchild=stepmother dyad, the stepchild's own

psychological difficulties may contribute to those of the stepmother, as may her own experience of children affect her ability to cope with her own stepchild. These tentative observations need further examination.

1.6 Criticisms

As can be seen, studies of stepfamilies have been of a largely descriptive nature. This raises two important criticisms: Firstly, Willard and Gasser (1982), from within the empirical paradigm, note that much of the research has involved subjects from clinical populations. This is due, in part, to the apparent reluctance of stepparents to openly acknowledge their relationship to the children in their care (Visher and Visher 1979). A common experience among organisers of meetings of stepparents is to have poor attendance. This is a sharp contrast to similar meetings arranged for a variety of other parent issues. One could hypothesize that the myths prevalent about wicked stepparents and the family romance contribute to the wish of stepparents to remain anonymous. Both stepmothers and stepfathers who attend clinics for psychological help have been noted to present their stepchildren as the problem and to attribute the stepchild's problem to biological or environmental situations rather than to their own management (Willard and Gasser, 1982). While highlighting the difficulties of investigating the problems of stepparents such studies cannot be, for the reliability, generalized, as they are limited to a clinical population.

Secondly, there is the criticism that the majority of studies have been lacking in theoretical input. Kuhn (1962)

and Feyerabend (Marx and Goodson, 1976), drawing examples from physics, have shown that while there are instances where fact and theory may be relatively autonomous, perceptions are always intertwined with concepts. Empirical studies devoid of a clear theoretical framework have little explanatory value, remaining at the level of description.

1.7 Rationale.

Due to the general paucity of research into stepmotherhood, many questions seek to be answered. Research done in the area reveals that stepmothering has more difficulties than stepfathering, and, that a stepmother with her own children, either from a previous marriage, or from a new marriage, has less difficulties than the stepmother who has never experienced mothering. Although reasons for these findings have been postulated, these must be regarded as tentative. Hence this research will describe the factors which contribute to the difficulties of stepmotherhood. This will be done by comparing those stepmothers who have their own children with those who do not, hoping to thereby better understand the findings of previous work.

As indicated in the foregoing review, a great deal of research has examined the psychology of the stepchild. The stepchild is assumed to have suffered the psychological loss of separation. As a consequence of factors such as the stepchild's age at the time of separation, and the nature of such separation, the stepchild may manifest a variety of behavioural or emotional disorders. The period of time separating divorce and the new marriage may also have important consequences for the stepchild's behaviour. Thus might

an extended period with the establishment of a close father/child unit result in the stepchild being unwilling to accept a newly constituted family. These features of the stepchild's past do not account for all the possible factors affecting behaviour, but serve to demonstrate that the stepchild may manifest disturbed behaviour patterns. Clearly a stepchild with behavioural problems will strain the stepfamily functioning, contributing to the stepmother's difficulties. Indeed, research reveals that

"Typically a stepfamily comes into the clinical setting with maternal complaints regarding a problem child".

(Willard and Gasser, 1982, page 243).

Stepsibling rivalry may further contribute to difficulties in a stepchild's behaviour. As such, one would expect that the stepchild from a stepfamily where the stepmother has no children of her own will manifest less behavioural or emotional disturbances.

However, while the stepchild's behaviour may be a major contributing factor to the stepfamilies functioning, evidence suggests that the psychology of the stepmother may be equally important. As noted above the stepmother

with children of her own often has less difficulties, notwithstanding stepsibling rivalry.

Of great concern in the literature is the question of the stepmother's role as regards her stepchild's development. (Duberman, 1973). Willard and Gasser (1982) consider that the stepchild's problems may be a result of the stepmother's attitudes. Research into foster families reveals that foster mothers vary in their ability to act as substitute mothers (Walker, 1971 and Fanshel, 1966). It is postulated that this is also the case in stepmothering. The factors differentiating stepmother's ability to mother have thus far, however, not been successfully identified. For example, Willard and Gasser (1982) found that the only difference in the maternal attitudes of stepmothers and biological mothers, as measured by the Hereford Parent Attitude Survey, lay in stepmothers attributing their stepchild's difficult behaviours to environmental causes rather than to their own management of the stepchild.

We have seen that Deutsch (1944) considers a woman's capacity and motivation to mother to be rooted in her past. In the case of stepmotherhood, there is no normal introduction to the child through pregnancy and birth, and as a result, the normal parent child dynamics of the relationship have not been negotiated since the stepchild has had another mother. A great deal of maturity is thus

required of the stepmother; that is, there must exist a less infantile transference of her own primary mother relationship (Deutsch, 1944). One may therefore postulate that the stepmother's view of her early relations with her mother will be an important variable for her functioning as a stepmother. It would be expected that in the case of the stepmother without her own children one would find less maturity, as she would not have had the opportunity to work through her early relations with her mother through pregnancy and nurturing of an infant.

As noted, Faust and Cain (1966) consider that the stepmother's difficulties are inevitable, as the role definition of stepparent is unarticulated. According to Draughon (1975), the appropriate management of the stepchild can alleviate both the difficulties of the stepchild and provide structure to the stepmother's role, thereby reducing her difficulties. Hence we would expect that the major area of stepfamily dysfunctioning would be that of roles and behaviour control. One could further hypothesize that, for the stepmother without her own children, there would be more difficulties in both these areas than there would be for the stepmother with her own children.

In comparing stepmothers on the basis of their experience of mothering, the stepchildren's behaviour, and the stepmothers early family relations and present

difficulties, by no means exhaust the variables we might postulate as being associated with the difficulties of stepmotherhood. These are however, hypothesized as being major features of the difficulties of stepmothers and hence are the focus of this research. Details concerning the stepmother's present circumstances will also be gathered.

As we have seen in the review of the literature, there are factors in the present circumstances of the stepmother which reflect the difficulties of stepmothering. The stepfamily might experience the extra financial burden of supporting both a wife and providing for an ex-wife. Clearly financial problems will place an added strain on the stepfamilies functioning. The number of stepchildren a stepmother has may affect her ability to cope. Whether or not a stepmother also has a career might be a relevant factor. In South Africa, where white families frequently employ domestic help, the stepmother without such help may be at a disadvantage in coping. As noted earlier, the age of the stepmother and that of her stepchildren may be of importance in her ability to cope. A stepmother's contact with the biological mother of her stepchildren and her contact with extended family could effect her relations with her stepchildren and husband. As earlier postulated, the recent divorce history of the stepfamily might be of significance. In comparing the

two groups of stepmothers these details may highlight important considerations and hence will be looked to.

Results will be discussed in the light of the debate raised by the empirical studies that stepmothers without their own children have the most difficult role of all stepparents.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

A two-part, semi-structured interview was conducted with each stepmother. Part one of the interview consisted of open-ended questions intended to provide an overall view of the particular circumstances of the stepmother (note appendix 2). Part two of the interview involved eliciting information by means of psychometric testing to be outlined in detail. The interview took place in the stepmother's own home for several reasons:

-it would be most likely to facilitate a relaxed atmosphere necessary to allow possibly painful and personal information to be shared with a stranger.

- it would alleviate transport and baby-sitting difficulties of some subjects.

-and it would make possible the gathering of information not available outside the home environment.

2.1 Subjects.

A convenience sample of thirty-one volunteers, who were full-time stepmothers, constitute the sample. After obtaining data from the subjects, the sample was divided into two groups: twelve stepmothers who had no children of their own, and nineteen stepmothers who had one or more children of their own, either from a previous marriage, or from their present marital union, or both.

To reduce the number of variables which might account for differences between the two groups, an effort was made to control for several factors in selecting the sample. Excluded from the study were stepmothers with part time stepchildren, (stepchildren living with their natural mothers) which, as noted, may raise different problems for stepmothers. Because it was believed that ethnic and environmental experience should be relatively similar among the study subjects, the sample was limited to predominately English speaking Caucasians in the Cape Town area. For the purpose of assessment, as dictated by The Child Behaviour Questionnaire, the stepchildren had to be between the ages of seven and twelve. The Child Behaviour Questionnaire is reliable only for the middle years of childhood, it thus excludes adolescence.

With regard to educational background, working and

financial status, no control was incorporated but these details were recorded to be considered as variables in the study. Research was restricted to Cape Town, thus the geographical location of subjects was similar.

As outlined in the introduction, previous research indicated that subjects would be difficult to obtain. Subjects were obtained in the following manner:

- (a) An advertisement was placed in a local newspaper asking for the cooperation of stepmothers.
- (b) A letter was sent via the children attending two co-ed private schools, requesting that should they know of or indeed are full-time stepmothers could they contact the author (note appendix 1).
- (c) Stepmothers contacted by either of the above means, were asked after being interviewed whether they knew of further possible subjects who were then contacted by telephone.

Most stepmothers once contacted, were willing to participate in the study. Two stepmothers refused, giving as reasons their husbands unwillingness for them to participate. Five stepmothers had to be rejected as they did not fulfil the requirements, either being part time stepmothers or having stepchildren older than twelve.

However, as was found by previous research, stepmothers preferred to remain anonymous, indicated by the few responses received from (a) and (b). Thus difficulties in obtaining possible subjects was experienced, but little difficulty was experienced in getting those contacted to participate.

After the interviews, the stepmothers were divided into groups depending on whether they had children of their own or not.

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 **McMaster Family Assessment Device - Version 3 (FAD).**

This instrument was designed by Epstein, Baldwin and Bishop (1983) to evaluate family functioning. The fifty-three item paper and pencil questionnaire (note appendix 7) is filled out by individual family members and average scores provide an index of family functioning along several dimensions: Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement, Behaviour Control and General Functioning. Problem solving examines the family's ability to identify and resolve problems in both instrumental and affective areas. Communications refers to the transmitting of verbal messages, clear and direct verbal messages are considered effective communication. Roles are the behaviours necessary to ensure the provision of both the instrumental and affective means of family members. Affective responsiveness refers to the ability of the family members to respond with appropriate feelings to a range of stimuli. Affective Involvement is the amount of concern family members have for each other. Behaviour control concerns the family's standard of behaviour and how these are maintained. General Functioning examines the family's overall health/pathology. The authors stress that

the instrument is designed to be a screening instrument only and that

"family functioning is much more related to transactional and systematic properties of the family system than to intrapsychic characteristics of individual family members."

(page 171, Epstein, Baldwin and Bishop, 1983)

The device thus assesses a wide variety of functions. Upon standardisation, it was found to distinguish healthy and non-healthy families: Healthy being defined as appropriate functioning so as to co-operate in a flexible manner if necessary; unhealthy being defined as an inability to solve problems. A score of 1 represents healthy functioning while a score of 4 represents unhealthy family functioning.

Findings thus far suggest the device to be both valid and reliable. The seven scales are not independent of each other but as Epstein, Baldwin and Bishop (1983) state, problems in family functioning are never independent - if, for instance, communications in a family are impaired this will effect other areas such as their behaviour control. Reliability between the seven scales is high. Validity of the test is also high although future research is being planned in this

area. This device has not been standardised for use in South Africa, however as the sample of this study is restricted to English speaking white stepmothers in the Cape Town area who closely approximate western culture, it was considered applicable. The device has been used for research in South Africa by Saayman and Saayman (1985), although these authors make no comment regarding the devices reliability in the South African context.

The questionnaire was filled in separately by the stepmother and husband only. No contact between the couples was allowed while they were completing the questionnaire. An average of their scores was taken as the final measure. It is indicated that the reliability of the test is thus maintained. As the device does not assess the intrapsychic characteristics of individual family members, the instrument was used to assess family functioning while not precluding or including the associated factors to be examined. While stepmother's difficulties may not necessarily be the same as the family's difficulties, the family functioning would include her problems and thus it is the family functioning which was used to gauge her difficulties. As the test includes a wide area of family functioning it was further able to indicate the aspect of family functioning in which difficulties lay. Hence it was considered most suitable.

2.2.2 The Child Behaviour Questionnaire.

This questionnaire for parents is a screening instrument which differentiates pre-adolescent children between the ages of seven and twelve with emotional or behavioural disorders from those without and was developed by Rutter (1970).

The scale has three sections: the first consists of eight problems such as "complains of headaches"; the second consists of five questions dealing with the sleeping patterns of the child; the third consists of eighteen brief descriptions regarding the child's behaviour (note appendix 8). Individual items are scored and when summed provide an index of behaviour with a range of 0 - 62: 0 indicating no disorders; 62 indicating highly disordered behaviour. Children with a total score of thirteen or more are designated to show some disorder. Further, the scale may be used to differentiate neurotic from antisocial disorders. It was decided, however, that since the stepmother is the focus of this study, this distinction would be superflous. Findings which record reliability and validity strongly suggest that the questionnaire may be employed as a screening instrument to select children likely to show emotional or behavioral disorders. The instrument has not been standardised for use in South

Africa, but has been used successfully by clinicians on the white South African population and in research by Saayman and Saayman (1985).

The instrument, a standardised means of describing a child's behaviour, was completed by both the stepmother and her husband together for each of the stepchildren. In the case of more than one stepchild, the score of the stepchild with the most disordered behaviour was taken, as this would be the most extreme behaviour the stepmother need deal with.

2.2.3 The Family Relations Test.

The children's version of this test was developed by Eva Bene and James Anthony to provide an objective technique for exploring emotional attitudes in children. Eva Bene developed the test further to include an adult version of the test which investigates recollected childhood feelings. It measures the adult's positive and negative feelings, both incoming, in the sense of emotions directed towards the person, and outgoing, in the sense of emotions expressed by the person, towards each member of his/her family. It also measures maternal overprotection, parental overindulgence and the family member who influenced personality weaknesses and strengths. This device produces

a score for each of the above categories and for each member of the adult's early family (note appendix 9). It should be noted, however that items constituting each category are not independent. As such, the test is amenable only to observational statistics.

The test consists of 109 items printed on cards. The subject slips each card into boxes attached to ambiguously drawn cardboard figures representing family members. An important "Nobody" figure is included for those items inappropriate to all family members. The figures assist the adult in recollecting earliest childhood memories and, as the card disappears into a box, it is claimed that the adult is protected from any possible feelings of guilt or embarrassment by being unaware of the accumulation of cards for a given figure.

Test figures allow an examination of the emotional involvement of each member of the adult's family and of the quality of these feelings, whether they be negative or positive, incoming or outgoing. As the test measures the recollected early childhood feelings of the adult, it is expected that the development of the adults life and present status will affect the scores: thus, for instance, will the mature adult be able to reconstruct his/her past in a less involved or emotive manner. The test is consequently based on general psychoanalytic theory

where the subjects concept of his/her childhood is considered to have a bearing on his/her present behaviour.

While this test is reported to have an acceptable reliability and validity , Kauffman (1970) points out that additional research is crucial to determining its usefulness. Furthermore this test has no proven reliability or validity for use in South Africa. Abelson (1973) used the test in research successfully after having translated it into Afrikaans. As this aspect of the study compares the early childhood experiences of two groups of stepmothers, it was deemed to be appropriate for objectively exploring family relationships insofar as they have a bearing on the stepmothers present psychological make-up and functioning as a stepmother.

Each stepmother completes the test; and a mean score for each member of her family in the various categories is obtained. These mean scores will then be compared between the two groups of stepmothers.

2.2.4 The Demographic Details.

As outlined in the Rationale, a number of details concerning the present circumstances of the stepmother were gathered. These included the stepmother's age, the length of time she had been married, the number of children and stepchildren she had and their ages, the stepfamilies recent divorce history, the stepmother and her husband's occupations and incomes, the type of contact she had with the biological mother of her children and with her extended family.

As there were a number of details and as they were of a varied nature, an abbreviated list was drawn up by the researcher to ensure full coverage, (note appendix 2). The questions asked of the stepmother were in the form of an interview and hence were generally followed in order and worded in the same way for each stepmother interviewed. Details were recorded by the researcher on paper during the interview. Where possible both the stepmother and her husband were interviewed together, alternatively the stepmother only was interviewed.

2.3 Procedure.

Prior to being interviewed, the first contact with subjects was by telephone. The subjects were told that research was being conducted into the area of stepmotherhood and that the aim of the research was to plan possible future therapeutic programmes based on the findings, (it was thought that as the subjects would receive no reward for their efforts, this would serve as a motivation for participation). Furthermore, the researcher stressed that confidentiality would be strictly maintained; that the interviewer was also the researcher; and that while data gathered would be featured in the write-up of a thesis, all information would be anonymous. The stepmother was then asked if she was a full time stepmother and whether her stepchildren were between the ages of seven and twelve. If the stepmother met both these criteria, it was explained that her participation was sought and that this involved the researcher conducting a two hour interview with her at home, and that the interview included details such as the composition of the stepfamily and their present circumstances, and that the study involved the completion of some psychological measures by her and her husband. The stepmother, if necessary, was given time to check with her husband before committing herself, or, if she was sure of her participation, a convenient appointment was made.

The interview began with the general collection of details such as the stepfamily history, and their present circumstances as outlined in Appendix 2. Although unspecified, the husband's participation in the interview was unnecessary. It became apparent, however, that although the husband was available he was generally unwilling to be interviewed and his presence was only noted in one interview. This was not the case with the stepmothers themselves who were frequently found to be very enthusiastic. It was considered appropriate to mention the researchers own stepmother status which was noted to facilitate discussion.

The second part of the interview involved completing the psychometric measures outlined. The Family Assessment Device was first completed individually by the husband and by the stepmother: This was followed by the Rutter Child Behaviour Questionnaire, where both the stepmother and her husband worked together to complete a questionnaire for each of the children. Both tests were paper and pencil tests and were conducted where most comfortable. The researcher provided the instructions as specified. Finally, the stepmother was taken aside so that the Family Relations Test could be conducted. The manual specifies that the testing should take place at a desk or table. While the stepmother and her husband completed their questionnaires,

the researcher, with permission, set up the test in an appropriate place. The stepmother and her husband were thanked for their participation and the interview was completed.

Once all the data had been obtained, scoring was done manually by the researcher. Once the questionnaires had been scored, the sample was divided into the two groups: stepmothers without any children of their own; and those stepmothers with children of their own. The data from the The Child Behaviour Questionnaire, Family Relations Test and The Family Assessment Device were collated under these headings. All devices were scored by the researcher who was blind as to which group the questionnaires were from.

2.4 Statistical Analysis.

The demographic details elicited in the first part of the interview will be examined by categorising the information and reporting the categories as percentages of all subjects sampled. Where appropriate the two groups will be compared by conducting Chi squared tests on the observed frequencies of responses.

According to Langley (1968), the Chi squared statistic cannot be suitably used for 2x2 contingency tables, more appropriate for use on a sample size of less than fifty, is Fishers Exact Probability test. However, this assertion has been disputed by Howell (1987). As the Demographic Details include a variety of contingency tables, it was decided that for the sake of uniformity, Chi squared tests throughout would be preferable.

The scores of The Family Functioning Device are given by a ratio of each category. The categories are independent of each other although they serve to measure family functioning and in this sense are related. Hence the scores are best analysed using the Hotellings T² test for significance.

As noted, The Rutter Child Behaviour Questionnaire provides a score of child behaviour between 1 and 62. The scores obtained from the two groups of stepmothers are compared by

means of a studentised t test to examine for significant difference between the two groups. For the purpose of uniformity, the t test was used rather than the One-way analysis of variance, though, both would be suitable.

The Family Relations Test presents statistical problems: Data obtained for the categories of the family members is dependent. A score given to one category results in the loss of a score for another category. With the added factor of the small number of subjects, observational statistics had to be discounted and it was decided that histograms would best illustrate the trends of each group.

CHAPTER 3**Results****3.1 The McMaster Family Assessment Device.**

The average scores of stepmothers and their husbands on The Family Assessment Device (FAD) yielded the following means and [standard deviations] for each of the seven categories screened by the device .(see table 1). The Family Assessment Device has a range of mean scores from one to four, a score of 1 represents healthy family functioning while a score of 4 represents unhealthy family functioning.

TABLE 1: FAD MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

	stepmothers status	
	without own children	with own children
problem solving	2.13 [0.58]	1.80 [0.45]
communication	2.02 [0.57]	1.88 [0.54]
roles	2.31 [0.22]	2.12 [0.40]
affective responsiveness	1.65 [0.52]	1.77 [0.52]
affective responsiveness	2.16 [0.52]	1.94 [0.50]
behaviour control	1.60 [0.39]	1.64 [0.54]
general functioning	1.93 [0.60]	1.71 [0.43]

N = 12

N = 19

Inspection of the cell means indicates that stepmothers without their own children generally have higher means than do stepmothers with their own children. Statistical analysis of this data confirms that there is a significant difference between the two groups of mean scores,

Hotellings $T^2 = 25.6959$, T^2 critical (7,29) (0.050) = 21.555. It can be concluded that these two groups of stepparents thus come from different populations.

To further analyse the significant differences between the two groups, t^2 was calculated for each of the categories of the scores on the FAD. Results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: FAD ANALYSIS

	vector of mean differences	vector of std. errors	t	t^2
problem solving	0.3288	0.0905	3.6331	13.199
communication	0.1343	0.0787	1.7070	2.9138
roles	0.1893	0.0607	3.1170	9.7157
affective responsiveness	-0.1242	0.0928	1.3387	1.7921
affective involvement	0.2254	0.0910	2.4776	6.1385
behaviour control	-0.0466	0.0873	0.5333	0.2844
general functioning	0.2223	0.0906	2.4532	6.0137

using t^* critical (0.050) for degrees of freedom 7, 29 the calculated t^2 yielded that no category in isolation distinguishes stepmothers, but the categories together show that the family functioning of stepmothers without their own children is less healthy than the family functioning of stepmothers with children of their own.

As Epstein, Baldwin and Bishop (1983) outline, the seven scales that constitute the Family Assessment Device are interrelated because all seven scales together assess family functioning. Thus correlation is expected. The Correlation Matrices included below indicate that there is a lack of correlation between the variables of family functioning for stepmothers without their own children (see Table 4) while high correlations are to be found on the seven variables of family functioning for stepmothers with their own children (see Table 5). This further indicates that the two groups of stepmothers do indeed come from different populations but that the differences are to be found in all seven variables combined.

The following correlation matrices were obtained from the scores.

Correlation Matrices

Table 3: Both groups.

	PS V1	Comm V2	Roles V3	AR V4	AI V5	BC V6	GF V7
V1	1						
V2	.585**	1					
V3	.598**	.429	1				
V4	.541**	.699**	.546*	1			
V5	.478	.601*	.439	.552	1		
V6	.564**	.450	.657*	.418	.471	1	
V7	.441	.821**	.399	.759**	.604**	.461	1

Both Groups

n = 31 df n - 2 = 29
 r crit 0.05 = 0.355* 0.01 = 0.486**

As can be seen in Table 3 above, there are a number of positive correlations between the variables of The Family Assessment Device for both groups of stepmothers.

However when the correlations between the variables are examined for each of the groups of stepmothers, (Table 4 and Table 5 below), the lack of correlations in Table 4, stepmothers without their own children, in comparison to the many correlations to be seen in Table 5, stepmothers with their own children, suggest that the two groups of stepmothers do indeed come from two different populations.

TABLE 4:

Stepmothers without their own children

	PS V1	Comm V2	Roles V3	AR V4	AI V5	BC V6	GF V7
V1	1						
V2	.227	1					
V3	.229	-.335	1				
V4	.246	.671*	.045	1			
V5	.249	.599*	.021	.278	1		
V6	.352	.272	.447	.392	.226	1	
V7	.080	.866**	-.215	.823**	.483	.245	1

n = 12 df n - 2 = 10
 r crit 0.05 = 0.576* 0.01 = 0.708**

Table 5:

Stepmothers with their own children

	PS V1	Comm V2	Roles V3	AR V4	AI V5	BC V6	GF V7
V1	1						
V2	.887**	1					
V3	.326	.720**	1				
V4	.783**	.718*	.742	1			
V5	.674**	.603**	.612**	.718**	1		
V6	.717**	.542	.712**	.437**	.595**	1	
V7	.837**	.796**	.740**	.723**	.632	.723**	1

n = 19 df n - 2 = 17
 r crit 0.05 = 0.576* 0.01 = 0.708**

3.2 The Child Behaviour Questionnaire.

The Child Behaviour Questionnaire is used to compare the general behaviours of the stepchildren from both groups of stepmothers. The scores of the questionnaire, completed by the stepmothers and their husbands, yielded the following means and [standard deviations], see Table 6 below.

Table 6: The Child Behaviour Questionnaire.

Stepmothers without their own children	Stepmothers with their own children
12.33	12.21
[12.88]	[12.55]

There are thus no significant differences in the behaviours of the stepchildren from both groups of stepmothers, that is stepmothers without children of their own and stepmothers with children of their own (t^2 calculated = 0.02628 ; $df = 29$).

Furthermore, the means of both groups of stepmother's child behaviour scores (see Table 6) lie within the normal range of the test (1-13). The standard deviations to be seen in Table 6, are similar for both groups of stepmothers suggesting that the range of behaviours manifested by their children are the same.

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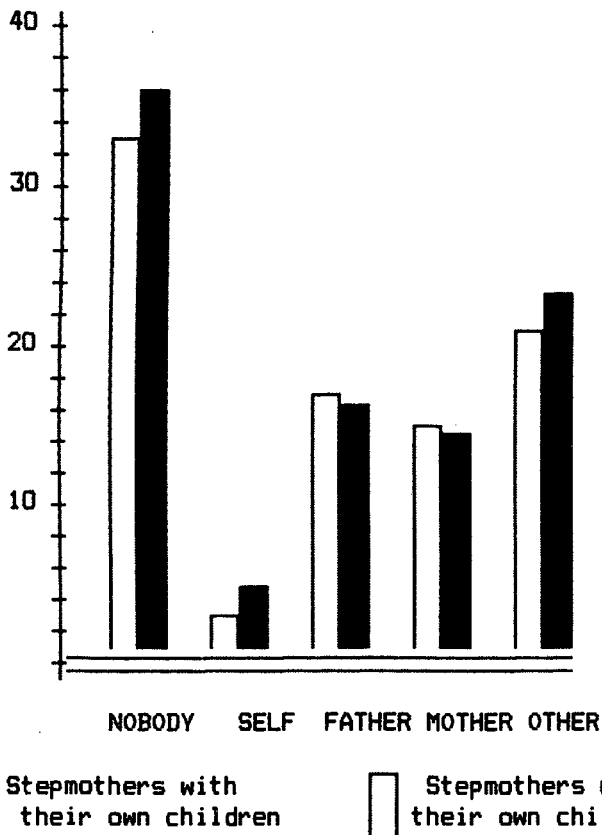
3.3 The Family Relations Test.

The Family Relations Test provides a standardised means to examine the stepmother's early family history. The scores obtained on the Family Relation Test yielded the following means and [standard deviations]:

TABLE 7: MEANS & [STD DEV]: TOTAL INVOLVEMENT

	stepmothers without children	stepmothers with children
nobody	34.75 [6.36]	37.58 [19.05]
self	4.50 [2.94]	4.05 [4.22]
father	18.58 [6.53]	17.32 [8.99]
mother	17.33 [4.68]	14.74 [6.39]
other	20.83 [4.34]	24.68 [17.27]

GRAPH 1: MEANS OF TOTAL INVOLVEMENT

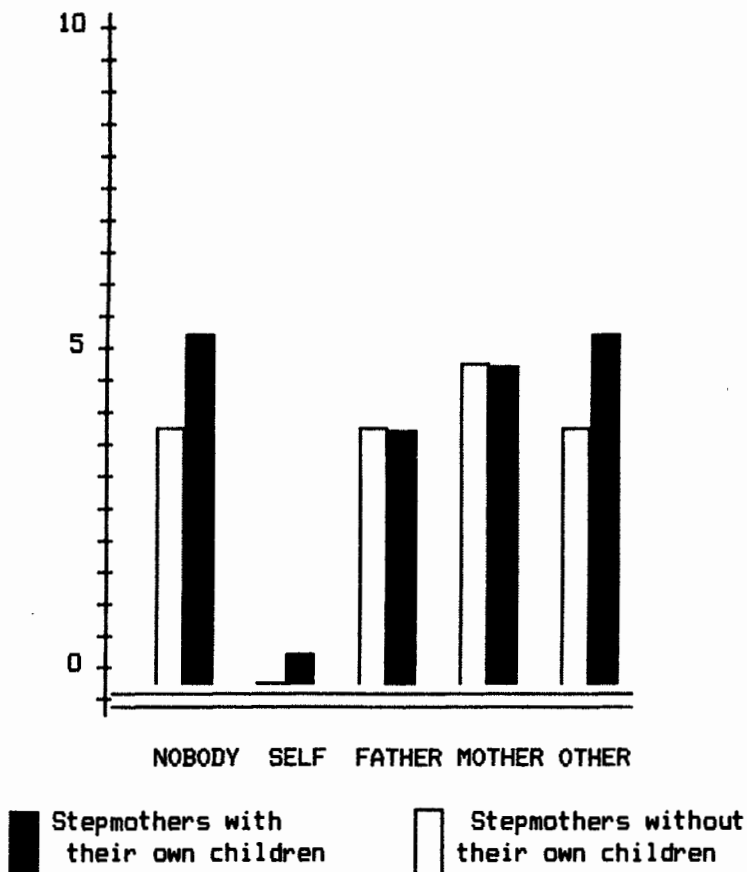


As can be seen by the means in Table 7 and Graph 1, both groups of stepmothers recall similar involvements with their family members. Excluding the Nobody category, they recall being most involved with other members of their family.

TABLE 8: MEANS & [STD DEV]: + OUTGOING FEELINGS

	stepmothers without children	stepmothers with children
nobody	4.17 [1.52]	5.00 [3.55]
self	0.00 [0.00]	0.21 [0.41]
father	4.42 [3.55]	3.63 [3.66]
mother	5.17 [3.06]	4.53 [3.68]
other	4.33 [2.57]	5.16 [3.56]

GRAPH 2: MEANS OF OUTGOING POSITIVE FEELINGS

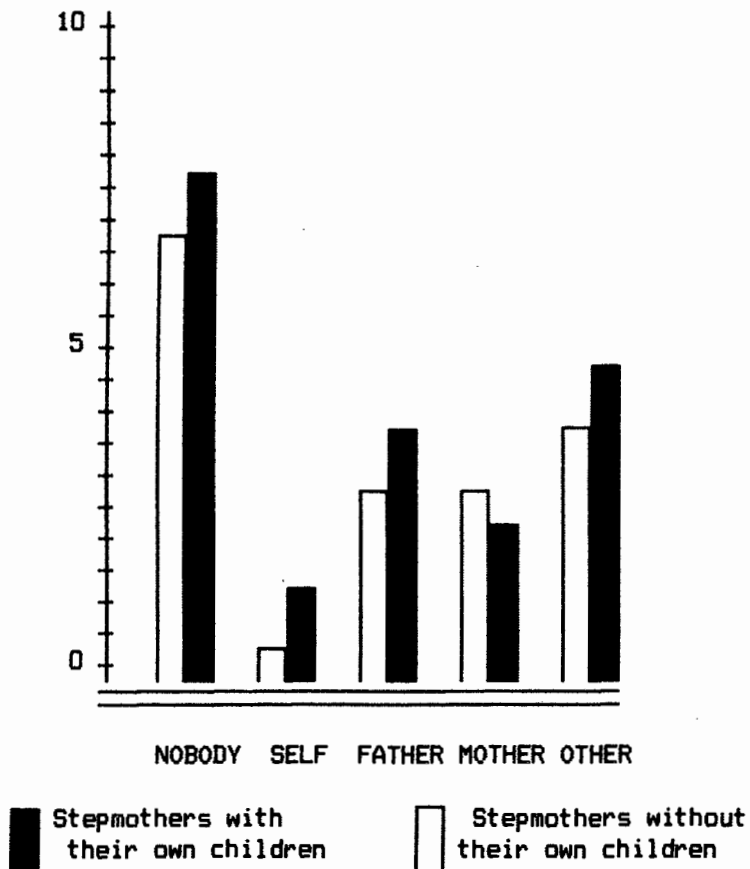


From Table 8 and Graph 2 it can be seen that stepmothers with and without their own children show similar patterns. However, stepmothers without their own children recollect most positive feelings for their mothers, while stepmothers with their own children placed most positive outgoing feelings in the Other category.

TABLE 9: MEANS & [STD DEV]: - OUTGOING FEELINGS

	stepmothers without children	stepmothers with children
nobody	6.83 [2.51]	7.37 [4.66]
self	0.67 [0.77]	0.79 [1.31]
father	3.25 [2.70]	3.37 [4.64]
mother	3.08 [1.31]	2.00 [2.84]
other	4.17 [1.89]	4.42 [5.13]

GRAPH 3: MEANS OF OUTGOING NEGATIVE FEELINGS

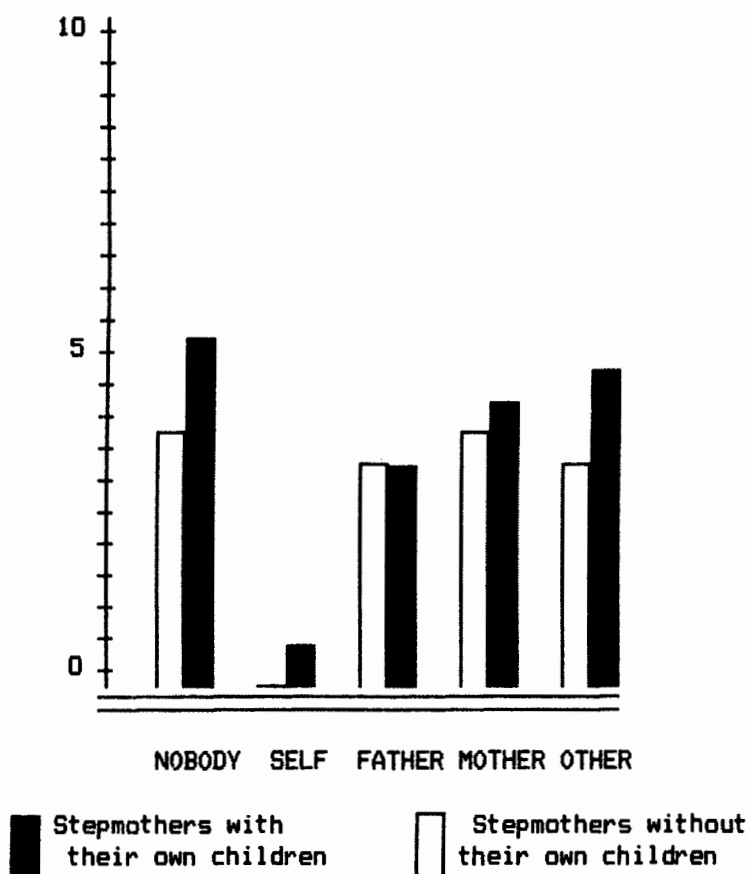


As can be seen above, both groups of stepmothers recall feeling most negative towards other members of their family, excluding the Nobody category which is the highest.

TABLE 10: MEANS & [STD DEV]: + INCOMING FEELINGS

	stepmothers without children	stepmothers with children
nobody	4.17 [1.40]	4.79 [3.29]
self	0.00 [0.00]	0.05 [0.22]
father	3.58 [3.47]	3.16 [2.83]
mother	3.92 [2.96]	3.95 [3.35]
other	3.92 [2.46]	4.58 [3.30]

GRAPH 4: MEANS OF INCOMING POSITIVE FEELINGS

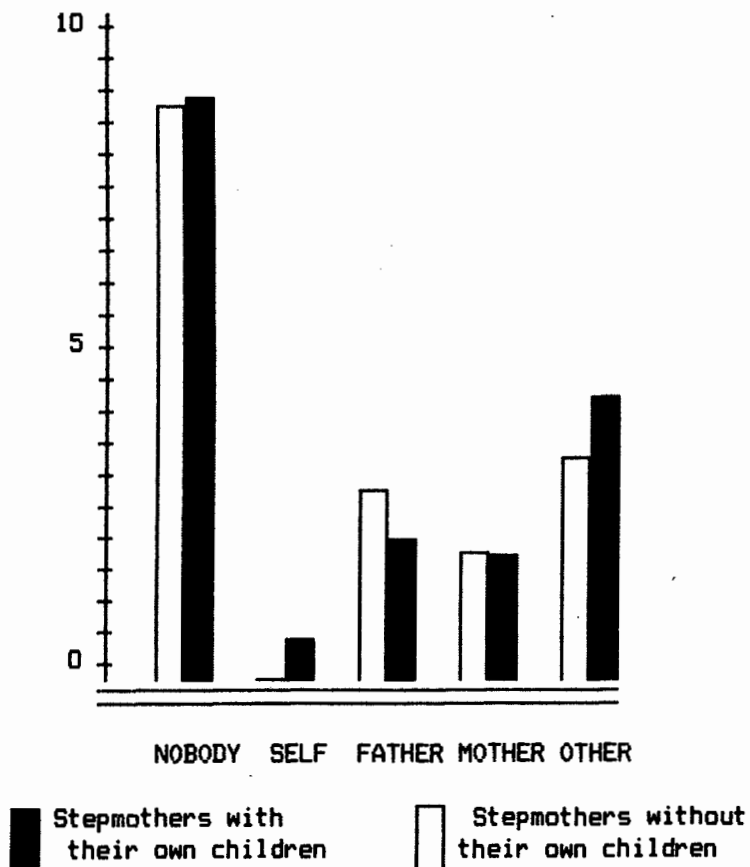


As can be seen in Table 10 and Graph 4, the means for the two groups of stepmothers are fairly similar, however stepmothers with their own children recall most positive incoming feelings from other members of their family, while stepmothers without their own children recall the same number of positive incoming feelings from both their mothers and other members of their family, the Nobody category being excluded.

TABLE 11: MEANS & [STD DEV]: - INCOMING FEELINGS

	stepmothers without children	stepmothers with children
nobody	8.42 [1.88]	8.68 [4.48]
self	0.00 [0.00]	0.11 [0.45]
father	2.67 [1.37]	1.74 [2.40]
mother	1.67 [0.98]	1.53 [1.61]
other	3.33 [1.96]	4.16 [4.12]

GRAPH 5: MEANS OF INCOMING NEGATIVE FEELINGS

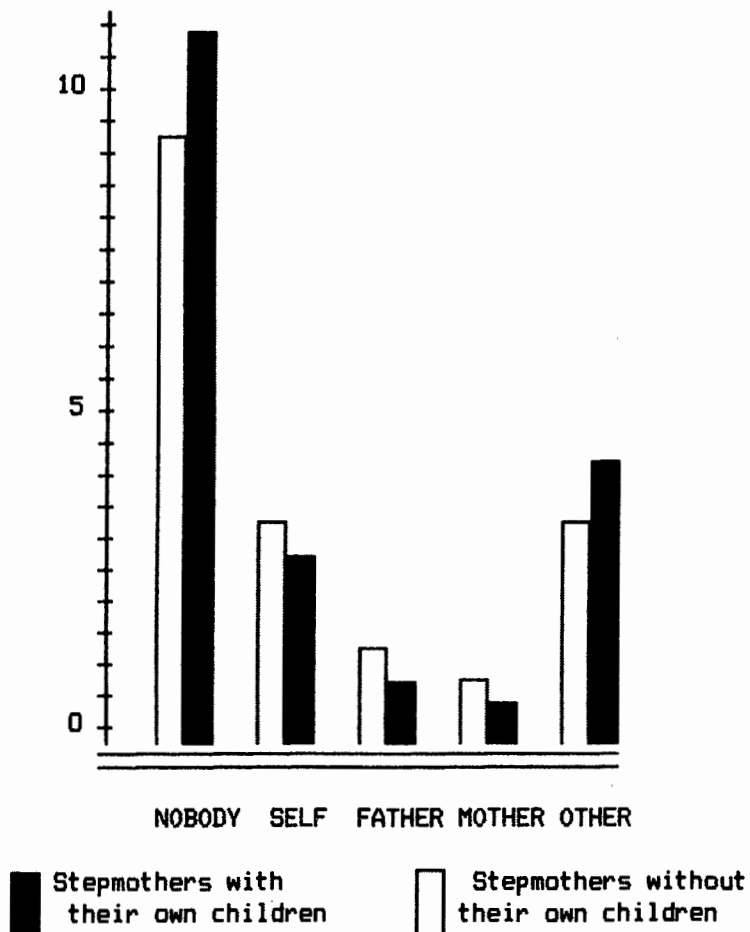


From the means in Table 11 and Graph 5 above, it can be seen that stepmothers recall most negative incoming feelings from other members of their family. The means obtained on the Nobody category are high as most situations were considered inappropriate by the stepmothers.

**TABLE 12: MEANS & [STD DEV]:
OVERPROTECTION AND OVERINDULGENCE**

	stepmothers without children	stepmothers with children
nobody	9.33 [1.49]	10.74 [5.58]
self	3.42 [2.64]	2.68 [2.80]
father	1.25 [1.05]	0.58 [0.96]
mother	0.50 [0.52]	0.21 [0.41]
other	3.42 [3.05]	3.90 [3.85]

GRAPH 6: MEANS OF OVERPROTECTION AND OVERINDULGENCE

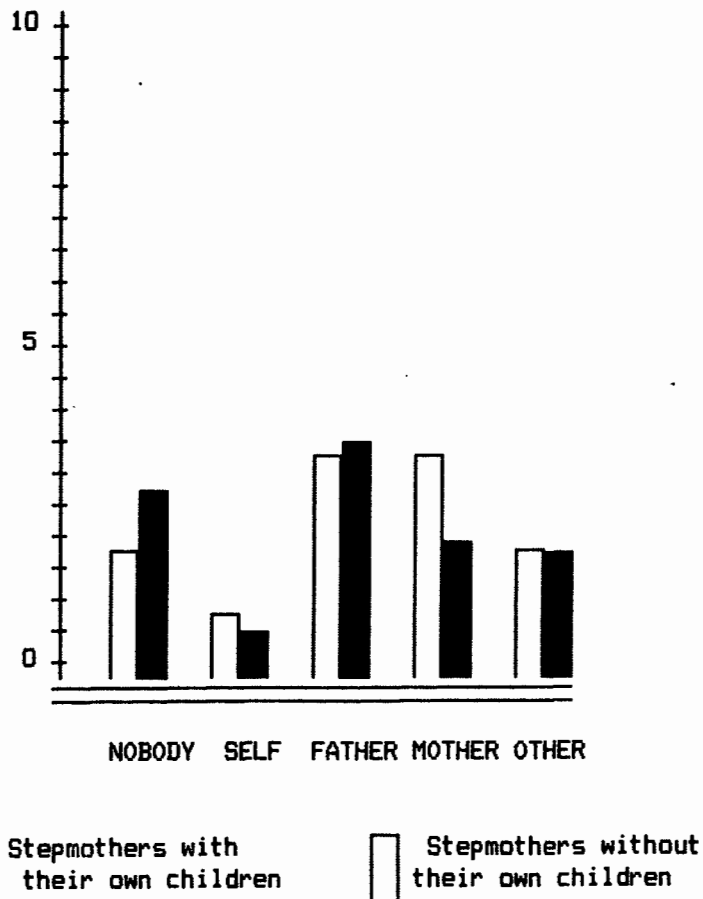


The means for overprotection and overindulgence, to be seen in Table 12 and Graph 6 above, are similar for both groups of stepmothers. Once again it is other members of the family who are recollected by stepmothers as being most overprotective and overindulgent. The Nobody category here is high for both groups of stepmothers.

TABLE 13: MEANS & [STD DEV]:
PERSONALITY WEAKNESS AND STRENGTHS

	stepmothers without children	stepmothers with children
nobody	1.83 [0.83]	2.58 [1.86]
self	0.42 [0.51]	0.26 [0.56]
father	3.17 [0.93]	3.42 [1.74]
mother	3.00 [0.73]	2.16 [1.16]
other	1.67 [0.88]	1.68 [1.76]

GRAPH 7: MEANS OF PERSONALITY WEAKNESS AND STRENGTHS



From Table 13 and Graph 7 it can be seen that stepmothers recall personality weaknesses and strengths largely from their fathers and mothers.

As can be seen from the histograms of the means and the mean tables, similar results were obtained for both groups of stepmothers, that is those without children of their own and those with children of their own. Hence stepmothers generally have similar perceptions of their early family relations.

The histogram of the means obtained for total involvement (graph 1) indicate that both groups of stepmothers recall being more emotionally involved with other members of their family, such as siblings and grandparents, than either mothers or fathers individually. Furthermore, they recollect being involved more with their fathers than their mothers.

To examine this further, the means obtained for the six categories (graphs 2 to 7 respectively), outgoing positive feelings, outgoing negative feelings, incoming positive feelings, incoming negative feelings, overprotection and overindulgence, personality weaknesses and strengths, indicate that both groups of stepmothers are consistently more emotionally involved with other members of their family than with either of their parents in all the categories except for outgoing positive feelings and personality weaknesses and strengths. For outgoing positive feelings stepmothers without their own children recalled being more involved with both their

mothers and their fathers, while for personality weaknesses and strengths both groups of stepmothers recollected being more emotionally involved with their fathers and mothers than with other members of their families, their fathers being the highest mean.

Stepmothers with their own children consistently scored higher means for other members of their families and for the category of nobody than do stepmothers without their own children. Regarding the former, stepmothers with their own children are thus consistently more emotionally involved with other family members than are stepmothers without children of their own.

Stepmothers recollect being more involved with their fathers than with their mothers for the categories of outgoing negative feelings, incoming negative feelings, overprotection and overindulgence as well as personality weakness and strengths. While their emotional involvement with their mothers was greater than with their fathers for the categories of outgoing positive feelings and incoming positive feelings.

Both stepmothers with children of their own and stepmothers without their own children recollect more positive outgoing and positive incoming feelings than negative outgoing and

incoming feelings. Their early childhood recollections are thus largely positive.

The scattergrams of scores (appendix 5) and standard deviations suggest that there is a greater range of scores for stepmothers with no children of their own. However this could be due to random sample variation.

2.5.4 Demographic Details

The demographic details elicited from the stepmothers in the first part of the semi-structured interview yielded the following percentages:

TABLE 14: FINANCIAL STATUS (TOTAL MONTHLY INCOME OF STEPFAMILIES)

monthly income	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
>R4 000	45.1%	41.7%	47.4%
R2 000 - R4 000	41.9%	41.7%	42.1%
<R2 000	12.9%	16.7%	10.5%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 0.2681953 DF: 2

Chi² [critical] 5%: 5.99

As noted earlier, subjects were all white South African women. All subjects were of the broad range of middle class income groups. As can be seen above, a small percentage of stepfamilies had a monthly income of less than R2 000, the majority having an income of over R4 000 and between R2 000 and R4 000 per month. There are no differences between the two groups of stepmothers regarding their financial status.

TABLE 15: CAREER STATUS PRIOR TO THE PRESENT MARRIAGE:

career status	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
had careers	62.5%	100.0%	53.0%
no careers	35.7%	00.0%	47.0%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 8.00957* DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

Before their present marriages, stepmothers were largely working. There is a significant difference between the two groups of stepmothers, all stepmothers without children of their own had all been working, while approximately half of the stepmothers with children had been working prior to their present marriage.

TABLE 16: STEPMOTHERS WHO GAVE UP THEIR CAREER UPON MARRIAGE

career status	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
gave up	74.2%	58.3%	84.2%
have not given up	25.8%	41.7%	15.8%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 2.572249 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

As can be seen in Table 16 above, the majority of stepmothers gave up their career status upon remarriage. There is no difference between stepmothers without their own children and stepmothers with their own children regarding careers at present, although as noted before (Table 15) fewer stepmothers with children of their own had careers when they married.

TABLE 17: THE NUMBER OF STEPCHILDREN FROM THE HUSBANDS PREVIOUS MARRIAGE OR MARRIAGES

number of stepchildren	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
1	38.7%	25.0%	47.4%
2	41.9%	58.3%	31.6%
3	16.1%	16.7%	15.8%
4	3.3%	0.0%	5.3%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 2.841145 DF: 3
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 7.81

The majority of stepmothers had 1 or 2 children, both groups of stepmothers have the same number of stepchildren with which to cope.

TABLE 18: THE NUMBER OF STEPCHILDREN FROM THE STEPMOTHERS PREVIOUS MARRIAGE OR MARRIAGES

number of children	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
0	100.0%	68.4%
1	0.0%	5.3%
2	0.0%	26.3%
n	12	19

Only 31.6% of the stepmothers with children of their own had these children before their present marriage. Hence the majority of stepmothers had no children prior to their present marriage.

TABLE 19: THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN FROM THE STEPMOTHERS
PRESENT MARRIAGE

number of children	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
0	100.0%	21.1%
1	0.0%	57.9%
2	0.0%	15.8%
3	0.0%	5.2%
n	12	19

The majority of stepmothers with their own children have had these children during their present marriage.

TABLE 20: THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND STEPCHILDREN

number of children	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
1	9.7%	25.0%	0.0%
2	32.3%	50.0%	21.1%
3	35.5%	25.0%	42.1%
4	6.5%	0.0%	10.5%
5	16.1%	0.0%	26.3%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 11.68804* DF: 4
Chi² [critical] 5%: 9.49

The stepmothers generally had two to three children and stepchildren. However there is a significant difference in the number of stepchildren and children of stepmothers, stepmothers without their own children have fewer children with which to cope than stepmothers with their own children.

SEPARATION DUE TO DEATH OR DIVORCE:

Only one stepmother without her own children reported that her husband's separation was due to death. Therefore 97% of the subjects cared for stepchildren while their biological mothers were alive.

TABLE 21: THE FREQUENCY OF THE PRESENCE OF BIOLOGICAL MOTHERS:

frequency	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
never	25.8%	41.7%	15.8%
seldom	12.9%	0.0%	21.0%
frequent	35.5%	41.7%	31.6%
often	25.9%	16.7%	31.6%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 5.279455 DF: 3
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 7.81

Most stepmothers have regular contact with the biological mothers of their stepchildren. Stepmothers without their own children see the biological mother as often as stepmothers with children of their own. no differences are noted between the two groups.

TABLE 22: WHETHER THE HUSBAND'S SEPARATION WAS DUE TO HIS PREVIOUS WIFE'S WISHES OR TO HIS OWN WISHES:

who wished to divorce	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
ex-wife	48.4%	50.0%	47.4%
husband	16.1%	25.0%	10.5%
both	35.5	25.0	42.1

Chi² [calculated]: 1.636111 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

Both stepmothers with their own children and stepmothers without their own children most frequently reported that the separation of their husbands and previous wives were due to the ex-wife's wishes.

TABLE 23: THE NUMBER OF YEARS BETWEEN THE BREAK-UP AND REMARRIAGE OF THE HUSBAND

number of years	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
<1	6.5%	0.0%	10.5%
1	32.3%	50.0%	21.1%
2	29.0%	0.0%	47.4%
3	19.4%	25.0%	15.8%
4	3.2%	0.0%	5.2%
7	9.7%	25.0%	0.0%
n	31	12	19

As can be seen the majority of the stepmother's husbands had one to two years between their previous and present marriage.

TABLE 24: THE NUMBER OF MARRIAGES FOR THE STEPMOTHER:

number of marriages	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
1	64.5%	75.0%	57.9%
2	35.5%	25.0%	42.1%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 0.940012 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

The majority of stepmothers of both groups have no history of divorce. No differences are noted between the two groups.

TABLE 25: HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION:

occupation	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
professional	64.5%	58.3%	68.4%
technical	25.8%	41.7%	15.8%
other	9.7%	0.0%	15.8%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 3.919189 DF: 2
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 5.99

The majority of stepmother's husbands hold professional jobs. The pattern for both groups of stepmothers are the same.

TABLE 26: THE AGE OF THE STEPMOTHER:

age in years	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
21 - 25	3.2%	0.0%	5.3%
26 - 30	41.9%	25.0%	52.6%
31 - 35	38.7%	50.0%	31.6%
> 36	16.1%	25.0%	10.5%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 3.5706483 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 7.81

The subjects are largely between 26 and 35 years of age. No differences are noted between stepmothers without children of their own and stepmothers with children of their own.

TABLE 27: THE AGE OF THE HUSBAND:

age in years	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
26 - 30	3.2%	0.0%	5.3%
31 - 35	29.0%	25.0%	31.6%
36 - 40	35.5%	25.0%	42.1%
> 41	32.3%	50.0%	21.0%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 3.258213 DF: 3
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 7.81

Stepmother's husbands are largely between 31 and 40 years of age. No significant differences were found between the husbands of stepmothers without their own children and the husbands of stepmothers with their own children.

TABLE 28: THE NUMBER OF YEARS THE PRESENT MARRIAGE HAS LASTED:

years	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
1 - 3	35.5%	25.0%	42.1%
4 - 6	38.7%	50.0%	31.6%
7 - 9	25.8%	25.0%	26.3%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 1.256132 DF: 2
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 5.99

Stepmothers without their own children have generally been married for the same number of years as stepmothers with children of their own.

TABLE 29: THE STEPCHILD'S SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AFTER SEPARATION FROM HIS/HER BIOLOGICAL MOTHER AND THEREAFTER:

school performance	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
remained the same	51.6%	41.7%	57.9%
changed	48.4%	58.3%	42.1%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 0.7755666 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

Approximately half of the stepmothers reported that their stepchild's marks had remained the same at the time of the break up of the original nuclear family. This is true for both stepmothers without their own children and stepmothers with their own children.

TABLE 30: THE STEPMOTHER'S REPORT OF HER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BIOLOGICAL MOTHER:

reported relationship	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
poor	61.3%	41.7%	73.7%
curteous	22.6%	41.7%	10.5%
good	16.1%	16.7%	15.8%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 4.392179 DF: 2
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 5.99

Stepmothers more frequently reported having poor relationships with the biological mothers of their stepchildren. No differences are found between the reports of stepmothers with their own children and stepmothers without children of their own.

TABLE 31: THE STEPMOTHER'S REPORT OF HER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EXTENDED FAMILY:

reported relationship	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
poor	9.7%	16.7%	5.3%
curteous	16.1%	0.0%	26.3%
good	74.2%	83.3%	68.4%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 4.366642 DF: 2
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 5.99

Stepmothers generally report having good relationships with the extended families. no differences are noted between the two groups in this regard.

TABLE 32: THE PRESENT MARITAL STATUS OF THE BIOLOGICAL MOTHER:

marital status	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
married	61.3%	58.3%	63.2%
unmarried	38.7%	41.7%	36.8%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 0.0072156 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

The biological mothers of the stepchildren for both groups have largely remarried.

TABLE 33: THE STEPMOTHER'S DOMESTIC HELP WITH HOUSEWORK:

domestic help	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
yes	45.2%	16.7%	63.2%
no	54.8%	88.3%	36.8%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 6.418915* DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

Approximately half of the stepmothers had domestic help. Stepmothers without their own children had help in more cases than stepmothers with their own children, who more frequently had no domestic help.

TABLE 34: THE STEPMOTHER'S PLANS FOR HAVING CHILDREN
IN THE FUTURE:

more children	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
yes	51.6%	41.7%	57.9%
no	48.4%	58.3%	42.1%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 1.516902 DF: 1
Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

Approximately half of the stepmothers of both groups reported that they wanted more children.

TABLE 35: VIEWS ON WHETHER STEPMOTHERING IS THE SAME AS MOTHERING:

views on stepmothering	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
it is the same	29.0%	41.7%	21.1%
it is different	71.0%	58.3%	78.9%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 1.516902 DF: 1
Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

Generally stepmothers considered that stepmothering was different to mothering. No differences were found in this view between stepmothers without their own children and stepmothers who had children of their own.

TABLE 36: THE AGREEMENT ON CHILD REARING BETWEEN STEPMOTHERS AND THEIR HUSBANDS:

child rearing	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
agree	54.8%	41.7%	63.2%
disagree	45.2%	58.3%	36.8%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 1.516902 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

Approximately half of both groups of stepmothers agree with their husbands on child rearing.

TABLE 37: REPORTS OF STEPSIBLING RIVALRY:

sibling rivalry	stepmothers with their own children
no rivalry	52.6%
rivalry	47.4%

Approximately half the stepmothers with their own children reported having rivalry between their own children and their stepchildren.

TABLE 38: THE STEPMOTHER'S RECENT FAMILIAL HISTORY OF DIVORCE:

history	both groups of stepmothers	stepmothers without their own children	stepmothers with their own children
divorce	12.9%	25.0%	5.3%
no divorce	87.1%	75.0%	94.7%
n	31	12	19

Chi² [calculated]: 2.549342 DF: 1
 Chi² [critical] 5%: 3.84

By far the majority of all stepmothers report having no familial history of divorce.

In summary, the two groups of stepmothers, those with children of their own and those without children of their own, show few differences in their demographic details. Differences between the groups however were noted: Firstly, stepmothers without their own children all had careers prior to their present marriage, while only half of the stepmothers with their own children were working before their present marriage (note Table 15); then, stepmothers with their own children generally had more children and stepchildren with which to cope (note Table 20); lastly, stepmothers with their own children had domestic help with household duties more often than did stepmothers without their own children (note Table 33).

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

Although relatively few studies have examined the difficulties experienced by stepmothers, research suggests that of stepparents, stepmothers without their own children have the most difficult task. Furthermore, the literature indicates that stepmothers have problems predominantly in the following areas: in coping with stepchildren who may suffer the psychological loss of separation from their natural mother; from the unique position of the stepmother which is different from that of other substitute mothers in that she is married to the child's parent; and the stepmother's own psychological state may be an important determinant of her ability to manage the situation. Although these problem areas are often seen to be the reason for the stepmother experiencing difficulties, studies have not examined them in detail, and results are inconclusive. Hence this study aimed to explore the difficulties further by comparing two groups of stepmothers, that is, it compared stepmothers without children of their own with those who have their own children, either from a previous marriage, or from their present marriage, or from both.

The findings suggest that the stepfamily functioning in the unit where the stepmother has no children of her own is less healthy than in the family where the stepmother has children of her own. The range of behaviours of the stepchildren from the two groups showed no significant differences, and few differences were found in the demographic details between the groups. The psychology of the stepmother, as measured by the Family Relations Test, likewise revealed few differences between these groups. The difficulties that explain the differences thus remains unidentified.

These results are largely consistent with the literature. With the exception of Price-Bonham and Balswick (1980), the majority of researchers consider that the stepmother without children of her own has the most difficulties. Here, as noted, researchers have been unable to identify the exact nature of, and contributing factors to, the difficulties of stepmothering. The results of this research suggest that an investigation which seeks a single identifiable factor to account for the differences between the family functioning of the two groups would not yield meaningful results. This points to the importance of adopting a theoretical viewpoint in order to explain and understand the stepmothers position in more detail.

4.1 The Results in More Detail

4.1.1 The Family Assessment Device

This variable assessed whether stepmothers without their own children experienced more problems than did stepmothers with their own children. It was assumed that the difficulties of stepmothering would be better assessed within the family context. This is especially true where the nature of the stepmother's problems are poorly articulated by the literature, and thus where an overall assessment would serve to clarify the problem. The stepmother who experienced the most difficulties would score higher on the Family Assessment Device, thus indicating less healthy family functioning.

The results suggest that stepmothers without their own children have less healthy family functioning than do those stepmothers with their own children, and thus that stepmothers without experience of mothering have more difficulties. To be noted however, stepmothers without their own children do not manifest clinically unhealthy family functioning.

An examination of the extent of the difficulties for each subsection of the test, that is, problem solving,

Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement, Behaviour Control and General Functioning, suggests that the differences between the two groups are to be found in a combination of all the categories, since no differences were found on any of the categories individually examined. All of this is further confirmed by the fact that the correlations of the different groups of stepmothers showed correspondingly different patterns: Whereas stepmothers with their own children have far greater correlations between the subsections of the test, stepmothers without their own children show fewer correlations between the variables.

This finding is consistent with the aforementioned literature, where it is argued that the stepmother without her own children is in the most difficult position. This is primarily because she has had no normal introduction through pregnancy to motherhood, and because she has had no experience in the mothering and rearing of children. Furthermore, one can postulate that stepmothers without their own children have had less experience of marriage and divorce, having most commonly been single prior to their stepmother status. This consideration would have vast implications for the stepmother's ability to cope in all aspects of family life and of motherhood. The stepmother without children may also have given up a career which she

had had as a single woman, making her transition upon marrying a father even more complicated.

These points are explored further in this study by the demographic details obtained from the stepmother:

Stepmothers without their own children and stepmothers with their own children have the same number of stepchildren, however stepmothers with their own children have these children as well. Hence, stepmothers with their own children have more children with which to contend, but these children are their own children - an experience which may in itself contribute to their ability to cope with their present situation. As regards previous careers, all the stepmothers without their own children had careers before their present marriage, fifty-eight percent of these having given up their careers upon marrying a father. As against this, only fifty-three percent of stepmothers with children of their own had careers prior to their present marriage, and of these eighty-four percent gave up their careers. This indicates that many of the stepmothers interviewed have a change not only in marital status, but also in career status, particularly in the case of stepmothers without their own children. The demographic observations thus support the notion that the stepmother without children of her own not only has more difficulties because of her lack of experience in motherhood, but that these are

exacerbated both by her not having experience of children, and by her traumatic change in career status upon stepmotherhood.

The Family Assessment Device provides a ratio score from one to four for each of the following seven categories: Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, Affective Involvement, Affective Responsiveness, Behaviour Control and General Functioning. Studies which include both clinical and normative data suggest that a mean score of one indicates a healthy family functioning, while a mean score of four reflects unhealthy family functioning (Epstein, Baldwin and Bishop, 1983). The range of the mean scores for both groups of stepmothers do not exceed 2.5, suggesting that stepfamilies generally have reasonably healthy family functioning.

As noted in the introduction, there is controversy regarding the extent to which stepmothers do have difficulties, and there is debate as to whether the stepfamily differs from the nuclear family in this regard. Notably Visher and Visher (1979) and Schulman (1972), are amongst those researchers who consider that the stepfamily today is fundamentally the same as the nuclear family, but that there are added pressures in the case of the stepfamily. If, however, as Willard and Gasser (1983) and Wald (1981) argue, stepfamilies as against ordinary

families, are increasingly attending health facilities, this may not in fact be the case.

The range of scores obtained for both groups of stepmothers suggest that the stepfamilies do not manifest unhealthy family functioning and thus supports the view that stepfamilies may well be no different from nuclear families, for they appear to be coping in a healthy manner. As will be noted later, however, there is the likelihood that stepfamilies undergoing a crisis in their functioning would not volunteer to participate in research.

Both groups of stepmothers obtained their highest mean on the Family Assessment Device for the 'roles' category. As outlined in the introduction, stepmothers are considered to have difficulties in this area. The Family Assessment Device provides an assessment of both the instrumental and affective aspects of roles. The former includes the provision of money, shelter, clothing and food while the latter covers the standards and rules of the family and the management thereof. The above finding confirms the literature which suggests that, because stepfamilies are a relatively recent phenomena, their roles are as yet ill-defined. (Visher and Visher, 1979; Draughton, 1975 and Fast and Cain 1966).

The findings drawn for the Family Assessment Device are

restricted by a few factors. Most importantly, the subjects of this study were limited to White, South Africans of high income status and thus the results are not capable of generalisation. Furthermore, subjects were volunteers and might therefore not be representative of even this population of stepmothers (Rosenthal and Rosnov, 1969). Families experiencing difficulties may be unprepared to expose themselves to scrutiny, and thus would bias the results. Indeed, as noted, one stepmother who was contacted refused to participate in the study because of her husband's wish for privacy, this during a crisis period for the family. However, as both groups were made up of volunteers, differences found between the two groups remains significant.

The small sample of stepmothers presented difficulties since it failed to allow a further division of the sample into those stepmothers with children of their own from a previous marriage, and those stepmothers with children of their own from their present marriage. Such further division would have provided more clarity. The general difficulties with obtaining subjects, the fact that this excluded random sampling, and subjects being categorised only after the interview, made further categorisation impossible in this study.

4.1.2 The Child Behaviour Questionnaire

While the Family Assessment Device examined the extent of the difficulties of stepmothering, the Rutter Child Behaviour Questionnaire was used to determine the nature of the difficulties. The latter attempts to establish whether the stepmother's difficulties lie in dealing with children who have suffered the consequences of separation from their biological mothers.

The scores obtained on the Child Behaviour Questionnaire show that there are no differences in the behaviours of the stepchildren from both groups of stepmothers. The stepmothers under investigation thus contend with the same range of behaviours from their stepchildren, and hence the stepchildren's behaviours cannot be considered to explain the difficulties of the stepmothers. Furthermore, this device has a range of behaviours rated from 0-62; Sixty-two indicated gross pathology, 0-13 the normal range. In examining the scores (appendix 5), the ranges of the means of both groups are within normal limits, while 4/12 stepmothers without their own children, and 6/19 stepmothers with their own children, have scores above the normal limit. Hence the stepchildren generally show few behavioural or emotional difficulties.

The lack of differences in the stepchildren's behaviour indicates that the two groups of stepmothers are well

matched in this regard, hence the difference noted in family functioning between the groups of stepmothers is further validated. This result, however, raises the issue of whether or not the divorce of itself has had an effect on the children's behaviour. As noted in the introduction, children who have suffered the psychological trauma of separation from their mothers, as have stepchildren, may manifest behavioural or emotional problems which are reflected in difficult or abnormal behaviours. It is considered that damage is done largely as a result of the break up of the nuclear family. While such difficult behaviours could make substitute mothering problematic, it is in the prior trauma of divorce that their origins lie, rather than in the subsequent experience of being a stepchild. (Deutsch, 1944).

This study, however, indicates that both groups of stepmothers had similar and largely normal behaviours with which to contend from their stepchildren. This finding provides support for the argument that divorce does not necessarily lead to long term trauma in children (Burchinal, 1964). To draw further conclusions, however, a more detailed analysis of the children would be necessary, as well as a close examination of the nature of their separations from their biological mothers. Indeed, the Child Behaviour Questionnaire developed by M. Rutter is

a screening device, and thus does not examine the child's psychological make-up in detail. For the purpose of this study, the results suggest that the difficulties of the stepmothers examined cannot be attributed to the stepchildren's behaviours, as in this regard the two groups of stepmothers compare favourably.

Although the stepchildren's behaviours might not account for the difficulties of the stepmothers, this variable cannot be completely discounted without an examination of the demography of the sample. Stepmothers and their husbands were asked whether their stepchildren's school performance had deteriorated after the break-up of the original nuclear family. Approximately half of the stepmothers reported that the stepchildren's marks had changed: 58.3% of the stepmothers without children of their own reported changes in school performance and 42% of the stepmothers with children of their own reported changes. Hence it is indicated that the stepchildren were affected by the divorce, assuming that a change in school performance reflects such a trauma. While there were no differences in the scores between the groups in the Child Behaviour Questionnaire, there remains the possibility that subtle differences exist to which the test is not sensitive. Further investigation into this area could be fruitful in discerning both the effects of divorce on children and how this in turn affects the stepmother's management of her

stepchild. As noted, stepsibling rivalry may indeed place a strain on the stepmother, but even where no such rivalry exists, the number of stepchildren and children may account for the difficulties of the stepmother for having only one child is often less problematic (Bowerman and Irish, 1962).

The demographic details show that stepmothers predominantly had two stepchildren from their husband's previous marriage. Stepmothers with children of their own had these children from either their present marriage or a previous marriage. While these details suggest that stepsibling rivalry could not contribute to the difficulties of stepmothering, since the number of children was greater for stepmothers with their own children, no assumptions can be made in this regard. Approximately half of the stepmothers with their own children, as well as stepchildren, reported having to cope with stepsibling rivalry. However, as stepmothers with their own children had better family functioning, and as this is suggestive of less difficulties, it would seem that stepsibling rivalry, rather than contributing to problems, tended to lessen the burden placed on the stepmother.

These results must, however, remain suggestive of trends rather than being conclusive for a number of reasons. Firstly, as mentioned, the Child Behaviour Questionnaire is

a screening device only. The instrument differentiates children with emotional and behavioural disorders from children with no disorders. Significant behavioural distinctions between children with no disorders may not be highlighted by this device.

Secondly, the test presupposes a parental knowledge of the child's behavioural patterns, details necessary to complete the questionnaire. Particularly in the case of the stepfamily, this supposition may not be well grounded. Thus, for instance, to the question "Does your child complain of headaches?" the stepmother's reply may be inaccurate in the instance of a distant relationship between her and her stepchild. Her husband's work commitments and general lack of close contact with the child may inhibit his knowledge of the child. While both the stepmother and her husband completed the questionnaire together, this precaution may not have been sufficient to overcome this problem. Indeed, Bowerman and Irish (1962) found that affectional bonds between a stepmother and her stepchild were frequently poor. However, they note that, as a result, the relationships between the fathers and children of these families tended to be close. Nevertheless, such closeness does not compare to the nuclear family where the affectional bond between parents and children is stronger. Further investigation would be necessary to confirm this confounding variable.

4.1.3 The Family Relations Test

This measure was used as an objective means to explore the stepmother's early family relations which, it has been suggested (Schulman, 1972, Walker, 1971 and Deutsch, 1944) affect her ability to cope with stepmotherhood. It therefore explores the reasons, for the difficulties of stepmothering. The results indicate that both groups of stepmothers recollect similar early childhood relationships with their families and thus that the differences as found in The Family Assessment Device cannot be attributed to the stepmother's own psychology as measured by this device.

Both stepmothers without their own children and stepmothers with their own children displaced their early emotional involvement from their mother and father to others in the family, that is, they recalled being more emotionally involved with other members of their family than with either of their parents. According to the theoretical tenets of the test, an infantile relationship would be suggested by the number of responses being high in the mother category, that is by a closer emotional bond with the mother. In other words the above finding can be understood as indicating the emotional maturity of stepmothers - where a less infantile bond between parents and children exists because the early relationship with parents has been negotiated. This finding is further

substantiated by the stepmother's recollections of being more involved emotionally with their fathers than with their mothers, again suggesting that the stepmothers no longer hold a strong attachment to their early close dependence on their mother. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, a woman, through motherhood, relives her earlier relationship with her own mother. It is thought that thereby she better negotiates an immature early relationship, although this test is not sensitive to this observation.

Both groups of stepmothers generally recall having had more positive than negative feelings from and towards their family, suggesting that they have pleasant childhood memories. The demographic details confirm this, with by far the majority of stepmothers reporting no history of divorce in their families. The results of the Family Relations Test revealed some differences between the two groups. Stepmothers with their own children consistently obtained higher means for emotional attachment to other members of their families than did stepmothers without their own children. The results were similar in the 'nobody' category, that is, in the category of feelings which did not exist in the individual's childhood experience. Here stepmothers with their own children placed more responses into the 'nobody' category than did stepmothers without children of their own. The problem

with interpreting these findings is that while they may be due to random sample variation, they are not susceptible to being tested, since due to the small sample, observational statistics could not be administered on the scores obtained. Furthermore, normative data for the test is not available.

A more detailed assessment of the contribution of the stepmothers own psychology to her ability to act as substitute mother would be achieved by an in-depth analysis of each stepmother. Such analysis was, however, beyond the limits of this study.

4.1.4 The Demographic Details

Demographic details were obtained from the stepmothers to examine their unique situations and to compare the two groups of stepmothers. Differences between the two groups may suggest possible reasons for the differences already noted. Similarities will further define the sample and may suggest areas for further research.

The results show that, but for a few areas, both groups of stepmothers present with similar demography. All stepmothers were white South Africans from the middle class income groups. Their husbands were largely professionals with sufficient income to support the

family in a comfortable manner. According to the literature, finances can place a strain on the stepfamily where a husband, who is also an ex-husband, must frequently support two families (Hart 1976). In this regard, however, it must be mentioned that the husbands of stepmothers without their own children are exempt from paying maintenance, as they have custody of their children, and hence usually support only one family. It was noted that one stepmother with children of her own who reported financial difficulties in her present stepfamily situation also reported having arguments with her husband over the expenses incurred by her own children. Although this does suggest that this area may be a source of difficulty for the stepmother, this was an isolated case and could be accountable to other factors which are not here relevant.

Both groups of stepmothers had contact with the biological mothers of their stepchildren, their positions of stepmothers having arisen through the divorce of the original nuclear family. Here there was only one exception in the case where the biological mother was dead. This stepmother did, however, have frequent contact with the parents of the deceased. The question of whether divorce or death of the biological mother presents more difficulties for a stepmother, is an issue which is not raised by this sample.

The majority of stepmothers interviewed had one or two stepchildren, while a small percentage had three, with four being the maximum. A large number of stepchildren may make stepmothering more difficult, for the stepmother necessarily has more with which to contend. However, both groups of stepmothers sampled presented with the same number of stepchildren.

Adjustment to the stepmother status may be hampered by a number of factors stemming from the husband's previous marriage and divorce. (Schulman, 1981). For the majority of stepfamilies examined there were 1-3 years separating the break-up of the nuclear family and the later remarriage, the longest time separating the two events being seven years. Such a long period where the children are without a mother, may affect the stepmother status for children may find it more difficult to adjust and give up established behavioural patterns. However, while stepfamilies in which stepmothers with their own children tended to have less than three years separating the divorce and remarriage, this did not differ from stepfamilies in which the stepmother had no children of her own. Both groups of stepmothers were the same ages and had been married for the same period.

Most stepmothers from both groups reported that they were not presently working. This factor may contribute to the

difficulty a stepmother might have (Robinson, 1980). Sixty-five percent of all the stepmothers interviewed were unmarried prior to their present marriage which suggests further that their stepmother status represents a substantial change in their lives. Furthermore, fifty-five percent of the stepmothers had no domestic help in their new position, again making the transition from being unmarried more difficult.

During the interview stepmothers were asked to rate their relationship with the natural mother of their stepchildren. As can be seen from the results, stepmothers largely reported having poor relations with their husband's ex-wife. It was also noted that the only stepmother whose position arose from the death of the biological mother had poor relations with her stepchildren's maternal grandparents. This aspect of the stepmother's unique situation thus appears to be a source of difficulty for the stepmother, since terminating relations with the ex-wife of her husband would present difficulty as she is the mother of the children in her custody. The majority of stepmothers reported frequent contact with the biological mother which is generally related to child arrangements.

The relationship between the stepmother, her husband, her stepchildren and the biological mother, places the stepmother in a unique position distinct from the situation

of both foster mother and adoptive mother, and hence this aspect of stepmothering bears further scrutiny. There could be many reasons for the reportedly poor relations with biological mothers: The stepmother may have internalised her husband's resentment of his previous wife, given that husband's may commonly harbour resentment to previous wives (Hart, 1976). Indeed only 16% of the stepmothers interviewed reported that their husband's divorce was due to the wishes of their husbands, this being an indicator of not having resolved the earlier feelings (Price-Bonham and Balswick, 1980). Alternatively the stepmother might resent her position and unconsciously blame the natural mother. These are speculations which will need further research to confirm. Given the necessary relationship between the stepmother and the biological mother, this relationship is suggested to be an important one and thus warrants further investigation.

Despite the problems stepmothers are assumed to have, 51.6% of both groups of stepmothers wanted to have children of their own, or if they already had, wanted more children. The majority of stepmothers did, however, consider that stepmothering was different from mothering. As 36% of both groups of stepmothers have been remarried for 1-3 years and 39% have been married for 4-6 years, the stepmothers generally have had sufficient time together to render an

examination with their husbands of their marriages accurately.

While the above demographic details describe the particular positions of the stepmothers examined and suggest certain areas of further research, these details were the same for both groups, and thus cannot be said to provide insight into the reasons for the differences in family functioning. The similarities noted above, indicate that the two groups of stepmothers are well matched for comparison on other variables.

As can be seen in the results, there were areas of the demography of the sample of stepmothers where the groups presented somewhat different trends. On the one hand these areas may act as confounding variables by providing reasons other than the difficulties of stepmothers to account for the difference between the family functioning of the groups. On the other hand, these differences will also contribute to an understanding of the difficulties a stepmother might experience.

A most noteworthy difference between the two groups of stepmothers, was the total number of children and stepchildren they mothered. While both groups of stepmothers had the same number of stepchildren,

stepmothers with their own children had these children together with stepchildren resulting in them having more children in their care. On the Family Assessment Device, it was found that stepmothers with their own children had healthier family functioning. As mentioned earlier, a higher number of stepchildren may indeed make the stepmother's task more difficult, despite the stepchildren's individual behaviours being free from disorders. This research finding suggests that the number of children and stepchildren with which a stepmother must cope does not contribute to her difficulties. However the fact that the stepmothers without children of their own had only stepchildren remains an essential difference.

As mentioned, 53% of stepmothers with their own children as opposed to 100% of stepmothers without children of their own, had careers prior to their present marriage. As Robinson (1980) suggests, stepmothers without children of their own have a greater adjustment to make when marrying into a family. This could indeed contribute to the greater family functioning problems experienced by them.

Far more stepmothers with their own children had domestic help than those stepmothers without their own children. This despite both groups of stepmothers having the same number of stepchildren. As Singer (1984) notes, in the white

South African context

"The domestic servant is an accepted feature of family life ,the domestic servant reduces the burden of housework and leaves wives with more leisure time."

(page 131)

Stepmothers without domestic help may thus indeed have more difficulties in coping than will stepmothers with domestic help. This variable is thus suggested to be an important consideration.

4.2 A Summary of the Differences between Stepmothers
With and Without their own Children

The differences obtained on the analysis of the scores of The Family Assessment Device indicate that stepmothers without their own children have less healthy family functioning and therefore more difficulties than do stepmothers with children of their own. This finding is consistent with the literature.

The importance of a career for a woman has only recently received attention (Singer, 1984). It was found in this study that more stepmothers without their own children had careers prior to their marriage which were given up on becoming a stepmother. Having given up a career to marry therefore is an important determining factor in the woman's ability to stepmother, and hence necessitates consideration.

The white married middle class South African stepmothers without their own children less frequently employed a servant, despite the prevalence of domestic servants to alleviate the burdens of managing a household. This research suggests that this choice could contribute to making their task more difficult. Consequently the less healthy family functioning of the stepmothers without children of their own could have been confounded by their not being willing to employ a servant.

4.3 Limitations

This study was limited by several factors:

1. Sample Size

The small sample size has generally restricted the strength of the research. A larger sample could encompass a greater variation in the economic class of the stepmothers.

Furthermore, the sample size prevented meaningful statistical analysis of both the Family Relations Test scores and of the demographic details. Lastly, because the sample size was so small, stepmothers could only be divided into two categories namely, those who had no children of their own and those who had children of their own. However, further categorization is possible, for instance, a group of stepmothers who had children of their own before their present marriage or a group who may have had their children within their present marriage, such further categorisation might have provided more insights. The sample size, however precluded this.

2. The Convenience Sample of Voluntary Subjects

As it was considered necessary to obtain a normal, rather than a clinical sample of stepmothers, convenience sampling was used. As a result, the subjects were exclusively white South African women of the middle class income bracket. Voluntary subjects may unwittingly bias

the results in an attempt to please the researcher (Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1969). As mentioned, the stepfamily experiencing problems may be unwilling to participate in research. Consequently the results of the study cannot be generalised.

3. The Child Behaviour Questionnaire

The Child Behaviour Questionnaire, although suitable for distinguishing normal from abnormal children, does not adequately distinguish the children within the normal ranges of behaviours. As the majority of the stepchildren fell within the normal range, a further distinction in this regard might have proved more informative. Furthermore, this questionnaire is only suitable to be used for screening children between the ages of 7 and 12, placing further limits on the sample of stepmothers examined.

4. The Adult Family Relations Test

This test is used as an objective means for exploring the stepmother's early family relations. As mentioned, however, the test was used despite paucity of research as to its validity and reliability. This was done because of the problems of researching the stepmother's psychological make-up. An in-depth study, necessary for such an assessment, would have been beyond the limits of this

research. Furthermore, it was noted that scores produced for each category are not independent and thus not amenable to analysis.

For these reasons the results of The Family Relations Test must be considered as broadly descriptive. A better understanding of the psychological make-up of the stepmother would require a detailed analysis by a researcher with clinical experience and skills.

4.4 Criticisms and Further Research

Both this study, and the majority of previous studies of stepmothering, have been largely of a descriptive nature. While this provides valuable material, it is clear that to understand the area in real depth, a theoretical study which goes beyond this, is required. The findings of this research support this criticism. For a composite understanding of the stepmother's position, research must focus on examining a multitude of variables. Adopting a theoretical viewpoint will provide the necessary explanatory analysis.

This study shows that there are differences between stepmothers with and without their own children. It would thus seem that the population of stepmothers do not present a homogenous group. Further research could examine this in more detail. Stepmothers with their own children may be usefully further categorised into 3 groups: a group of those with children from a previous marriage; a group with stepchildren from the present union; and a group with children from both. This would extend a study of the differences between stepmothers, and thereby highlight areas which might present difficulties for her.

Stepmothers in this study largely manifested healthy family functioning. In view of Fast and Cain's (1966) contention

that problems in stepfamilies are inevitable, this finding also leaves room for further research. An even broader understanding might be gleaned by using The Family Assessment Device to compare a group of stepmothers with a group of natural mothers.

As there have been few studies examining the difficulties of the stepmother, this research necessarily incorporated a broad range of areas so as to highlight the contributing factors which might explain her position. Since the sample of stepmothers was both small and exclusive, many of the variables here considered might be researched in greater detail.

The role of the stepmother was examined by means of The Family Assessment Device. The findings suggest that this aspect of stepmotherhood might be problematic. This is in the analysis. This study included the husband both directly (in the interview), and indirectly (through the stepmother's report). The stepchild/children was included indirectly through the stepmother and husband's report. As mentioned, stepmothers frequently disagreed with their husbands over child rearing practices. The relationship between husband, stepmother and stepchild could thus be further detailed. A further refinement might have included a more detailed examination of the husband's adjustment to

divorce, and of the stepchild's relationship to the stepmother.

The Child Behaviour Questionnaire may only be appropriately used on children between the ages of 7 - 12 (Rutter, 1970). Furthermore, the questionnaire, as mentioned, is a screening device only. This questionnaire thus limited the sample of stepmothers to those whose stepchildren were between the ages of 7 - 12. A re-examination of the stepchild's adjustment to the divorce is thus indicated, using possibly a wider age range. Indeed a transgenerational study of the effects of divorce and of subsequent stepmothering could be insightful.

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APPENDIX 1

TO ALL PARENTS

I am a psychology student at the University of Cape Town, presently engaged in a Masters thesis investigating the difficulties encountered by stepmothers.

I require to interview stepmothers with stepchildren between the ages of seven and fourteen. If you are either such a stepmother yourself, or know of one, could you please phone me at 752860, preferably between 9 - 10 a.m or 7 - 8 p.m. All information provided will be held in the strictest confidence.

Yours thankfully

Ruth Price

APPENDIX 3

FAD Raw Data

PS	Comm	Roles	AR	AI	BC	GF
2.17	1.78	2.18	1.17	1.86	1.11	1.42
2.83	2.89	2.09	2.67	2.29	1.44	3.00
1.67	1.67	2.45	1.50	1.57	1.89	1.42
1.17	1.33	2.18	1.00	2.14	1.11	1.42
2.33	2.57	2.64	2.33	3.33	2.00	2.42
1.89	1.80	2.20	1.19	1.89	1.21	1.43
1.19	2.90	2.10	2.00	2.25	1.46	2.96
2.80	1.71	2.55	1.62	1.58	1.92	1.43
2.40	1.38	2.48	1.34	2.16	1.13	1.50
2.89	2.60	2.15	1.21	2.98	1.98	2.00
2.18	1.69	2.62	1.72	1.93	2.00	2.20
2.00	1.89	2.11	2.05	1.96	1.89	2.00

Stepmothers Without Children of their Own

APPENDIX 4

FAD Raw Data

PS B1	Comm B2	Roles B3	AR B4	AI B5	BC B6	GF B7
1.50	2.00	1.80	1.40	1.57	1.38	2.18
3.00	3.44	3.09	2.83	2.43	2.44	2.58
1.83	1.78	2.27	1.67	1.71	1.56	1.42
1.50	1.89	1.73	1.17	1.43	1.00	1.25
1.00	1.00	1.55	1.00	1.29	1.00	1.00
2.00	1.78	2.36	1.83	2.29	2.22	1.92
2.00	1.78	2.09	1.50	1.86	1.89	1.92
1.17	1.00	1.64	1.50	1.29	1.00	1.08
2.00	1.89	2.27	1.67	2.14	2.00	2.00
2.00	2.33	2.64	2.17	2.71	1.89	2.09
1.83	1.89	1.91	1.33	2.00	2.71	1.42
1.83	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.43	1.33	1.67
1.67	1.67	1.73	2.00	2.57	1.11	1.75
1.83	2.33	1.82	2.00	1.57	1.00	1.50
2.00	2.00	2.09	1.67	2.00	1.78	1.92
2.00	1.67	2.30	2.17	1.50	1.56	1.73
2.00	2.11	2.55	2.00	2.29	2.11	2.00
1.00	1.11	2.00	1.00	1.14	1.10	1.00
2.00	2.11	2.50	2.80	2.57	2.11	2.08

Stepmothers With Children of their Own

APPENDIX 3

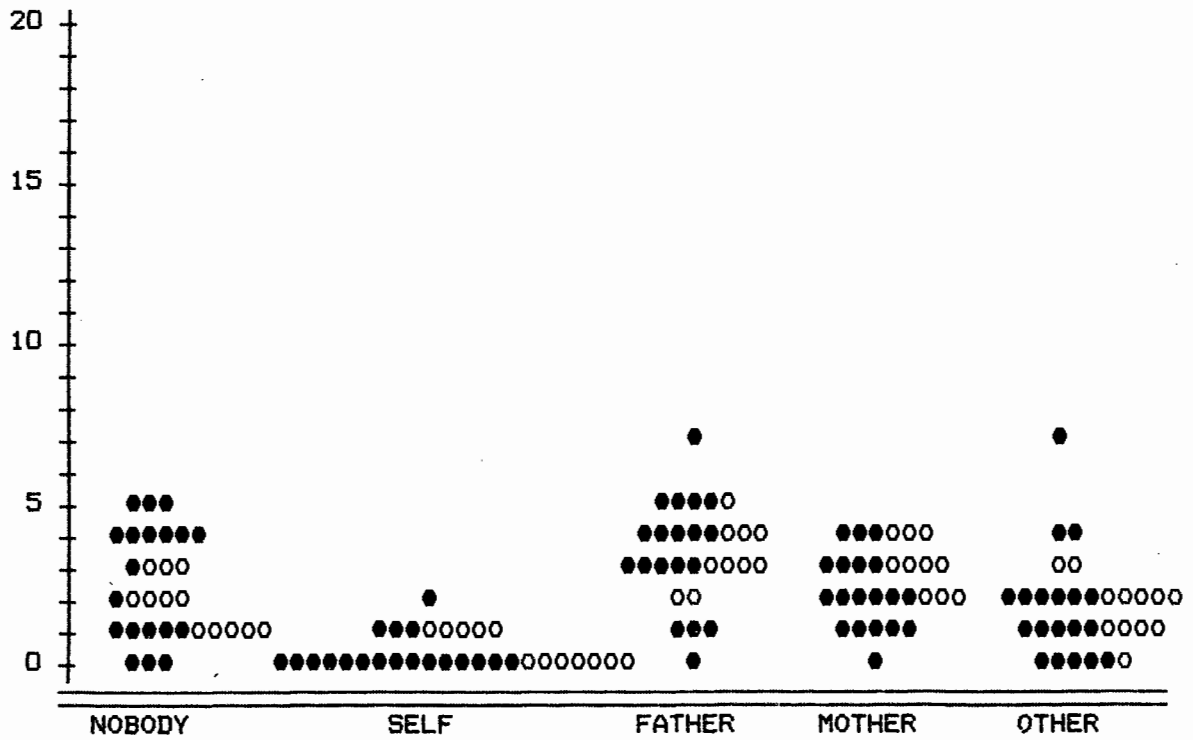
Raw Data: The Rutter Child Behaviour Questionnaire

Stepmothers without
their own children

Stepmothers with
their own children

6
13
2
18
15
12
8
9
29
5
19
12

22
8
8
2
4
30
10
2
7
6
5
3
9
13
26
18
13
3
4
38
19



RAW DATA: PERSONALITY WEAKNESS AND STRENGTHS

● Stepmothers with own children ○ Stepmothers without own children

APPENDIX 7

The McMaster Family Assessment Device

1. Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
2. We resolve most everyday problems around the house.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
3. When someone is upset the others know why.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
4. When you ask someone to do something, you have to check that they did it.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
5. If someone is in trouble, the others become too involved.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
6. In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
7. We don't know what to do when an emergency comes up.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
8. We sometimes run out of things that we need.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
9. We are reluctant to show our affection for each other.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
10. We make sure members meet their family responsibilities.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
11. We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
12. We usually act on our decisions regarding problems.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

13. You only get the interest of others when something is important to them.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
14. You can't tell how a person is feeling from what they are saying.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
15. Family tasks don't get spread around enough.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
16. Individuals are accepted for what they are.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
17. You can easily get away with breaking the rules.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
18. People come right out and say things instead of hinting at them.
_____ SA _____ A _____ ~~D~~ _____ SD _____
19. Some of us just don't respond emotionally.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
20. We know what to do in an emergency.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
21. We avoid discussing our fears and concerns.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
22. It is difficult to talk to each other about tender feelings.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
23. We have trouble meeting our bills.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
24. After our family tries to solve a problem, we usually discuss whether it worked or not.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

25. We are too self-centered.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
26. We can express feelings to each other.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
27. We have no clear expectations about toilet habits.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
28. We do not show our love for each other.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
29. We talk to people directly rather than through go-betweens.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
30. Each of us has particular duties and responsibilities.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
31. There are lots of bad feelings in the family.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
32. We have rules about hitting people.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
33. We get involved with each other only when something interests us.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
34. There's little time to explore personal interests.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
35. We often don't say what we mean.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
36. We feel accepted for what we are.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

37. We show interest in each other when we can get something out of it personally.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

38. We resolve most emotional upsets that come up.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

39. Tenderness takes second place to other things in our family.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

40. We discuss who is to do household jobs.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

41. Making decisions is a problem for our family.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

42. Our family shows interest in each other only when they can get something out of it.

_____ SA _____ A _____ ~~D~~ _____ SD _____

43. We are frank with each other.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

44. We don't hold to any rules or standards.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

45. If people are asked to do something, they need reminding.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

46. We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

47. If the rules are broken, we don't know what to expect.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

48. Anything goes in our family.

_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

49. We express tenderness.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
50. We confront problems involving feelings.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
51. We don't get along well together.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
52. We don't talk to each other when we are angry.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
53. We are generally dissatisfied with the family duties assigned to us.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
54. Even though we mean well, we intrude too much into each others lives.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
55. There are rules about dangerous situations.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
56. We confide in each other.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
57. We cry openly.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
58. We don't have reasonable transport.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
59. When we don't like what someone has done, we tell them.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____
60. We try to think of different ways to solve problems.
_____ SA _____ A _____ D _____ SD _____

APPENDIX 8

The Rutter Child Behaviour Questionnaire

Child scale A

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

TO BE COMPLETED BY PARENTS

NAME OF CHILD BOY/GIRL
DATE OF BIRTH
ADDRESS SCHOOL

How to fill in this form

The questionnaire asks about various kinds of behaviour that many children show at some time. Please cross the answers according to the way your child is now.

Health problems

Below is a list of minor health problems which most children have at some time. Please tell us how often each of these happens with your child by putting a cross in the correct box.

	(i) <i>Never in the last year</i>	(ii) <i>Less often than once per month</i>	(iii) <i>At least once per month</i>	(iv) <i>At least once per week</i>
A. Complains of headaches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Has stomach-ache or vomiting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Complains of biliousness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Wets his/her bed or pants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Soils him/herself or loses control of bowels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Has temper tantrums (that is, complete loss of temper with shouting, angry movements, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Had tears on arrival at school or refused to go into the building	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Truants from school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Habits. Please place a cross against the correct answer.

I. Does he/she stammer or stutter?

No Yes—mildly Yes—severely

II. Has he/she any difficulty with speech other than stammering or stuttering?

- No Yes—mild Yes—severe

If 'Yes', is the difficulty

- 'lispng'
 cannot say words properly
 other, please describe:.....

III. Does he/she ever steal things?

- No Yes—occasionally Yes—frequently

If 'Yes' (occasionally or frequently),
when he/she steals, does it involve

- minor pilfering of pens, sweets, toys, small sums of money, etc
 stealing of big things
 both minor pilfering **and** stealing of big things

when he/she steals, is it done

- in the home
 elsewhere
 both in the home **and** elsewhere

when he/she steals, does he/she do it

- on his/her own
 with other children or adults
 sometimes on his/her own, sometimes with others

IV. Does he/she have any eating difficulty?

- No Yes—mild Yes—severe

If 'Yes', is it

- faddiness
 not eating enough
 eating too much
 other, please describe:.....

V. Does he/she have any sleeping difficulty?

- No Yes—mild Yes—severe

If 'Yes', is it difficulty in

- getting off to sleep
 waking during the night
 waking early in the morning
 other, please describe:.....

Below are a series of descriptions of behaviour often shown by children. After each statement are three columns—'Doesn't Apply', 'Applies Somewhat', and 'Certainly Applies'. If your child definitely shows the behaviour described by the statement place a cross in the box under 'Certainly Applies'. If he or she shows the behaviour described by the statement but to a lesser degree or less often, place a cross under 'Applies Somewhat'. If, **as far as you are aware**, your child does not show the behaviour, place a cross under 'Doesn't Apply'.

Please put **ONE** cross against **EACH** statement

STATEMENT	Doesn't Apply	Applies Somewhat	Certainly Applies
1. Very restless. Often running about or jumping up and down. Hardly ever still	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Squirmy, fidgety child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Often destroys own or others' belongings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Frequently fights with other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Not much liked by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Often worried, worries about many things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Tends to do things on his own—rather solitary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Irritable. Is quick to 'fly off the handle'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Often appears miserable, unhappy, tearful or distressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Has twitches, mannerisms or tics of the face or body	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Frequently sucks thumb or finger	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Frequently bites nails or fingers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Is often disobedient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Cannot settle to anything for more than a few moments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Tends to be fearful or afraid of new things or new situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Fussy or over-particular child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Often tells lies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Bullies other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ARE THERE ANY OTHER PROBLEMS?

SIGNATURE: Mr/Mrs/Miss

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP

APPENDIX 9

The Scoring Sheet of The Adult Family Relations Test

FAMILY RELATIONS TEST

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Name, Age, Sex of siblings:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Others in childhood family:

1.

2.

3.

4.

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APPENDIX 10

THE REPORTED DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY STEPMOTHERS

stepmothers without children of their own

- need for physical affection by children
by children
- children not willing to go halfway
- responsibility of the child
- PTA meetings
- dealings with strange children become
petty
- feels unappreciated
- no privacy
- life disrupted eg housework
- loss of privacy
- learning to be unselfish
- guilt of not doing enough
- no privacy

stepmothers with children of their own

- sharing with mother
- expressing anger without losing
affection
- sharing things
- constant reminder of husbands
- previous guilt about stepchild
not her own
- getting to know the children
- trying to be fair
- overcoming resentment
- feelings of insecurity
- being taken for granted
- coming to terms with difficult
child
- tensions in the family
- conflict with mother
- joining different life styles
and approaches
- feeling pivotal but uninvolved
- assuming half a role in everything
- accepting stepchild and vice versa
- being unfair
- your interests come last
- sharing husband
- having a stranger take over
- feeling excluded
- mother's interference
- avoid talking to stepchild
- mother contact
- trying not to offend child

APPENDIX 11

THE REPORTED SATISFACTIONS EXPERIENCED BY STEPMOTHERS

stepmothers without children
of their own

- having a good relationship
- having a good friend
- companionship
- experience of children, learning
- the loving way children respond
- ready made family life
- being a mother without conceiving
- doing things with children
- being needed
- being accepted
- family life

stepmothers with children
of their own

- being a mother
- love of children
- having insight for your own child
- being a mother
- immediate family
- husbands appreciation
- knowing children prefer you to mother
- taking risks and getting rewards
- being needed
- experience of having children
- children exposed to a wider view of life
- being mother of a big family
- none
- husbands support
- being appreciated
- being needed, appreciated, loved
- enjoys mothering a daughter
- husband is grateful
- happiness of husband
- maturing quickly
- sympathy for children