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THEORIES OF REMARRIAGE



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**ABSTRACT:**

Remarriage has not been a major topic for either empirical research or theorizing. This article presents a theoretical approach to the specific issue of the impact of remarriage on post marital family reorganization, based upon existing theory and research. Several propositions for empirical testing derived from the theoretical argument are presented and discussed in relation to each of five subsystems within the reorganizing postmarital family system.

**KEYWORDS**

*assessment, family policy, family theory, remarriage, step-family, family relation.*

## INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY:

Conceptually, it is useful to think of marital dissolution and re-marriage as the component parts of a process that takes people back and forth between being married and not being married. There are two states (married and unmarried), and dissolution is the process or event that transfers people from being married to being unmarried while re-marriage takes people in the opposite direction.

For women who experience dissolution through widowhood, there are two distinct steps that correspond with the two processes for the dissolution-marriage cycle. The women go from the married to the unmarried state at the death of the husband. The reverse process is accomplished when they re-marry. However, for women who experience dissolution as a result of marital unhappiness and discord, there is a three-step sequence of events that corresponds to the two processes of the dissolution re-marriage cycle. The first is the decision to stop living together. This, for many couples, is the actual breaking point of the marriage. However, the formal and legal dissolution of the marriage requires a second step, divorce. Marriages are only legally dissolved when a divorce is obtained. The third step in the complete cycle is re-marriage. Of course, a second marriage can only be contracted after the first one has been officially dissolved.

For women who experience such dissolution, a three-step procedure (separation, divorce, and re-marriage) is superimposed on a cycle that only contains two states (married and unmarried) and two processes (dissolution and re-marriage) for transferring people between states. This superimposition creates conceptual and methodological difficulties. Separation, the first step in the cycle is obviously part of the dissolution process; it transfers women from being married to being unmarried. The third step, re-marriage is clearly part of the re-marriage process; it transfers women from the unmarried condition to the married. It is the second step, divorce, and the period of time between separation and divorce that created difficulty. Are the marriages of separated women married or unmarried? Is the re-marriage process best seen as beginning with separation or divorce.

Legally and formally these three questions can be answered in a fairly straight forward and simple manner. Marriages end at the time of divorce. Until divorce, women remain married and cannot begin the re-marriage process. However, the sociological answers to the questions are less simple and in many ways different. The legal requirements are recognized, but it is also understood that most of the characteristics of the married state end when separation occurs. By definition, the partners no longer live together, and the ties are mostly broken. Many separated couples no longer consider themselves as married. This is especially true for those who believe the separation to be permanent. In fact, many marriages are disrupted permanently from discord and yet are never dissolved legally by divorce.

The third question is the re-marriage process best seen beginning with separation or beginning with divorce is more difficult to answer sociologically than the first two. The beginning of the re-marriage process undoubtedly varies tremendously among individuals. As Bernard points out the process probably begins even before separation for some.

**Significant Aim of the Study:** Twentieth-century studies differ from historical works in that they must consider divorce as well as widowhood as an important source of candidates for remarriage. However the present research for this article was supported by aiming at critically evaluating the relevant important theories related to the concept of remarriage in-order to establish a theoretical framework and further undertake specific analysis to develop a perfectly fitting model for the concept

of remarriage.

### CRITICAL DISCUSSION.

**Theory of reunification:** One spouse's death, the widow or widower is apt to survive for years and even decades. This was true in the eighteenth century as it is in the twentieth, and twenty-first too. Here the age of the survivor has only secondary importance. Acknowledgement of influences on the likelihood of remarriage is therefore essential to an appreciation of the personal and social consequences of widowhood. Yet historians of the family have seldom given the subject much attention, despite the implications of failure to remarry for the welfare of the widow or widower and the survival of the remaining member of the household. This article will begin re-focusing on that neglected component through a critical study related to remarriage in India, at the beginning of the contemporary society. It will examine the personal attributes of a cohort of newly widowed men and women and use that information to explain why some remarried and others failed to do so. The argument will follow a model developed from the findings of published case studies of the correlates of remarriage in a number of European, North American, Australian, African and Asian communities starting between the sixteenth to twenty first centuries. There will be no systematic study of the communal characteristics that affected aggregate remarriage.

**Theory of dating:** Courtship for remarriage has not been a major topic for either empirical research or theorizing. This paragraph of article presents a theoretical approach to the specific issue of the impact of courtship for remarriage on post marital family reorganization, based upon existing theory and research. Several propositions for empirical testing derived from the theoretical argument are presented and discussed in relation to each of five subsystems within the reorganizing postmarital family system.

A survey of recent courtship literature indicates a bias in this field toward studying young, heterosexual, never-married persons. In addition, the emphasis has been on identifying factors that influence courtship behavior and progress, such as couple similarity, peer and parental approval, and family background variables (Adams, 1979; Booth, Brinkerhoff, and White, 1984; Hill, Rubin, and Peplau, 1972). Courtship in the population of older, divorced women and men has only recently come to the attention of some investigators (Peters, 1976). Most of this research focuses on the remarried state, ignoring the courtship process leading up to remarriage (Walker et al, 1979, for an annotated bibliography). When the question of courtship for remarriage is addressed, the emphasis is on courtship as a dependent variable. As such, demographic variables (Goode, 1956; Spanier and Glick, 1980), past marital history (Hunt, 1966), and current family circumstance (Bernard, 1956; Weiss, 1979) are cited as important factors influencing the courtship process.

In contrast, the following discussion represents an attempt to treat courtship for remarriage as an independent variable. The dependent variable of interest will be level of family reorganization after divorce. The dearth of empirical studies dealing with courtship for remarriage, let alone treating courtship as an independent variable, has made it necessary to draw almost exclusively from research on remarried families.

The substitution of remarriage literature for more direct studies on courtship is justified on at least two accounts. First, potential mates of formerly married persons are often introduced to other

family members only after there is some assurance of a commitment between the courters (Weiss, 1979). A commitment between the courters is likely to result in family members acting and reacting toward the situation more as if it were a remarriage than a dating relationship. Second, divorced courting partners often take on the roles husband and wife in relating to one another (Bernard, 1956; Hunt, 1966). To the extent that they interact like husband and wife their courtship behavior can be expected to be similar to the interaction that will occur in remarriage. There are, of course, important differences between courtship for remarriage and actual remarriage, and these differences will be kept in mind when characteristics of remarriage are substituted for the independent variable courtship.

**Theory of social inclusive and exclusive:** Nearly all the existing empirical work on step- families has been published in the last decade. This review first describes the demographic context for this work and then surveys research on stepchildren remarriage, and stepfamily functioning. Problems in the extant research are identified, and attention is given to areas that need to be explored in the future. Explicit and implicit theories that guided remarriage and stepfamily research in the '80s receive special emphasis. The review closes with suggestions regarding the direction of future theory in these areas of research.

Prior to 1980, only a handful of studies on remarriage and stepfamilies appeared in print (Espinoza and Newman, 1979). Today this body of research contains well over 200 published empirical works. The past decade clearly has been the most productive period for research on remarriage and step- families. The quality and complexity of the studies advanced concomitantly with the quantitative increase.

The reason for the increase in empirical investigations of remarriage and stepfamily dynamics is not because either phenomenon is new; stepfamilies have existed through the ages.

However, until the early 1970s, remarriage typically followed the death of a spouse. Currently, the majority are preceded by divorce. If well over one-half of today's young persons in the United States become stepsons or stepdaughters by the year 2000, as has been predicted ((flick, 1989), the increased attention by researchers is justified.

We begin this review by summarizing some of the demographic literature. Research on stepchildren, remarriage, and stepfamily functioning is examined in separate sections. A critique of the research methodology follows, and we conclude by proposing new directions for research and by suggesting areas of study for the next decade.

The volume of research on remarriage and stepfamilies in this decade dictated that we would be selective in choosing studies to review and issues to discuss. Some issues (e.g., extended kin, step-siblings) were omitted because research in those areas was extremely limited. Many good studies were excluded for lack of space. We tried to select only well-designed research, but some investigations were included because they represented unique methods or points of view.

**Theory of Family Stress:** The purpose of this article is to describe the application of family stress theory as a conceptual model for explaining and promoting adjustment to remarriage and stepfamily living. Family stress theory provides a useful format for assessing mid helping step-families by explaining the remarriage experience in a way that suggests possibilities for interventions within the family and also possibilities for policy changes within a variety of institutions in our society. In addition, the basic ideas of this model can be understood by family members themselves, and therefore, some families may be

able to learn to use the model independently for self-assessment and directions for change.

The conceptual basis of family stress theory can be found in Hill's (1949, 1958) ABCX family crisis model. Which was designed to identify the variables that could explain the differences among families in their adaptation to stressful events and situations. Basically the model states that a stressor event interacts with the family's crisis meeting resources and the meaning that the family gives to the stressor event to create the crisis. The evolution of the model has produced expanded and more dynamic models: the Double ABCX model of adjustment and adaptation to stressors (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), which includes the process as well as the outcome of the family's adaptive or maladaptive coping behaviors overtime, and the contextual model of family stress (BOSS 1987), which emphasizes the extrafamilial and intrafamilial contexts which influence how the family members perceive the stressor event.

Applying the ABCX model to step-family living illustrates how the stressor event of remarriage interacts with the particular Family's resources and the meaning attached to the remarriage by members of the family system to possibly create a family crisis. In addition, this model identifies processes leading to either bonadaptation or maladaptation. Remarriage is a stressor event that is conceptualized in the model as a normative transition (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) therefore some stress associated with this family transition is expected and considered normal. This conceptualization is important for two reasons. Family members often attribute stepfamily adjustment problems to their failure as individuals, and stepfamily members can be empowered by focusing on coping processes. Personal, familial, and community resources are important contributors to the adjustment of stepfamilies. The meaning of the remarriage is influenced by a variety of contextual factors (both inside and outside of the family), which predict individual family members' coping behaviors and the family's adaptation; Crises often occur in remarried families. The 54% divorce rate among remarried women, the 61% divorce rate among remarried men (Glick, 1983), and the early extrusion of stepchildren from the step family home (White & Booth, 1985) suggest that many families do not cope with the remarriage adaptively. This study presents a guide for the application of the family stress model to remarriage and the adjustment to stepfamily living. It places the key issues in stepfamily adjustment into a useful integrated framework. Discussion of each aspect of this model will emphasize points of preventive or remedial Intervention to practitioners and to the family itself.

Stepfamily is defined as a family in which at least one married or cohabiting adult has one or more children from a prior relationship and the children spend time in the adult's household. Extended stepfamily network is defined as the households that are linked together by traditional extended family and by biological ties between children and divorced parents for example, the household of the residential parent and stepparent (a stepfamily) and the household of the nonresidential parent (possibly a step-family) and the stepparent also had children from a prior relationship, the household of the stepparent's ex-partner and his/her biological children (also possibly a stepfamily).

Before discussing the model in detail, a case will be presented to illustrate specific components of the model. The history of the case will be described briefly here and further details and references to the case will be included where appropriate in subsequent discussions.

Barbara Jones and Jack Smith were both unhappily married and living in a small town in rural America. Barbara had been pregnant when she married Tom Jones during their senior year in high school, and they became the parents of Julie, now aged four, and Tommy, aged one. Tom had a drug dependency problem and had been physically abusive to Barbara; at Barbara's request, Tom had the

difficult time period as long as he staged with family, similarly another popular case of Indian re-married couple is of non other than the famous writer Shobha de presently living happily with her step children in a family.

### THEORY OF ECONOMICS:

The number of persons experiencing re-marriage has increased for two increased for two reasons. First, more people are eligible due to the increase in marital disruption, and second, a rising proportion of those eligible remarry (Sweet, 1977), Most eligible persons do remarry. Thornton (1975) found that 83 percent of women interviewed for the 1970 National Fertility Survey remarried by the ninth year after marital disruption, with 52 percent remarrying within three years. Using male respondents from the 1967 Survey of Economic Opportunity, Sweet (1973) reported that 75 percent of those whose first marriage terminated prior to age 40 had remarried. Clearly, who remarries, how quickly they remarry, and what factors affect the stability of second or higher order marriages are becoming more important questions.

This work studies the influences that lead to remarriage by focusing on the effects of men's earnings. Our data are from the Wisconsin Study of Social and Psychological Factors in Socioeconomic Achievement which include each male respondent's Social Security earning history. We first review the literature on the economics of remarriage and evaluate the empirical evidence from previous studies. We then discuss the data source, our models, and the measurement of our variables. After presenting the results, the conclusion relates our findings to those of previous studies.

Hypotheses and previous findings, because our earnings data are for males only, we emphasize here the hypotheses and evidence about the relationship of men's earnings to the probability that they remarry. The theoretical and empirical literature on the role of earnings in affecting the likelihood that women remarry sets forth hypotheses that differ from those for men. Because women traditionally specialize in home work or tend to interrupt their full-time market work experiences with spells devoted to childrearing, women's earnings are usually viewed as an alternative to spousal support, leading to an emphasis on the degree of independence their earnings appear to permit.

### CONCLUSION:

The demographic literature published during the past decades primarily reports data collected in the 70s or early 80s. The 1990 Census will assess stepfamily households for the first time; data previously had to be inferred from special surveys.

### SUGGESTIONS:

Remarriage and adjustment to stepfamily living are conceptualized as a life transition in the framework of family stress theory. The Double ABCX model serves as the basis for delineating the hardships that can be associated with remarriage, potential resources available to the stepfamily, meanings of the remarriage, and possibilities of adaptation that are unique to the remarried family. The application of the model is designed to provide a format for assessment of stepfamilies, a guide for interventions and a basis for policy supporting stepfamilies.



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