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EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF LATER-LIFE REMARRIED
COUPLES

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EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF LATER-LIFE REMARRIED COUPLES

By

Sara B. Dupuis

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Family and Child Ecology

2009

ABSTRACT

EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF LATER-LIFE REMARRIED COUPLES

By

Sara B. Dupuis

Remarriage is a normative process in society, whereby nearly half of all marriages constitutes a remarriage for one or both members of the couple (Faber, 2004). While remarriage and stepfamily dynamics are well documented in mid-life, such dynamics have been virtually ignored in the literature with respect to older adults. As such, this qualitative study addresses this gap, by examining the experiences of later-life remarried couples. This study further assesses the primary factors that inform such experiences, and how factors specific to aging play into couple experiences. Human Ecological Theory, as well as the theory of Social Interactionism helps to guide this study. A grounded theory approach, as specified by Strauss and Corbin (1992) is utilized to analyze the contents of eleven in-depth, couple interviews. Salient themes suggest that such experiences are highlighted by each member of the couple's individual experiences and processes, as well as the couple's experiences with relational systems, the remarried couple's internal processes and experiences, as well as factors specific to aging. Altogether, these themes suggest that such relationships provide a place of growth, development, connectivity, and companionship to the members of such couples. Yet, such relationships are marked by a lack of shared history. They are further marked by a complex history, in terms of individual components, and they face complex relational dynamics. Finally, such relationships face challenges in balancing drives towards independence. Clinical suggestions are provided, as well as limitations to the study, and future directions in research.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my son, Joshua,
and my husband Matthew, for teaching me
the meaning of life and love.

Acknowledgements

My experiences as a graduate student in the Department of Family and Child Ecology have truly provided an environment of growth and support. Such an environment has allowed me to develop not only personally, but as a researcher and clinician as well. As such, I have many people to thank for my progression along this road.

I especially would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Marsha Carolan. At every stage of the learning process, she guided and inspired me. Her support was everlasting, and her encouragement was endless. Without her, none of this would be possible. Special thanks also go to my other committee members, Dr. Adrian Blow, Dr. Tina Timm, and Dr. John Mooradian. Each has contributed so much to my experiences; I am truly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with each and every one of you. I am also truly thankful for the enduring support and guidance. You will all continue to be guiding lights as I go forward in my career.

I would also like to thank Dr. Holly Brophy-Herb for mentoring me along my research path. Her guidance and understanding have been instrumental throughout. In addition, the Building Early Emotion Skills Research Team provided a wonderful model of collaboration and respect.

Further, I truly would like to thank Dr. Shelley Smithson for providing me with a sounding board all of these years. You have played the role of supervisor, mentor, and friend. You have also provided a calming influence, for which I am ever so grateful. In addition, thank you to Dr. Martha Bristor for providing me with ongoing support and supervision as I juggle my many roles in life.

I would also like to thank the faculty and staff in the Marriage and Family Psychology program at Wayne State University, as well as the Psychology department at Kenyon College for giving me my start, and encouraging me in all my endeavors.

In studying families, I have often times reflected upon my own experiences. As such, I can truly say how fortunate I have been to have such loving parents, Ben and Jackie Rudolph, and brothers Mark and Barry Rudolph. Each of them have encouraged me to pursue my dreams, and provided me so much support along the way. I also want to thank my mother-in-law, Nancy Babcock, and father-in-law, Steve Dupuis, for providing the inspiration for this study, and for their support along the way.

There are no words to describe the love and appreciation that I feel towards my husband, Matt. He has provided me with support, solace, laughter, love, and friendship. He has truly been there, by my side, through it all, and for that, I am so thankful. To our son, Josh, I have been so inspired by you. As you have grown through this process, so I have I. You have taught me what is important in life. Further, you are so essential to my world, and I am just so thankful that you are here.

Finally, I would like to thank the eleven couples who shared a part of their life stories with me. I sincerely hope that I have provided them with a voice, so that their experiences can be recognized within the clinical and scholarly communities.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Remarriage is a normative process in society, whereby nearly half of all marriages constitutes a remarriage for one or both members of the couple (Faber, 2004). While remarriage and stepfamily dynamics are well documented in mid-life, such dynamics have yet to be fully recognized or understood with respect to older adults (Clawson & Ganong, 2002; Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). Given that an estimated half a million people above the age of 65 remarry each year (Cooney & Dunne, 2001), and given that the Baby Boom generation is now entering such a phase, this provides for an important area of study.

Further, couples entering remarriage during their later adult years (65+) face challenges that are unique to their stage of life (Miller, Yorganson, Sandberg, & White, 2003). As such, examining the context of such remarriages provides for important clinical implications.

Significance

Older Remarried Couple Processes

As stated previously, much energy has been expended on detailing the lives and processes of mid-life blended family members. Yet, to-date, little research has sought to inquire as to older remarried couple processes. For instance, research has yet to explore how older remarried couples seek to integrate their respective past family lives, traditions, and narratives into the present. In addition, few studies have sought to examine expectations as to intergenerational interactions and support. Studies thereby need to explore how older remarried couples feel about these processes, such as the role of being

a stepparent to an adult child. Without such knowledge, clinicians are ill equipped when it comes to treating such couples.

Remarriage and Aging

Only recently has the field of geriatric studies truly developed (Blieszner, 2007). Until this point, as Blieszner (2007) provides, research examining later-life relationships has been significantly lacking. Moreover, Sherman and Boss (2007) argue that research on older remarried couples has been essentially ignored. Given that individuals face a longer life expectancy and a greater period of good health than ever before (77 years on average; Cooney & Dunne, 2001), and given that a good proportion of the aging segment of society is more likely to have experienced divorce and remarriage in their lifetime (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000), such research is of primary importance. Further, such research offers the opportunity to explore factors of aging, such as decreasing health, planning for retirement, and changes around sexual intercourse and desire, as it relates to remarriage.

Purpose of Study

Given the above statements, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on later-life remarriages. More specifically, this study explores the lived experiences of remarried couples in later-life. For the purposes of this study, later life remarriage has been defined as a remarriage or long-standing relationship wherein at least one partner in the relationship was 55 years or older (Cooney & Dunne, 2001). Further, at least one of the members has to have experienced a divorce. As has been stated, despite copious research on mid-life blended families, such couples represent an overlooked population. Given the growing number of older adults who are entering into

remarriage (Cooney & Dunne, 2001), this study presents a relevant and timely contribution to the remarriage literature.

Theoretical Background

Theory provides a lens through which researchers can better understand a phenomenon (Robila & Taylor, 2001). Given this, two primary theoretical frameworks were utilized to guide the development of this study: Human Ecological Theory and Symbolic Interactionism. Together, these theories provided for a coherent and unified understanding of older remarried couples.

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) model of Human Ecology was central to this study, given that it provided a framework from which to explore systemic influences on the interaction of individuals within multiple environments. As such, it provided a venue from which to explore the experiences of spouses in relating to each other and to outside environments.

In addition, Symbolic Interactionism provided a frame in which to understand the connection between meanings and interaction (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). It provided a venue from which to examine roles amongst older remarried couples, and allowed for the exploration of how internalized meanings influenced such roles (White & Klein, 2002). In essence, this theory gave voice to each member's experiences and to the interactional processes involved in the couple formation.

Human Ecological Theory

Human Ecological Theory is based upon the study of relationships amongst individuals, families, and communities (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). It focuses on individual family members as well as on the family as a whole. Importantly, this

framework also provides for families of diverse structures and ethnicity, in varying life stages, and with different life circumstances (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). As such, this framework was easily utilized in the study of older remarried couples.

In addition, Human Ecological Theory provides a lens for looking at ways in which intrafamilial processes are influenced by extrafamilial conditions and environments (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). In other words, this theory is based upon the notion that individuals interact with the environment and the environment interacts with individuals. The underlying premise of this framework, therefore, posits that individuals reciprocally interact with and influence their environment. In the case of remarriage, this indicates that no single factor causes marital difficulties or dissolution; rather, it is the interchange and interaction with varying environments that poses such a result.

Human Ecological Theory also posits that social interactions take place within three varying environments: that of the natural physical-biological environment, the social-cultural environment, and the human-built environment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). These environments provide the settings in which one exists and interacts. For the purposes of this study, the social-cultural environment was of primary importance. The social-cultural environment, as defined by Bubolz and Sontag (1993) includes: 1) the presence of human beings (e.g. adult children, ex-spouses, friends); 2) abstract cultural constructions (e.g. laws, norms, values); and 3) social and economic institutions (e.g. marriage, money).

A major component of Human Ecological Theory is based upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) four levels of nested ecosystems. Accordingly, these ecosystems provide the environment in which the individual develops and interacts. They are differentiated with

regard to their closeness to the developing person (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993), and include: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (White & Klein, 2002). A fifth level, the chronosystem, which was added later by Bronfenbrenner (2005), will also be described.

To begin, the microsystem can be defined as the primary environment surrounding the individual, such as the immediate family (White & Klein, 2002), or, in the case of this study, the remarried couple. The mesosystem, as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979), consists of interactions occurring between two or more microsystems. In the case of the remarried couple, this was thought to include the interaction between the couple and their adult children/stepchildren, and the couple and their friends and extended family. The exosystem comprises those contexts in which individuals are not directly involved, but by which they are nonetheless influenced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, this was thought to include the spouse's ex-spouse, or the spouse's work. Further, the macrosystem can be defined as broad ideological norms and institutional patterns, such as governmental policies and cultural expectations (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). With regard to the remarried couple, this was thought to be exemplified by societal beliefs about later-life romantic relationships, as well as legal considerations regarding inheritance. Lastly, the chronosystem encompasses the temporal aspects of development (Adamsons, O'Brien, & Pasley, 2007). In addition to the passage of time over which development occurs, time refers to individuals' chronological age, the historical period within which they reside, and the developmental stage of the family (ie. courtship, retirement; Adamsons et al., 2007). Importantly, the chronosystem was

incorporated in this study through examining the contextual factors surrounding remarried couples in their later adult years.

It is important to note that all of these concepts are interconnected. As such, this provides that each level effects and is affected by the other levels. Given this, this model provided an ideal framework from which to understand how the remarried couple processes are influenced by and influence the varying environments.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism provides a general focus on the acquisition and generation of meaning (White & Klein, 2002). The theory posits that meanings emerge through the process of social interaction and that in order to understand behavior, one must understand the meaning that an action has to an individual (White & Klein, 2002). As such, this theory lends itself to the examination of individual and couple processes, given the inter-personal nature of meaning. Moreover, Symbolic Interactionism postulates that meanings reflect and emerge out of an individual's contextual, social, and historical background (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Such a theory thereby allowed for the exploration of everyday, subjective life experiences and societal influences, as was key to the examination of older remarried couples. This further lent itself to the rigorous qualitative methodology that was utilized in this study.

Primary components to the Symbolic Interactionist perspective and the understanding of the older remarried couple were the concepts of identity, role, social/familial interaction, and context (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). To begin, identity can be understood as embodying one's self-concept as it relates to a role. In other words, this concept encompasses the meanings about the self that emerge through shared meanings

and symbols. Given this, identity formation is a dynamic process that emerges within the social context of family. Such a perspective allows individuals to maintain multiple identities and to “construct different identities within a role” (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 147). This was thought to relate to older remarried individuals, given their varied familial transitions, and their need to moderate roles and maintain flexible boundaries.

Roles can be defined as shared norms that encompass a position (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). As such, they involve a component of expectation, wherein one can anticipate future behaviors (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Further, roles are dynamic and evolving, given that they are socially embedded and constructed through interaction. As such, roles are not static, but can change over time. Given this, past experiences can inform role presentations. Applied to older remarried couples, this was thought to indicate that past marital experiences could potentially facilitate current familial roles. In addition, this concept brought to light considerations with regard to the Cherlin’s (1978) postulation of the incomplete institution, wherein he provided that remarried familial roles are ill defined.

As LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) state, “it is through social interactions that individuals apply broad shared meanings and actively create the specific meanings of self, others, and situations” (p. 149). Thus, interactions provide a platform in which to create shared meanings, identities, and roles; they facilitate the creation of a consensus with regard to boundaries and the like. This has importance with regard to older remarried couples, given that they strive to establish such boundaries, rules, and roles both amongst themselves and external systems.

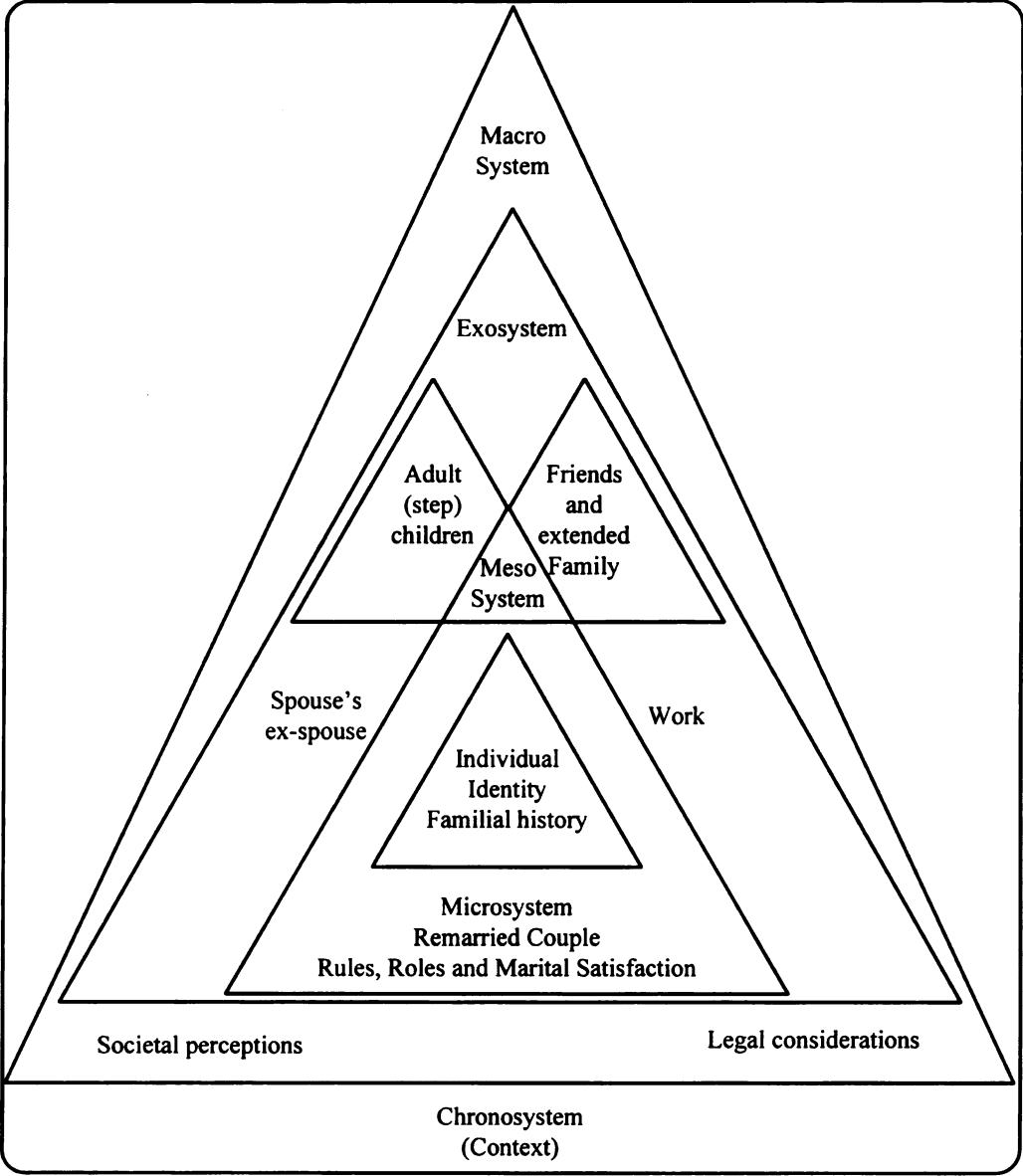
Lastly, the concept of context provided a venue from which to examine how the roles and behaviors of the remarried couple were shaped by society. Such a concept provides salience to social and cultural influences in shaping an individual's conception of self and family. This concept also informs role expectations. It was therefore key to the examination of the older remarried couple, wherein it was thought that societal factors and perceptions could influence the relational dynamics between such couples (Cooney & Dunne, 2001).

Overall, Symbolic Interactionism provided a frame in which to understand the connection between meanings and interaction (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). It thus provided a venue from which to examine how roles are constructed amongst older remarried couples, and how internalized meanings influence such roles (White & Klein, 2002). As such, this framework was well suited to this study, wherein it provided for an understanding as to the older remarried couple experience.

Theoretical Map

Figure 1.1 provides an illustrative representation of the theoretical concepts that provide a lens for this study. This map depicts the integration of Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) Human Ecological Theory with the primary concepts of Symbolic Interactionism. Together, the concepts provide for an in depth understanding of the environmental factors for which members of the remarried couple interact, as well as provide for the internal processes and meaning systems that the couple creates. More specifically, Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) model allows for the influence of external systems with regards to the remarried couple experience, while Symbolic Interactionism provides a lens from which to explore internal processes and meaning systems.

Figure 1.1 *Theoretical Map*

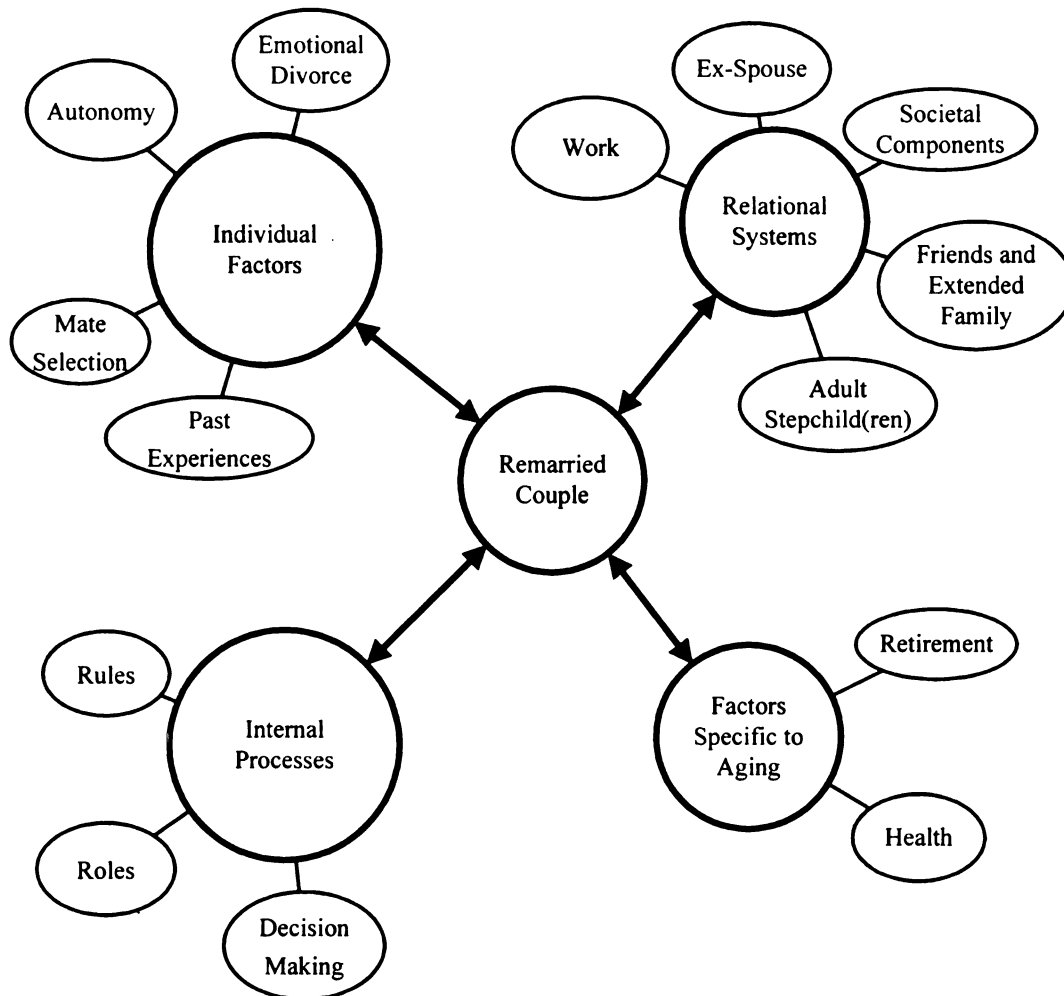


Conceptual Model

The Conceptual Model, as provided in Figure 1.2, offers a breadth of factors that are thought to play into the older remarried couple experience. It is fully expected that over the course of this study, this model will change. As such, the goal of this model is to help structure theoretically-based knowledge of the older remarried couple experience.

This model thereby suggests that individual factors, as well as interactions with relational systems, factors specific to aging, and the couple's internal processes reciprocally inform the couple's lived experiences.

Figure 1.2 *Conceptual Model*



Research Questions

The primary question that guides this study is: 1) What are the lived experiences of older remarried couples? The primary goals of this study are to explore: 1) The lived experiences of older remarried couples 2) The primary factors that inform such experiences, and 3) How factors specific to aging play into couple experiences.

Table 1.1: *Progression of Research Concepts*

<u>Theory:</u>	<u>Research Question:</u>	<u>Goals:</u>	<u>Concepts:</u>
Human Ecological	❑ What is the lived experience of older remarried couples?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ To explore the lived experiences of older remarried couples. ❑ To explore the primary factors that inform couple experience ❑ To explore how factors specific to aging play into couple experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Individual Factors ❑ Factors Specific to Aging ❑ External Systems
Symbolic Interactionism	❑ What is the lived experience of older remarried couples?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ To explore the lived experiences of older remarried couples. ❑ The primary factors that inform the couple experience 	❑ Couple Internal Processes

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

As stated previously, remarriage is a normative event in society, given that nearly half of all marriages are a remarriage for one or both partners (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). Further, in the United States, nearly half a million people over the age of 65 remarry every year (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). Among the present cohort of older Americans, longer life expectancy, better health, and a higher divorce rate have all contributed to the substantial rate of remarriage. Further, it is predicted that remarriage in this segment of the population will continue to grow (Sherman & Boss, 2007). Despite this, however, this group has been largely ignored within the scholarly literature. Instead, emphasis continues to be placed on the mid-life years of the blended family, and on issues of co-parenting and stepparenting. This is perhaps because of the complexities that such families face during a period of childrearing. This is also perhaps because of prevailing cultural archetypes of older individuals, wherein they supposedly lack a sexual desire (Larson, 1992). Yet, older remarried couples face unique challenges that must be addressed, such as complex marital histories and adult stepchild relations. Despite this, only recently have family and gerontology researchers called for greater consideration of older stepfamilies and later-life remarriage (Bleiszner & Roberto, 2000). Given this, this study provides for timely research.

The State of Marriage

To begin, despite the increasing social acceptance of divorce, most people are committed to the institution of marriage (as is signified by the percentage of remarriage). In fact, a cultural shift has occurred in which the view of marriage is for the pursuit of personal gratification and love (Bernstein, 2000; Hartin, 1990). Marriage thus symbolizes

a hope for happiness (Fredericson & Handlon, 1994) despite it now being considered an optional lifestyle that is perhaps not “happily-ever-after” (Bernstein, 2000). This hope is even more apparent in remarriages, wherein individuals may be determined to learn from their prior mistakes (Bernstein, 2000; Fredericson & Handlon, 1994). Although individuals often enter a second marriage with the expectation of becoming happier than in the first marriage, studies indicate that these marriages often end more quickly than first marriages and have a slightly higher risk for dissolution, with the rate of divorce encompassing around sixty percent (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Ceglian & Gardner, 1999; Coleman et al., 2000; Faber, 2004; Stokes & Wampler, 2002; Visher & Visher, 2003). This rate of dissolution is perhaps due to the multiple complexities that such couples face (Dupuis, 2007). Further, studies suggest that in remarried couples that maintain their relationship, levels of marital satisfaction are relatively equivalent to levels in their first marriage (Larson, 1992).

Remarriage as Normative

Remarriage can now be classified as a normative event within the lifecycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005) given that nearly two-thirds of divorced women and three-fourths of divorced men remarry (Dupuis, 2007). Moreover, in the older population, an estimated half a million people remarry each year (Cooney & Dunne, 2001). Given this, more blended families are said to exist than any other type of family (Visher & Visher, 2003). Despite this, such members face challenges whereby they are unsure of the rules and roles in which to act toward members of the blended family (Cherlin, 2004, 1978). This corresponds with Cherlin’s (1978) incomplete institution hypothesis, which suggests

that such families face challenges in relating to each other given the lack of societally-defined rules and roles (Coleman et al., 2000).

Individual Factors

. In general, each individual brings to the marriage unique experiences and qualities that can play into the couple relationship. These individual factors will be briefly explored below.

Past Experiences

To begin, it is important to note that the prior marital history of one or both members of the couple can affect the current marriage outcome (Dupuis, 2007). Given that such relationships are built upon hurt and loss (Dupuis, 2007), the current marriage is inevitably “perceived by the spouses within the context of the previous marriage” (Fredericson & Handlon, 1994). Oftentimes, this is presented in the form of unresolved emotional issues from the first marriage and process of divorce that are being brought into the second marriage (Faber, 2004; Fredericson & Handlon, 1994; Hartin, 1990). Such emotional issues may include feelings of helplessness, betrayal, and loss (Visser & Visser, 2003). The extent to which each spouse uses the current marriage to work through these past issues is problematic. This “emotional baggage” creates “misunderstandings, projections, and misperceptions, which can lead a partner to create a barrier to intimacy for self-protection, as they may be afraid of being hurt again” (Faber, 2004).

In addition, given the societal perception of “failure” surrounding the divorce, such past experiences can create pressure for a new marriage to succeed (Faber, 2004). In other words, one is compelled to prove that one is capable of having and maintaining a

good marriage. This adds anxiety and stress to a second marriage and stimulates behavior that is counter-productive (Faber, 2004; Hartin, 1990; Papernow, 1987). As such, each experience of a couple being pulled apart could signal failure and a fear that this marriage may follow the same path as the first, provoking an attack or retreat cycle (Faber, 2004; Papernow, 1987).

Emotional Attachment to an Ex-spouse

It is estimated that a large proportion of divorced people remain emotionally attached to their ex-spouses long after divorce (Falke & Larson, 2007). As such, most individuals have difficulty adjusting to the loss of their primary attachment figure. One study indicated that 86% of men and women who went through a divorce showed signs of continued emotional attachment to the ex-spouse (Kitson, 1982). This suggests that a person may not have yet experienced an “emotional divorce” (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Faber, 2004). This is defined as when one partner in a marriage is still emotionally connected with an ex-spouse (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Faber, 2004; Knox & Zusman, 2001; Stokes & Wampler, 2002). Evidence of this, for example, would be when an individual still confides in their ex-spouse, displays jealousy if their ex-spouse dates, or defends the ex-spouse to the new spouse (Stokes & Wampler, 2002). Also indicating this is when individuals still display simmering anger, resentment, envy, or guilt towards the ex-spouse (Bernstein, 2000). Empirical evidence shows that either a highly negative and/or a highly involved relationship with a former spouse can negatively affect the new couple’s relationship quality (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Knox & Zusman, 2001; Visher & Visher, 1989). As such, this continued relationship may interfere with both post-divorce well-being, as well as the formation of a

new relationship (Falke & Larson, 2007). Importantly, in older remarried couples, this concept needs to be further explored, given that such couples may have been involved in long-term relationships (25+ years; Tomassini, Glaser, & Stuchbury, 2007) with their ex-spouse, wherein the emotional attachment could be even stronger.

Mate Selection

Given these challenges, oftentimes a new tack is taken in choosing a partner, wherein a partner may be chosen who is thought to be the opposite of the first one (Bernstein, 2000; Hartin, 1990). This could create challenges to a new relationship, as the individual has yet to distinguish how they themselves contributed to the previous marital dynamics (Bernstein, 2000). In addition, with regard to older adults, studies suggest that the lack of available partners may cause some individuals to choose new partners who are not well suited to them (Berardo, 1982).

Autonomy

Although few studies have examined the concept of autonomy in later-life remarriage, this concept provides for another important contextual variable. Given the limited research, one can thus consider these factors as it pertains to remarried couples in general (Allen et al., 2001; Clarke, 2005). In this regard, studies indicate that remarried spouses, especially women, may desire more autonomy as individuals within their remarriage (Allen et al., 2001; Clark, 2005; Coleman & Ganong, 1989). Primary differences in standards of autonomy for mid-life remarried couples have been found in the areas of finance, childrearing, and social networks (Allen et al., 2001; Clark, 2005). In general, although childrearing is no longer a factor for older remarried couples, the concepts of finances and social networks is still of principal importance. With regard to

finances, Allen and colleagues (2001) posits that with age, one has had more time to establish patterns of savings, investing, and spending. As such, remarriage brings together two people from different households with two potentially different and conflicting ideas regarding earning, spending and money management. This is especially the case, as findings suggest that remarried couples may contribute more equitably than first-married couples to the finances (Allen et al., 2001; Coleman & Ganong, 1989; Eeden-Moorefield, Pasley, Dolan, & Engel, 2007). With regard to financial management, Fishman (1983) proposed two models of economic behavior: a “common pot” system, wherein the couple pools their money, or a “two pot” system, where the money is kept separate. In an analysis of remarried couples, Coleman and Ganong (1989) suggest that pooling was associated with a closer parent-child relationship, but it did not influence the quality of the overall marital relationship. These same findings may hold true for later-life remarried couples, as this may alleviate concerns about inheritance (Burch, 1990). However, more research is needed with regard to the financial management plans of older remarried couples, as concerns such as inheritance and retirement finances may come into play.

With regard to social networks, studies indicate a gender difference, wherein remarried women hold greater standards for social autonomy than men (Blieszner, 2006; Carr, 2004; Allen et al., 2001). Allen and colleagues (2001) suggests that this is the result of women turning to the external support systems of friends and family during the divorce process. Further, Goetting (1982) provides that such relationships would be difficult to abandon upon remarriage, given the strong interpersonal bonds that formed during the dissolution of the first marriage.

Interactions with Relational Systems

Importantly, older remarried couples must also be considered within the context of a blended family, even though they may not be in a stage of active parenting.

Relational systems, such as adult stepchildren and friends, play key roles in affecting older remarried couple processes.

Adult (Step)Child Interactions/ Intergenerational Support

In examining the interaction between the remarried couple and their adult (step)children, most studies have found that the relationships were complex, given the lack of social norms and guidelines (Bulcroft, Bulcroft, Hatch, & Borgatta, 1989; Coleman, Ganong, Hans, Sharp, & Rothrauff, 2005; Sherman & Boss, 2007). This corresponds with Cherlin's (1978) incomplete institutionalization hypothesis, which suggests that there is an absence of defined rules and roles for behavior (Coleman et al., 2000). Further, Sherman and Boss (2007) suggest that older partners may be unsure about how to relate to adult stepchildren and their families. This corresponds with DeJong-Gierveld and Peeters (2003) findings, wherein the researchers suggest that later-life remarriage is surrounded by a complex context of extended, though not necessarily blended, family dynamics. In other words, later-life remarriage does not translate into a shared sense of belonging to a 'stepfamily', given that such relationships lack a shared developmental history (DeJong-Gierveld & Peeters, 2003).

With regard to the stepparent and adult stepchild relationship, most studies suggest that it is unlikely that emotional bonds will form (Sherman & Boss, 2007; White, 1994). White (1994) provides that this is because older stepparents have spent little time with their adult stepchildren, and as such, neither person may be motivated to develop a

relationship (White, 1994). This again relates to the lack of a shared history. Further, in studies of intergenerational support, Clawson and Ganong (2002) found that later-life stepparents often feel little obligation towards adult stepchildren. Correspondingly, adult stepchildren do not feel as obligated to provide care for stepparents as they do for their own parents (Ganong & Coleman, 2006).

Importantly, Sherman and Boss (2007) found that later-life stepparents perceived that adult stepchildren rejected their marriage. DeJong-Gierveld and Peeters (2003) suggest that an important aspect of this reaction is associated with issues of inheritance. Adult stepchildren often question in whose hands family property and finances will end up. As a result, Berardo (1982) described that new partners are often made to feel like intruders by adult children and that such children foster a sense of competition with the new spouse over the attention of parent.

With regard to the parent-adult child relationship, it has been found that remarriage decreases the relationship quality and contact between parents and their adult children as well as their grandchildren (Aquilino, 2005; Kalmijn, 2007). Further, studies of intergenerational support suggest that remarried parents provide less financial support to adult children than parents in their first marriage (Aquilino, 2005; Marks, 1995). As such, remarriage is equated with less time and money transfers to adult children (Kalmijn, 2007). In addition, parental remarriage has been found to have a negative impact on later-life support and caregiving by adult children (Kalmijn, 2007).

Friends and Extended Family Interactions

Interactions with friends and extended family provide for another important contextual variable with regard to older remarried couples. Such support has been found

to strengthen a couple's relationship (Falke & Larson, 2007). As Roberts and Price (1989) found, positive relationships with friends and relatives were one of the best predictors of marital adjustment in remarriage. Conversely, Booth and Edwards (1992) reported that poor integration with friends and extended family predicted lower remarital stability. This indicates that approval of the relationship by friends and extended family is primary to the survival of the remarital relationship. Despite this, few studies have explored the interaction of friends and extended family in relation to older remarried couples. This is key, given studies that suggest the growing importance of social networks as individuals, especially women, age (Brown, Lee, & Bulanda, 2006; Clark, 2005). Further, as a result of extensions in the lifespan, some individuals in the older stage of life may be providing care for elderly parents and relatives (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). These interactions could play an important role in the remarriage, and thus need to be further explored.

Ex-Spouse

As stated earlier, although the ex-spouse may not be physically present within the relationship, he or she may still be emotionally present. Empirical evidence suggests that either a highly negative and/or a highly involved relationship with a former spouse can negatively affect the new couple's relationship quality (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Knox & Zusman, 2001). This was indicated in Buunk and Mutsaers's (1999) study, wherein they found that continued emotional attachment to a former spouse was inversely correlated with remarital satisfaction.

Work

A long tradition of research has examined the relationship between work and the marital relationship (Doumas, Margolin, & John, 2008; Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991; Weagley, Chan, & Yan, 2007). The focus of many of these studies has been on the processes by which experiences in the work domain are related to experiences in the marital domain. The majority of these investigations have examined these relationships in the context of the spillover model, which suggests that an individual's stress, emotions, or behaviors at work spillover into his or her experiences in the marital relationship (Doumas et al., 2008). Such studies have found that the amount of time spent working, psychological and physical fatigue from work, and absorption with work concerns are differentially related to marital functioning (Small & Riley, 1990). In other words, this suggests that such work-related factors are associated with a decrease in marital satisfaction and stability (Doumas et al., 2008). Importantly, these factors are thought to be similar across varying family types (Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007), and as such, extensions can be made to remarried couples. Yet again, however, few studies have examined this phenomenon specifically with regard to older remarried couples.

Societal Perceptions

Most of the literature that examines societal perceptions with regard to later-life relationships focuses on the context of women and sexuality. Mansfield, Koch, and Voda (1998) argue that older women face both ageism and sexism. Further, they provide that cultural norms have equated sexual expressions with youth, and sexual desire with men, and as such, this may make older people, especially women, ashamed of their sexual desires (Mansfield et al., 1998). In turn, this may diminish any sexual desires, and

discourage people from acting on them (Luria & Meade, 1984). Women may be particularly susceptible to this self-fulfilling prophecy, should they internalize the widespread belief that women are only physically attractive and sexually desirable in their youth (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). In the context of older remarried couples, this may prevent individuals from pursuing later-life relationships (Cooney & Dunne, 2001). Otherwise, it may create a sense of ashamedness, as older women may feel that society has labeled them as sexually immodest for pursuing a romantic relationship later on in life (Coupland, 2000). This is derived from the conservative societal belief that older individuals do not have sexual desires (DeJong-Gierveld & Peeters, 2003). As evidence, Carr (2004) described older women's experiences, wherein they perceived unpleasant reactions by members of society for engaging in romantic relationships. This had the result of making women reconsider the option of remarriage (Carr, 2004).

Legal Considerations

Within the legal system, the nuclear family remains the template for crafting and executing the law. Consequently, individuals living in other family forms, including remarried families, are virtually ignored. For instance, in younger remarried families, who are currently involved in an active stage of parenting, the role of the stepparent in relation to the stepchild is not acknowledged (Malia, 2005). As a result, the stepparent does not possess any legal rights to the stepchild, nor does the stepparent hold any legal responsibilities (Ganong & Coleman, 1997). Accordingly, their relation to the stepchild is largely undefined. In extending this to older remarried couples, there is an incongruity between the varying family forms and inheritance laws (Mason, Fine, & Carnochan, 2001). As such, stepchildren (adult or otherwise) face legal obstacles in most states that

prevent them from filing wrongful death suits on behalf of their stepparent or inheriting when a stepparent dies without a will (Mason et al., 2001). This once again denies any relation between the stepparent and stepchild. Further, another issue that may pose a problem for older remarried couples and their families is the preferred position of the spouse in probate law (Brashier, 2004). This position holds that the spouse receives greater protection with regard to inheritance over other family members (Brashier, 2004). In essence, this provides that other family members, such as children, could face devastating effects should their parent pass away before their stepparent. This is especially true in the case wherein the parent does not have a will. Such a legal position can thereby create hostility towards the new partner, as children do not want to put their inheritance at risk (Coleman & Ganong, 1998; Moorman, Booth, & Fingerman, 2006). Despite the confusion and strong emotions that the lag in legal posture creates, courts and legislatures have been hesitant to address the problem and to define a legal role for stepparents.

Shared Meanings and Decision-Making Processes

Shared meanings with regard to rules and roles, and decision making processes are key aspects of any marriage. How such concepts relate to older remarried couples will be explored below.

Rules

In Cherlin's (1978) classic work, which was discussed previously, he referred to the blended family as an "incomplete institution", wherein it was argued that such a family lacks norms about the way that members should act towards each other. In contrast, he stated that parents and children in first marriages could rely on well-

established norms (Cherlin, 1978). Despite the growth of the blended family within society, the concept of the incomplete institution is still highly regarded within the remarriage literature (Cherlin, 2004; Coleman et al., 2000). It has been well established then, that because of the lack of social regulations and adequate stepfamily models, each blended family must devise their own set of rules (Coleman et al., 2000; Elliot, 1997). The work of establishing these rules, however, creates much difficulty, as due to the lack of norms, these families often try to imitate the nuclear family model (Bernstein, 2000; Fredericson & Handlon, 1994; Elliot, 1997; Sager, Walker, Brown, Crohn, & Rodstein, 1981). Older remarried couples face similar challenges in terms of the ambiguous rules with regard to relating to blended family members, such as adult step-children and grandchildren (Sherman & Boss, 2007). This was discussed above in relation to adult child interactions, however, it was important to note that such rule processes needed to be further explored within the older remarried couple context.

Roles

Studies indicate that older remarried couples are not defined by traditional gender roles; rather, these marriages are more egalitarian in nature (Clarke, 2005; Cooney & Dunne, 2001). Such marriages thus place greater importance on companionship. As such, concepts of teamwork and equity predominate (Clarke, 2005). As evidence, Clarke (2005) found that women in later-life remarriages perceived that compared to their first spouses, their later-life spouse maintained more responsibility with regard to domestic chores. Clarke (2005) posited that such role changes may be a function of the experience in the previous marriage, followed by divorce, singlehood, and remarriage. In addition, these changes might occur because of natural developmental growth as the individual

ages (Clarke, 2005). Interestingly, the findings on gender roles are contrary to research that examines long-term marriages (Cooney & Dunne, 2001). Such marriages have been found to maintain the traditional division of labor, even after one or both partners retire (Cooney & Dunne, 2001). This indicates that the experience of marital dissolution may lead to more equitable relationships.

Decision-Making

With regard to decision-making processes, studies suggest that remarried couples have more equal roles in decision making than compared to their first marriage (Allen, Baucom, Burnett, Epstein, & Rankin-Esquire, 2001; Coleman & Ganong, 1989). As such, decision-making power seems to be more equally distributed between partners in remarriage. This is consistent with the above statements, wherein remarried couples may be more egalitarian than first-married couples.

Factors Specific to Aging

The aging process involves not only biological changes, but psychological and social changes as well. This next section will briefly outline some of these changes as pertains to the older remarried couple context.

Health

Given the realities of life, it is likely that remarried couples will have to deal with changes in health and functioning. As such, one member may have to assume a care-giving role. Such a role has been found to be quite challenging, not only in terms of the relationship, wherein marital satisfaction is decreased (Spitze & Ward, 2000), but also in terms of the physical health of the caregiver (Winslow, 1997). This is particularly true for spousal caregivers, who often jeopardize their own health in the process of caring for

their partner (Gallant & Connell, 1998). Few studies, however, have examined this process in remarried couples. A clear exception to this is the study by Sherman and Boss (2007), which looked at dementia in the context of remarital spousal caregiving. This study found that remarried caregivers provided proactive, strategic approaches towards caregiving; however, they faced challenges with regard to dealing with adult stepchildren. It is important to note that further research needs to examine couple dynamics in dealing with such health changes.

In addition, an important component within the topic of health is that of the sexual relationship. Once again, extensions must be made from the general literature on sexuality and aging, given the gap in the remarriage literature. As was stated before, it has been found that as one ages, sexuality becomes less primary in relation to companionship (Stevens & Westerhof, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Sherman & Boss, 2007). Although both men and women experience declining sexual activity with age, the literature suggests that the reasons for the decline are gender-specific (Atwood, Klucinec, & Neaver, 2006; Matthias, Lubben, Atchison, & Schweitzer, 1997). In men, the decline is primarily due to age, health, and medications (Atwood et al., 2006). For women, health is less of a factor, while having a functional partner appears to be a more important variable (Atwood et al., 2006). Further, most research on aging and sexuality has focused on the physiological aspects of sexual life. Physical changes associated with normal aging, including menopause, erectile dysfunction, and age-related illnesses, have been shown to inhibit sexual desire and functioning (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). Despite this, although physiological changes associated with menopause (e.g., vaginal dryness) adversely affect some women's sexual lives, many women report little or no change in arousal and

orgasm and many attribute sexual changes that occur to male partners' ill health and sexual dysfunction (Atwood et al., 2006; Deeks & McCabe, 2001). At this time, however, it is unknown how such factors play into the remarriage context, wherein a couple may be in the "coupling" stage of the family life-cycle as well as the "retirement" stage of the lifecycle (Gerson, 1995).

Retirement

Multiple factors underlie the decision to retire (Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2007). Importantly, retirement planning involves not only financial planning, but also planning for health care needs and other quality of life issues such as housing, leisure, and potential postretirement employment or volunteering. Importantly, the decision to retire has typically been found to be an interdependent process (Szinovacz & Davey, 2004). Despite this, women are more likely than men are to mold their retirement plans to fit their partners' planning, especially if they need to rely on their partners' retirement income (Szinovacz & Davey, 2004). Married couples are also more likely to coordinate their retirement timing (Gee & Baillie, 1999), and when couples retire around the same time, there is greater satisfaction with the transition (Szinovacz & Davey, 2004). Conversely, recent research on the impact of the retirement transition on married couples shows that when husbands retire, but wives remain employed, there is an increase in marital conflict (Szinovacz & Davey, 2004). After retirement, studies indicate that marital satisfaction increases (Szinovacz & Davey, 2004; Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2007). Importantly, few studies have examined this process with regard to remarriage. This may provide for an important area of study, given that remarried individuals in this age range are at risk for not being married long enough to qualify for a dependent spouse benefit

from Social Security (10+ years; Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2007); as such, this may play into the retirement decision-making process.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is an interactive process that involves close contact and interaction between the researcher, research participant, and data (Sword, 1999). Importantly, the word “qualitative” implies an emphasis on process and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 8). As such, whereas quantitative research provides an understanding as to general trends and information, qualitative research provides for a more in depth understanding of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) portrayed qualitative studies as “designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants” (p. 5). Given this, qualitative studies thus facilitate an understanding of individual experiences, processes, perceptions, and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As such, the use of qualitative methodology is consistent with the study goals, wherein the study ascertains a richer understanding as to the older remarried couple experience. Further, a growing contingent of researchers in the field of marriage and family therapy, and well as in the divorce and remarriage literature are advocating for the utilization of such a methodology (Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993; Coleman et al., 2000).

Grounded Theory

Within the arena of qualitative research, grounded theory is often seen as being one of the preferred methodologies, and a main contributor to the proliferation of qualitative methodologies (McLeod, 2001). In fact, Denzin (1994) provides that, “the grounded theory perspective is the most widely used qualitative interpretive framework in the social sciences” (p.508). Further, such methodologies are deemed as appropriate in

investigating complex behaviors where substantive research has not been conducted (Denzin, 1994). Given the lack of such research as pertains to older remarried couples (Clarke, 2005), and the need for substantive theory with regard to such couples, grounded theory is seen as the most fitting method of qualitative analysis.

Importantly, the term “grounded theory” refers both to a method of research and to the product of such research (Charmaz, 2005). Essentially, grounded theory methods are a set of flexible guidelines that enable and facilitate researchers in the development of substantive theories that are linked to, or rather, “grounded” in the data (Charmaz, 2005; LaRossa, 2005; Mullen, 2006). Such theories evolve from a particular situational context, and are thus meant to interpret the collected data, as well as show relationships amongst the data (Charmaz, 2005, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the modified grounded theory methodology, as set out by Strauss and Corbin (1990), is utilized. Such a methodology facilitates the creation of categories and subcategories, and ensures accurate descriptions with regard to the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Further, such a framework allows for the use of both inductive and deductive methodologies. Rather, this methodology advocates for the early use of literature in the development of theory, finding that such literature facilitates theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As such, theoretical concepts can be developed through the process of connecting existing theory and research with observations of phenomena. In addition, such a methodology provides a specified process for conceptualizing data (Charmaz, 2005).

Sampling Procedures

Sampling methods and procedures in grounded theory are designed to maximize opportunities in which to compare events, incidents, or happenings (Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Through the process of theoretical sampling, the researcher is guided by conceptual gaps or holes in the evolving theory, rather than by some predetermined population dimensions (Charmaz, 2000). As Glaser (1978) indicates, theoretical sampling occurs when “the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 36). This process calls for the conjoint acts of data collection, coding, and analysis. As such, this means that a researcher cannot produce solid grounded theory through only a single phase of data collection. Rather, this process provides that one engages in constant comparison, and then returns to the field to gain more insight (Charmaz, 2000). As specified in this methodology, the sampling process only ends once saturation has been reached. In the case of this study, saturation was reached after interviewing eleven couples.

Importantly, the sampling procedure, as specified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) provides for open as well as relational and discriminate sampling. Sampling methods are thus driven by the theoretical needs. As it happened in this study, the researcher cast a wide net, sampling broadly early on in the theory development. As the theory progressed, sampling methods became directed towards uncovering and validating relationships that had already been discovered. The last several interviews were used to verify the emerging theory, and further develop categories that were not well saturated. Sampling procedures were very much dictated by the theory development.

Participant Recruitment and Selection Criteria

Recruitment of participants utilized two primary methods. To begin, the researcher made use of the snowball sampling method, wherein current participants

assisted in recruiting additional participants. In addition, a site-based method was utilized, wherein flyers were posted at local community agencies in a Mid-West suburban area.

Importantly, all information provided to the investigator was maintained in a confidential manner, as approved by the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. As such, only the researcher and dissertation committee chair had access to the contact information. Potential participants were informed of the confidential nature of this process.

It is important to clarify that the investigator recognized the possibility for sampling bias within this regional population. However, the limitations associated with this sample provided for a challenge common to all qualitative studies.

Interested parties contacted or were contacted by the researcher over the phone. Potential participants were then provided with information as pertains to the study, and were screened for the following selection criteria:

1. All participants had to be able to speak English as a primary language.
2. The current relationship had to be the second marriage or long-standing heterosexual relationship for one or both of the partners. Given studies that find that older individuals are more likely to cohabit than remarry (Allen et al., 2000; Blieszner, 2006) this study was inclusive of members that have cohabitated for a minimum of three years (Miller et al., 2003).
3. At least one partner in the relationship had to be 55 years or older (Cooney & Dunne, 2001).
4. At least one partner in the relationship had to have experienced a divorce.

5. Neither member of the couple could be widowed.
6. The couple could not have had any children together.

Prior to the start of each interview, the researcher explained in greater detail the logistics related to the interview process. Participants were informed as to the potential for emotional responses to interview questions, and were provided with a list of local resources for future reference. Participants were also provided with information pertaining to informed consent (Appendix A), wherein the rights and protections afforded to participants was explained. They were further informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. They were also informed of the provisions that were taken to ensure the confidentiality of their personal information. Such provisions included keeping their personal information in a locked filing cabinet, and providing each participant with an identification number that was used on all forms and transcripts. In addition, participants were ensured that their names would not be included, and that no identifying information would be disclosed in the dissemination of this study. Participants were then provided with the informed consent documents, and reminded that participation was voluntary. After the completion of the interview, couple participants each received a \$40 gift certificate for participating in the study.

Sample Description

Participants included eleven remarried couples that fit the criteria as provided above. General demographic information (Appendix B) was gathered from each participant, wherein they provided information such as educational, occupational, and financial status. Such information provided an overall description of study participants as a group. An overview of participants' demographic information has included in

Appendix C. For the most part, however, this sample included Caucasian couples that were in their late fifties to mid-sixties. Further, most of these couples had typically been married more than ten years, and were financially well-off and well educated.

The average age of the men in this study was 65.9 years old, although they ranged from 57 to 77. In addition, the average age of women in this study was 59 years old, although they ranged from 43 to 70 years old. All of the men indicated that they had experience divorce, while nine of the eleven women had experienced divorce. The average length of the second marriage for these couples was 12.45 years, however, such marriages ranged from four years to 30 years. Further, all participants in this study were Caucasian.

In terms of educational attainment, one man attended some high school, while seven men held a college diploma. Three men held graduate degrees. In terms of the women, three women had some college, while two women had a college diploma. Six women in this study also held graduate degrees.

In terms of participant financial status, three of the couples reported that their annual incomes were over \$100,000. In addition, three of the couples reported that their income ranged from \$70,000 to \$100,000. Another three couples reported that their incomes ranged from \$50,000 to \$69,999, while only one couple reported that their income ranged from \$40,000 to \$49,000. Further, only one couple reported that their income ranged from \$20,000 to \$29,000.

In terms of work status, three men reported being fully retired, while four men reported working part-time. Three men also continued to maintain their full work status.

With regard to the women, one woman reported being fully retired, while four women provided working part-time. Six women reported working full time.

Method of Inquiry

Researcher as Instrument

In grounded theory, as well as in all other qualitative methodologies, the researcher provides for a key aspect in a study. In such a study, data is mediated through the researcher, rather than through inventories or questionnaires. As such, it is the role of the researcher to build abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from the datum (Creswell, 1994). As Strauss and Corbin (1990) maintain, it is through the use of self that research stimulates theoretical sensitivity and generates hypotheses. Given the important role of the researcher, one must take steps to insure the validity of the research process. Such steps will be detailed below in relation to the trustworthiness of the researcher.

In-depth Interviews

Given the nature and primary goals of this study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilized to address the research questions posed by this study. Such a technique involves conducting intensive, face-to-face interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on the phenomenon of interest (Richards, 2007). The semi-structured format provided a fairly open framework, which allowed for a focused, conversational modality. This methodology thus provided a framework from which to conduct an exploratory study. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe it, the purpose of such a format is to facilitate the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest, whereby one allows the views to "unfold". As such, this tool provided a

flexibility, whereby one could elicit a participant's thoughts and feelings, as well as evoke "thick description" (Richards, 2007).

Interview Process

The primary purpose of conducting open-ended, semi-structured interviews was to elicit thick descriptions as to the experiences of later-life remarried couples. As such, both members of the couple were interviewed together, at a location of their choosing, most typically, their home. Importantly, interviews took between one and a half to three hours to complete. On average, interviews took around two hours.

With regard to the interview, the questions were open-ended in nature in order to allow the theory to emerge (Appendix D). The questions provided, however, were informed by past research on stepfamily interactions, later-life remarriages, and aging. See Table 3.1. They were further facilitated through the use of Human Ecological Theory and the Symbolic Interactionist perspective. Interview questions were reviewed by the committee chair in order to assure that the content and language was inclusive and comprehensive. One practice interview was conducted with an older remarried couple in order to facilitate the interviewing process, and to ensure that the questions were well structured and relevant. The interview was not recorded nor coded; rather, the exercise was used to evaluate the flow of dialogue. It is important to note that given the grounded theory methodology, interview questions were subject to revision, as the interview and developing theory dictated. As it happened, particular issues and examples raised by participants in the interviews were incorporated into subsequent interviews.

Table 3.1 *Initial Interview Areas of Inquiry*

<u>Concept:</u>	<u>Topic:</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Factors	<input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy <input type="checkbox"/> Mate Selection <input type="checkbox"/> Past Experiences
<input type="checkbox"/> Factors Related to Aging	<input type="checkbox"/> Retirement <input type="checkbox"/> Health
<input type="checkbox"/> Shared Meanings and Decision-Making Processes	<input type="checkbox"/> Rules <input type="checkbox"/> Roles <input type="checkbox"/> Decision-Making
<input type="checkbox"/> External Systems	<input type="checkbox"/> Adult (step)children <input type="checkbox"/> Friends and Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Societal Components <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-Spouse <input type="checkbox"/> Work

Ecomap

To facilitate the interview process and provide additional data as to key systemic variables in participants' lives, each participant was asked to assist the interviewer in the completion of a focused, brief ecomap (Hartman, 1995). Such an instrument facilitated an understanding as to the couple's significant connections to persons and systems in their environment. It thereby informed the researcher as to significant factors with regard to the older remarried couple experience, as each participant was able to suggest not only key family members, but key variables in their lives. It was also utilized to provide insight into family and systems dynamics. Such a method provided not only a way of engaging couple members in the interview process, but also facilitated a succinct way of tangibly capturing complex systemic relationships. In general, this process took between twenty to thirty minutes to complete. All information gained from the ecomaps were fully coded, and incorporated in the development of themes.

Journaling

To further explore older remarried couple experiences, each member of the couple was asked to maintain a journal for the period of a week following the interview (Janesick, 1998). In this journal, members were asked to reflect upon experiences that pertain to life as an older remarried couple. They were further informed that they could share information in the journal that they perhaps did not feel comfortable sharing in person or in front of one another. Such a format provided for a more in depth understanding as to the perspectives of the participants (Janesick, 1998). Importantly, every participant in the study did submit this information to the researcher. In general, however, daily entries were brief, often times consisting of between one to two sentences. No single entry was longer than a page.

Questionnaire

A brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) was given in order to gather information regarding age, income, educational status, family background, and the like. This information was treated in a qualitative manner, and was important towards gaining a complete understanding of the context of the individuals.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative analysis, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), emphasizes “conceptualizing data by comparing incident with incident, and later, incident with concept” (p.12). In other words, the constant comparative method is a process whereby one takes information from the data collection and compares it to other data and emerging categories. This process facilitates the creation of categories and subcategories,

and ensures accurate descriptions with regard to the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Such a process also ensures that one stays close to, or rather “grounded” in the data.

The constant comparative method, as specified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) consists of three primary phases. These phases have been labeled as open, axial, and selective coding. In grounded theory, coding is the “fundamental analytic process used by the researcher” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 12). As such, it is the key process that facilitates the movement from data to theory. Importantly, each phase of coding has specific procedures and distinct purposes attached to it (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Yet, such procedures are to be carried out concurrently (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) initial phase of coding, or rather open coding, the primary objective is to “break down, examine, compare, conceptualize, and categorize data” (p. 69). Data is thus broken into discrete parts or properties, and is closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. As such, overall, open coding consists of developing categories (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Axial coding is the second phase of Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) three-phase method. The purpose of axial coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), is to put the fractured data back together in new ways “by making connections between a category and its subcategory” (p. 97). Through this model, the researcher is facilitated in understanding categories in relation to other categories and their subcategories (Walker & Myrick, 2006). This thus provides the researcher with a rich understanding as to relationships, and aids in building a well developed theory.

Selective coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), is the “process of integrating and refining the theory” (p. 143). Thus, this coding is more directed than axial

coding. To accomplish this task, the analyst selects a core category and then relates all other categories to the core. Selective coding is similar to axial coding, except that the integration occurs at more abstract level of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In keeping with this methodological approach, constant comparative analysis was done within each transcript, and then later, across all transcripts. Each transcript, journal, and ecomap was rigorously coded, wherein the data was broken into discrete parts and closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. Over one hundred codes were initially developed during the open coding process. After this, the researcher focused on developing primary categories, and making connections between categories and subcategories. In order to facilitate this, a coding book was created, wherein all instances of each theme was placed together. This allowed the researcher to review and reconsider primary quotes, coding categories, and larger meanings of the interviews as a whole. Further, such preparation provided a format in which to review themes and narrow focuses, rather than capture every possible thematic trend. This lent itself to the selective coding process, and to the creation a more concentrated and integrated set of themes. It further provided a way to evaluate whether themes were fully saturated. Such a method worked in tandem with the process of theoretical sampling, which was described above. Later interviews were more focused on areas that needed to be further developed.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an essential component of qualitative research. It encompasses the quantitative concepts of reliability and validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Trustworthiness was built into this study through several processes. One such method

was to maintain a clear audit trail, or log, documenting the decisions and rationale of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Another method was through the process of triangulation, which establishes accountability through the use of multiple data sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Triangulation was incorporated through the use of multiple methods. To begin, the researcher enlisted the use of memos, wherein descriptive notes and reflective notes were recorded directly after each interview. Themes and behavioral observations were primarily included in the memos, which utilized thick description. Rather, such memos were typically 5-6 pages in length, and took between forty-five minutes to an hour to compose. In addition, brief memos were created during the coding process to facilitate an understanding of the researcher's thoughts and perceptions. Other methods included reviewing all tapes of interviews and transcripts prior to coding, personally transcribing each interview, and using ecomaps, as well as the journals and demographic questionnaires. Such a process facilitated theme development and data saturation, which also increased the research validity.

Additional methods of ensuring trustworthiness included the processes of peer debriefing, and the presentation of quotes from the interview. With regard to peer debriefing, the researcher engaged peers in ongoing dialogues during the coding and writing process in order to help assure authenticity of interpretations and analyses. They further helped to better developing connections amongst themes and sub-themes. In addition, the researcher engaged the committee chair during the research process. As such, the committee chair met with the researcher for an extended period of time, in order to confirm codes and evaluate the theory. The chair carefully read through the coding book, and questioned decisions. She further assessed for the presence of bias. Further,

this dissertation includes a sizable number of quotes from the interviews in order to facilitate readers in personally engaging with the data.

Lastly, the researcher spent a considerable amount of time examining any personal biases. As stated previously, these biases were also checked through the examination of reflective notes, and well as through peer debriefing.

Reflexivity

As stated previously, the researcher in qualitative research plays a quintessential role. It is through the researcher that the data comes alive. As such, qualitative research places a large amount of responsibility on the researcher to be introspective and honest about the research process (Morrow, 2005). Therefore, the researcher has an obligation to be explicit as to any personal biases that they may hold. By understanding such biases, the researcher may understand how they are likely to influence the research findings and conclusions (Morrow, 2005). Yet, the challenge is for the researcher to demonstrate that his or her personal interest will not bias the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Given this, I will now seek to be forthright as to my own personal biases.

To begin, I was initially drawn to the topic of remarriage through my own personal, although indirect, experiences. My in-laws were each remarried, spawning in me not only an academic, but a clinical interest. My conceptualization of remarriage was born only through the media, wherein blended families are often stereotyped as possessing negative traits and characteristics (Ganong & Coleman, 1997). Further, stepmothers in particular, face the myth of the “wicked stepmother”. In truth, my perceptions of blended families only followed such stereotypes, wherein I held a naivety as to the warmth that can develop and the numerous challenges that such families face

(Dupuis, 2009). As my academic and clinical interests grew, numerous questions arose not with regard to the blended family as such questions were easily answered within the literature, but rather as to the couple processes. This was particularly pertinent given my in-laws' aging state, and their status as later-life remarried couples. I wondered about their couple experiences, and how such experiences were colored by the past. I also questioned how decisions were made, and how each related to their adult stepchildren. To me, the relational dynamics within the family seemed so confusing. I often wondered at the relationships that formed between stepfamily members and how I, as well as my son, fit into the equation. In terms of the relationship, it also seemed confusing that one could be both in a honeymoon stage and a retirement stage concurrently. In truth, this may have been an indicator of my own biases and beliefs towards later-life individuals. Such a bias was perhaps also derived through cultural stereotypes and the media wherein it is believed that older individuals are not "romantically" involved. By endeavoring to learn about later-life remarried couple processes, it is hoped that I will facilitate researchers and therapists alike in working with such a population. I further hope to break down ageist cultural stereotypes, while shedding some much needed light this population.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of older remarried couples. The prominent themes emerging from this study serve to facilitate researchers' and clinicians' understanding of such a population. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to present the key findings that were obtained through 11 in-depth interviews.

Salient Themes from the Findings

The final framework portrays the findings from this study (Table 4.1). Four primary themes emerged from the interview process:

1. Individual Experiences and Processes
2. Relational Systems
3. Remarried Couple Internal Processes and Experiences
4. Factors Specific to Aging

All of these themes lead to the overall theme of the later-life remarried couple experience.

Table 4.1 *Final Framework*

Individual Experiences and Processes	Relational Systems	Remarried Couple Internal Processes and Experiences	Factors Specific to Aging
1. Past Experience 2. Divorce Experience 3. Emotional Awareness 4. Independence and Self Empowerment.	1. Relating to Adult Child(ren) 2. Relating to Adult Stepchild(ren) 3. Relating with Grandchildren 4. Relating with Extended Family 5. Relating with Friends 6. Relating to Ex-Spouse 7. Work/Retirement	1. Remarriage Process: Mate Selection 2. Remarriage Process: Coming Together 3. Shared Attachment 4. Marital Lessons 5. Power and Equity 6. Chemistry/Connectivity 7. Sexual Relationship 8. Companionship 9. Balancing Independence 10. Work/Retirement Couple Challenge	1. Growth and Development 2. Mental Age 3. Health Changes 4. Caretaking 5. Living Healthy 6. Death and Loss
Later-Life Remarried Couple Experience			

The following discussion will provide details that will explain and support each theme. Specific quotes from the interviews and journals will help to illustrate the themes, and will provide the reader with a better understanding as to the older remarried couple experience. The emphasis throughout is on letting the participants speak for themselves. Where appropriate, critical incident data will be woven in with interview and journal data to augment and solidify the discussion.

Individual Experiences and Processes

Participants in this study described their couple experiences as being informed by each's individual experiences. Participants described how past experiences or issues from their families of origin or previous marriages affected their present experience. In addition, participants related their experiences of starting over after divorce. Further, members developed an understanding and awareness of their emotions. As such, they were later able to apply this understanding within the context of their relationship. Lastly, participants discussed a process of becoming independent and self-empowered; they feel at liberty to engage in their own individual pursuits, and a confidence in their capabilities.

Past Experiences

As stated previously, all couples spoke about their past experiences as having some influence on their present-day relationship. Some couples related that it is these family-of-origin experiences which cause the most conflict in the relationship. As one participant suggested,

“It’s not about particular content. But these are probably old, primitive, early, from childhood issues that get unresolved there, and you bring it to the relationship. That’s probably the things that are most difficult between us, are the things that we’ve each brought from forever... what’s happening is not about me, but... in Yiddish you’d say that’s your mishigas” (ie. Crazy, Male, age 72).

Similarly, another participant stated that,

“I mean there’s some issues in... in our relationship that we both bring to it, but that we’ve had forever, you know, all our lives. You know what childhood wound you’re dealing with so to speak. Because we each have our own issues, and you step on them” (Male, age 68).

As such, this suggests that unresolved aspects of one’s family-of-origin and childhood enter into the experience of the older remarried couple. A primary component of this

involves gender role assumptions brought forth by one's family of origin. As one participant stated,

"I mean that's a childhood thing. But my mom, when my... stepfather would come home, she'd wait on him hand and foot. And I, I did not like the fact she was so dependent upon a man. And so I went, I like women who are independent. But then when they don't act like your mom, you get frustrated, you know, you go like, where's my dinner? And she'll say, well I don't know, what are you making, you know? You know, you sort of figure out where that frustration comes" (Male, age 68).

Another participant reflected,

"It's a kind of implicit... belief that they should be taking care of these things. Which is what I think I did very much in the first marriage. And making all kinds of weird assumptions about the relationship between men and women, which are... I, I got from my parents, from a different generation. That is not how we are at all, but it's sometimes a challenge" (Male, age 72).

Given these statements, it can be noted that members of couples bring into the relationship gender role assumptions from their families-of-origin. Yet, as will be discussed later, such gender traditional roles are no longer the primary mode of operation for such couples, even though they can be at the heart of many conflicts.

Further, couples bring into the marriage experiences from their past marriage. Many participants mused about an imbalance in roles and power in their former marriage, wherein they eagerly welcomed their new spouse playing the role of partner. As one participant stated, "I was always subservient all the time in that marriage. He (referring to new spouse) taught me to be different though" (Female, age 70). Another participant related a similar experience in his past marriage, wherein,

"During the entire time that I was married to R, basically, uh, there would be all kinds of things that she would never do. Like, she only did a fraction of the cooking, for the kids in particular, she only did a fraction of the laundry... She only did a fraction of the taking care of the house, so I was used to having to do all that stuff... Now we share all that stuff" (Male, age 64).

Conversely, one participant talked about having too much power in her past relationship:

“I always thought, you know, it seems like having more power is a good thing. And I really learned that it’s not. Because it’s way too much responsibility for anybody, you know.... And... and I just, I learned that that’s not, that’s not a healthy thing at all. Now we’re more balanced” (Female, 62).

All remarried participants related similar stories of inequities and power imbalances in their past marriages. They further shared an excitement in having a new partner share many of the roles and responsibilities.

Divorce Experience

A formative aspect in many of the participants’ lives resulted from the divorce experience. Participants related experiences of starting over and adjusting to a new phase of life. They further shared a sense of hardship and struggle. In many cases, this time period was marked by self-examination. It was further marked by an intense strength and resilience.

To begin, several participants provided stories of trials and tribulations resulting from the divorce. Many expressed themes of starting over, and financial hardships. For instance, one participant related her experience of having to start from financial scratch, “I essentially had to start over. I was ... basically put out in the street. And it was very difficult . . . And it’s, I didn’t have a house. He even took my car”. (Female, age 64).

Participants also related emotional hardships. As one participant stated,

“It felt like being hit in the face with a 2 by 4. It’s miserable. I had cancer, and that divorce, and I would take cancer any day over a divorce. So... I mean I’m telling you that there was nothing that just hurt so badly as that divorce did. And I didn’t even like my ex” (Female, age 64).

The concept of emotional “baggage” wherein one carries the pain and hurt experienced at one point of life onto another, was also seen throughout the interviews. As one participant provided, “I’ll tell you what, going through the first marriage and divorce just kicks a lot of that stuff right out of ya. I mean, you’re gonna, you can’t emerge from the first one without baggage and battle scars” (Male, age 66). This same participant later provided,

“You’re a recruit . . . You’ve never seen battle before. You don’t know anything about combat. Then, once you taste a little bit of it...you’re different. And there’s nothing... as combative as divorce. If it’s a knock down drag ‘em out, it’s obvious. But there is, there’s lots a stages and windows you have to go through. And you don’t know anything about it unless you’ve been through it. You don’t know a thing. Because as ready as you think you are, for such a thing, you’re gonna find out different. Yeah, there’s gonna be a, I mean it’s... it’s gonna be a, a fog. It’s gonna be, it’s gonna be horrific. And it’ll take you, it’s gonna take you a couple years to get over it. No matter how much, how much you thought you were ready for it” (Male, age 66).

It can thus be seen that such couples viewed their divorce experience as a seminal point in their development. Through the stress and strain, many came out the other side changed and battle-scarred; however, they were able to move forward. For example, four of the participants discussed strides to further enrich their development through going back to school. Three other participants mentioned engaging in a therapeutic process in order to “grow and develop” (Male, age 68). Yet, others took the time to rediscover their past interests and hobbies. These actions can be seen as a sign of resilience.

Emotional Awareness

Through the process of divorce, many participants discussed a theme of becoming aware of their emotions, and attuned to their needs. Most conceptualized this as a key component to the success of their remarriage,

“I really didn’t know what I wanted when I got married the first time, other than I was trying to take care of her problem. So I think you gotta have a better sense of who you are. So that you can bring more emotional involvement to the relationship. I would say getting to know myself better was probably the... the biggest thing. So in remarrying, I picked someone...who was emotionally attuned to themselves” (Male, age 68).

Independence and Self Empowerment

Primary to the study is a theme of independence and self empowerment. Couples in this study voiced, through the context of their ecomaps, feeling at liberty to engage in their own individual activities and pursuits, wherein they were able to form their own identity. For example, one participant stated “We do a... lot of our own things. I mean, if I call up J and say that I’m going to go somewhere with my friends after school, oh, that’s okay. He will just get his own food and stuff. I don’t feel so rushed” (Female, age 64). Couples suggested that the post-divorce experience helped to re-expose them to their own individual interests and hobbies. Other participants voiced similar sentiments, suggesting that the post-divorce experience helped convince them of their own competency, and thus provided an empowering experience. For example, as one individual stated, “You know what, it was such a big change for me to go, to become like, independent and to do everything, you know, run the household, pay the bills, do everything, that, once you do it, it’s hard to give it up” (Female, age 63).

In addition, several participants brought forth the concept of freedom and acceptance of self as developed within this new relationship. For instance, as one member of a couple stated, “I’m pretty independent and I think he... I think he made me that way. I really think that he allowed me to find what I truly—like he always said I was a late bloomer” (Female, age 70). The older remarried relationship thus provides a sense of safety and security wherein one can development.

Relational Systems

Interactions with relational systems provides a key component to the later-life remarried couple experience. Couples in this study described their remarriage as being very much imbedded within a complex context. They provided that such a relationship was necessarily inclusive of a broad familial history, wherein one must negotiate relationships with each's children and grandchildren from a previous marriage. Further, extended family and friends, as well as each's ex-spouse sometimes play a part in the larger context. In addition, the decision surrounding work and retirement acts as a key external variable for many of these couples.

Relating to Adult Child

A good portion of the participant couples in this study described interactions with adult children as a key facet in their remarriage experience. For the most part, relationships were described as good, yet marked by independence on the part of the adult child. On the other hand, five out of the nine men who have children in this study reported experiencing long periods of strained, cut-off, or friction-filled father-child relationships over the years. Most of these men directly attributed the difficulties as a result of the divorce experience,

“M (son) is not... he's not always emotionally available. Because he's learned not to be emotionally available. So to me, that's the big effect of...the earlier years.... Um... but he's really... he keeps his self . . . So, but, you know, I'd rather have a more close relationship, but, it's not going to happen” (Male, age 68).

Two fathers, however, attributed the challenges in part to the remarriage experience. As an example, one couple phrased it in the following manner:

Husband: "The 2 have made it pretty clear that as long as N was in my life, they did not want to be part. And, um... so, I... said that's fine. Because I am... very much in love with my wife and... she's the most important thing to me.... I just don't see them. It's been years since I've seen them. I have stayed away from their children too... So I just, we, I, we just stay away. And since N's not welcome, they don't even pay any attention to her, that's just the way it is, you know. Bless them and release them" (Male, age 71).

Wife: "They were in their 20's when we got married. And they never forgave, forgave him for, um... being divorced. It was a mutual thing with his ex-wife and R to be divorced, but the 2 older daughters never really forgave him for that. And, uh, I was the other woman, even though R had been divorced about 5 years when we met. Um... but, at, at 25, 26, you know, adjust and go on. And they're, they're reacting like small children" (Female, age 69).

Some of these fathers felt as if their child's spouse, most typically daughter-in-law, exacerbated an already tenuous relationship:

"And I would say that another stressor is K...the grandchildren's mom, and ... M's wife. She tends to be very opposite to me.... I think, you know, that also part of it is that, as a result of the... tremendous kind of difference, personalities between K and us, that... it doesn't allow us to have as close, a regular relationship with M (son) as we... would like to have" (Male, 68).

Interestingly, only one woman reported having similar challenges in relating with her children. This indicates that there may a gender difference in relating with adult children.

As stated previously, for the most part, couples described having relationships with adult children wherein such children were independent, yet dependable. In other words, the parents had good relationships with their children, yet, such children were in essence, busy with their own lives. As one participant described:

"When I was raising A and C... my goals for them were, I always intended to raise them to be what I call happy, independent, productive adults. And... they are happy, independent, productive adults. And, you know, they think I did a great job. But now... you know, they're—very happy with, you know, their lives, and, the reality of it is, they don't really need us all that much" (Male, age 68).

With regard to the remarriage experience, although most couples reported feeling some initial tension in their decision to remarry, they felt that, by in large, they were

supported by their children. Rather, the children seemed to recognize their parent's need for companionship,

"I know one of my children didn't really like the idea of my... connecting up with D. At first. I don't even remember which one it was. But then another one said...you know, don't you want her to be with someone and be happy? And you won't feel as much like you need to take care of her. And, emotionally I think as well, as, you can just not worry, because she's with somebody. And, then the other one said, oh, yeah, I guess you're right" (Female, age 67).

Overall, the resounding message is that adult children seem to be fairly engaged in their own lives, yet able to maintain good relationships with their remarried parent. While some hold lingering resentments resulting from the divorce and remarriage process, particularly in regards to father-adult child relationships, others seemed to accept their parent's need for an adult relationship. Importantly, for those with tenuous relationships, adult children's spouses seem to fan the flames.

Relating to Adult Stepchild(ren)

In relating to adult stepchildren, the same message was recounted throughout the majority of interviews, wherein individuals did not necessarily feel as if they were in a "parenting" role, but rather they related to the adult children as a relative or as a friend. As one participant stated,

"I don't feel like a mom to them, and I'm sure they don't feel like I am a mom to them. I'm just someone that knows their dad. Oh I mean I get along with them . . . But it's not, it's not, um... it's not as a stepmom. And, and, it's not, it's not in a mother—or parent role at all, so. Well, more like relative friend. You know I mean, I, I mean I, I'm related to them, but it's not in a parental figure" (Female, age 54).

Further, most remarried partners voiced a concern of not wanting to step on their partner's ex-spouse's toes. Rather, they felt as if the role of "mom" or "dad" belonged to someone else,

“And, and for me it’s just, you know I, I just wanted to, I just really wanted to make sure I respect B as his mother, you know. She is his mom, and she earned that title. And that, that’s hers, and I would never... presume to... take that role, because it’s not my role. And, and so... that’s a little tricky for me. But, um... and so, you know, how, how I feel about it, um... is... I don’t feel like I’m his mother. And that’s, and that’s not a statement at all about how I feel about him” (Female, 62).

Further, in relating to adult stepchildren, many participants provided that their relationship really depended on the individual child. For instance, as one participant suggested,

“It really depends very much on the individual child. And it’s true with my own children as well, that the relationship, the roles I play or whatever, is a dance. In terms of where that child is, and what he or she needs and wants... And I think, uh...it’s like what doors are the children opening to me” (Male, age 72)?

While some stepparents felt “guarded” (Female, age 62) in relating to particular adult stepchildren, others felt as close as can be. For instance, one participant read aloud a card she had received for Mother’s Day,

“You’re like a mother to me. Mother’s Day reminds me of all you mean to me, for, although you’re not my mother, we’re as close as we can be. That’s why I want to let you know how very much I care. You’ve touched my life in many ways, and I’m so glad you’re there” (Female, age 64).

Importantly, this same participant related feeling quite distant from her partner’s other child. As such, this reconfirms the assertion that feelings for and relationships with adult children vary depending on the “doors” (Male, age 72) that such children open. Further, this asserts that relationships with adult stepchildren can range all over the spectrum, from being extremely close to being extremely distant.

Overall then, these older stepparents felt as if they were not in a parenting role at all, but rather served in the capacity of a relative or friend. Further, these stepparents felt as if they had to maintain a fine line in order to protect the sanctity of the adult child’s

actual parent. Lastly, these stepparents felt as if so much of the relationship depended on the adult children, and the relationship that such children were willing to develop.

Relating with Grandchildren

In relating with grandchildren, older remarried couples seemed to take a different approach than in relating with adult children or stepchildren. An overwhelming number of these couples seemed to feel as if these grandchildren were shared. For instance, as one couple put it:

Wife: "When I say my children... I think of them as my children, although, D is definitely involved with my children. But when I say my grandson, that's ours...." (Female, age 67).

Husband: "We're, we're, he's getting to know us together. We are his grandparents. We come as a package in his mind" (Male, age 72).

Another step-grandparent stated it differently, "I definitely feel like their grandmother. I mean I just, I never thought I'd be interested in that, and then, when they. . . It, it's a transforming experience, it really is" (Female, 62). As such, this indicates that for a lot of older remarried couples, this new, younger generation is claimed as "ours" (Female, age 67), whereas with adult children and stepchildren, a biological boundary is drawn and roles are more ambiguous. Yet, that ambiguity does still appear in some step-grandparent relationships,

"L (partner's ex-wife) is J's grandmother and... She calls me L (participant's first name). Although C and K (adult stepchild and spouse) refer to me as Aunt L to her. And, and that's a... common Chinese thing, to call, people Aunt, when they're not aunt. Because at first I thought that was odd, you know aunt. I think of people that, you know, are... well, well you're (referring to her partner) a grandparent too, and... I guess by relation to him, although it's not an age thing for me that I don't feel like a grandparent, it's more just like I don't feel..." (Female, age 54).

As such, this indicates that not all step-grandparent relationships are alike, wherein the children are claimed as mutual. Rather, further research is warranted to explore the variables that could affect such a relationship.

Relating with Extended Family

In relating with extended families, couples shared a wide range of experiences. Some members discussed feeling warmly welcomed into the family, while others discussed great feelings of conflict and resistance. For example, one couple shared their experiences of feeling completely rejected by the extended family as a result of the way in which their relationship began,

“Well, it (family relationship) was really strong until I met J. And then it kinda dissolved. Because I, uh... wasn’t completely divorced at the time, you know when I met J. And, uh, she, D (former spouse) was in a nursing home, but, you know, we were trying to move on with our relationship. And it, uh... he (brother) didn’t care for the way that I did things, and he dug in and he, you know, his youngest kid was 18... he’s kind of locked into... formulating their opinions for them, and trying to keep them from this adulteress home that his brother was having. And... it’s still a very stressful situation, even though we’ve been married for awhile. We’ve battled pretty heavily about it. But, you know, and it just, it’s just very damaging” (Male, age 59).

Other members of couples discussed feeling “outside the loop” (Male, age 59) when it came to extended family interactions. Rather, it was not so much that the individuals did not feel welcomed, it was more that such members were unaccustomed to the extended family’s way of being. As one participant provided,

“And...I think for me it was, I realized some stress involved in having family here, and they had their own way of being in space. And it’s different from... First of all, my, I need, I need quiet space a lot. You know, quite—And, but, you know, they’re, they’re having a great time, they love each other, that’s real clear. And that’s important to me that that’s, that J... gets to continue that relationship. And... I need to find a way to go out and get air, you know. But it’s like, these are the ways that their family is together. And it is different from the way I... I am. And I... I, so, there is, there’s stress” (Male, age 72).

Importantly, it was these divergent kinship styles that primarily created stress in relation to the older remarried couple experience, rather than any conflict about the remarriage itself. Overall then, the older remarried couple experience within the larger family landscape seems to be quite diverse. Importantly, however, it seems that there is some stress with most couples in terms of fitting into the family system.

Before leaving this topic, another key facet with regard to extended family relations must be mentioned. Several members of couples within this study provided experiences of being cut-off from their ex-spouse's extended family. Such participants shared stories of closeness in relating to former extended family members, and feelings of sorrow in the loss of these relationships. Only one participant described a continued, strong relationship with former extended family members.

Relating with Friends

The experience of relating with friends again provides a complex dynamic. Several participants in the study related experiencing loss with regards to past friendships. Rather, a good number of participants described transitions throughout their marital experiences. As one participant stated,

“Well, I, uh, I... I felt that, when I was married, I had married friends. And then I got divorced, and I had single friends. And then I got married again, and I ended up having married friends again. And I, I have a few single friends that are still single that are friends, but most of them dropped by the wayside” (Female, age 57).

Another participant framed it similarly,

“I think as far as friendships go, you don't keep any of your old friends. You end up making new friends because somewhere along the way... if you had like a couple that were your friends, one of them almost resents the fact that you got a divorce, because they would take the other, my spouse's side. So you kind of lose all your old friends” (Female, age 62).

Interestingly, three couples described an experience of not having a lot of close friends at this stage of the game, but rather, having a multitude of acquaintances. As such, this indicates a relational complexity in friendships that needs to be further explored in research. The resounding message, however, is that the older remarried couple experience is marked by transitions in friendships.

Relating with an Ex-Spouse

At this point in time, the majority of remarried individuals provided that they have limited contact with their ex-partner, given that they are no longer in an active stage of parenting. While some participants described sharing in family events, such as grandchildren's birthday parties and the like, others described elaborate maneuvers on the part of adult children to avoid interactions. One such participant described frustration with such events,

“So she (ex-spouse) won't interact, and so, when she comes here, that means we can't, you know, if it's Christmas, we got to figure out how to do all that sort a stuff without, you know . . . Okay, we can't be together for Christmas . . . Instead of just—and you know, because she travels here, she's here then. And so, it'd just be a lot easier if, you know, we could all just get along. I don't mean to be a big happy family or anything, but . . . But just get together for Thanksgiving . . . She could talk to a lot of other people besides me. But anyway, so that's a little bit of a stressor” (Male, age 68).

Only one participant described maintaining a semi-amicable relationship with her ex-spouse. In this relationship, the former couple talked about concerns surrounding their adult children, one of which was a substance abuser. Further, every once in awhile, they were able to engage in narratives surrounding their shared family history. Overall though, most continued ex-spousal relationships were marked by a general feeling of awkwardness and stress.

Work/Retirement

In this study, nine of the eleven couples interviewed discussed the concept of an encore career, or rather, a post-retirement position. Participant's reasons for engaging or wanting to engage in such a position ranged from financial concerns, resulting from the divorce experience as well as the present economic state, to the desire to keep active or engage in a fulfilling vocation. For instance, one participant provided the following:

“We thought we were prepared to retire and we found out that because of the economy, that we don't have the money that we thought we had. And, uh, I've only been back to work, um, it'll be 3 years this August. Um, but it just so happens that I like the work so well, that I'm only part time there, but there, there's a need for some extra money too, and that's the reason I'm working. But, uh, the other thing is keeping active. You know I think it's important. Use it or lose it” (Male, age 71).

On the whole, most of these positions were part-time in nature, and not particularly lucrative. They did, however, provide for the couples some sense of keeping engaged in the community. Further, although some of these positions were not necessarily a welcomed event, for the most part, members did end up finding such positions to be somewhat pleasurable. From a research perspective, it might be valuable to further examine this notion of an encore career in relation to older remarried couples. This could perhaps be related to the concepts of independence and self empowerment discussed earlier in this chapter.

Remarried Couple Internal Processes and Experiences

Primary within this study were themes regarding the couple's relationship. Many discussed experiences with regards to the remarriage process, such as selecting a new mate and coming together. Further, the theme of a shared connection, wherein a grandchild, or other relative provides a substitute kinship connectivity, was prevalent.

Moreover, each couple described lessons learned from their past marital experience that they have applied to their current marriage. As a part of this, couples described present experiences with power and equity in relation to roles. They also described intense feelings of chemistry and connectivity, sexual compatibility, and companionship. Yet, couples experienced challenges in balancing independence, wherein they faced difficulty knowing how much was too much. Some couples, wherein one member was retired, or semi-retired, and the other member was still working, expressed concerns with regard to the mutual retirement process.

Remarriage Process: Mate Selection

Throughout this study, couples provided strong themes of the remarriage process. Prevalent within this theme, was the concept of mate selection. Interestingly, most remarried individuals seemed to have a cognitive plan as to what they were looking for when it came to finding a new mate. Only a very few provided that they had no plan; rather, they let nature take its course. For the most part, however, individuals strongly professed to “doing the opposite” of what they did the last time and looking for the “opposite type of person” (Male, age 59). In other words, some remarried individuals were very deliberate in their pursuit for a new mate that was contrary to their first in key areas. One extreme example is as follows,

“I had a problem because I was attracted to the same type of person I was always attracted to, which is my first husband. And, the type of people that are like me, Type A personalities, really on the go. And then... that one movie... with Gerard De Perdue, . . .Green Card. When I saw that movie, it was like a chilling event. I started asking my sisters and my friends, is this my problem? I need to see somebody that is 180 degrees opposite? Like this girl in the movie. This guy was an oaf, and she couldn't stand him. And I go, this is my problem I keep finding the same type of person, and I'm not getting involved in a relationship because I'm not finding the right type of person. So I started dating people who I wouldn't give the...who I would never even look at. And so C is actually...he's

opposite, he's a B instead of an A. I tried out people that did not fit my mold" (Female, age 57).

Others were not as advertent in their search. Rather, they looked at their way of being together, as opposed to certain, defined characteristics,

"I think that you, when you are going into a second marriage, you are looking for certain things that maybe you weren't looking for in the first marriage. You're looking for someone that, you're very compatible with, that you can get along with...that you see you're not going to have fights all the time. You're looking for different things" (Female, age 64).

Still others knew of only what they did not want in a new partner. For example, "What I learned from that was, when I decided that I did want to get married again, I had a whole list of things that I didn't want in a husband, more than what I did want" (Female, age 69). As this women described, she, along with two other participants, actually created a list as to what they did or did not want in a new partner. As such, overall it can be seen that in looking for a new partner, many of these participants wanted something different than in their last relationship.

Remarriage Process: Coming Together

Another common aspect of the remarriage process was this theme of coming together and combining households. Many provided examples of initial adjustments that needed to be made, such as getting used to each other's habits. For example,

"Getting used to each other was hard. You know, getting used to each other's moods, and... just the way you'd think. You know, there are certain habits, that you have. Like even like okay, the bedroom. Somebody likes it dark, some people like it light. We have a thing, he likes very light covers, I like heavy covers. It's like all these things that you have to adjust to, and after a while you think I can't adjust to one more thing. But, finally . . . It's the, some of the little tiny things, I think was harder for me, than the big things. The little things of like where you put your shoes, and your stuff" (Female, age 63).

Later on, this same participant provided that it was living independently, and getting used to her own way of being that made it all the more difficult to adjust. In other words, having had that period of living on her own, this participant felt that it was difficult for her to modify her preferred environment.

Further, five couples discussed the actual process of combining households,

“You also bring your stuff; you got so much stuff. You know. I mean, he gave up his house, so then he had to move into my house. So that was hard for him. But then, he had to bring his stuff, and he had to get rid of stuff, and so you don’t have so much stuff in the first marriage. The second marriage, you got all this, you know, stuff” (Female, age 62).

The concept of “too much stuff” was seen throughout many of the couple’s dialogues.

In addition to roles, which will be discussed below in terms of power and equity, couples also discussed the financial aspects of coming together. Each couple seemed to design their own unique financial arrangement, combining elements of both the one pot and two pot system, as discussed in chapter two. A consistent element in these financial plans, however, was that the women had complete control of a certain allotment of money. As one woman put it, “You need your own money” (Female, age 63).

Taken as a whole, the remarried process of coming together involves challenges in sharing space and getting used to one another’s habits. This is especially taxing given a period of singlehood. Further, couples face challenges in minimizing materials accumulated through the maintenance of two households. Lastly, couples each develop their own unique financial arrangement, merging aspects of the one pot and two pot systems. Yet, the commonality in each provides for the woman to have at least some of her own money.

Shared Attachment

Interestingly, every couple in this study described having an intense, shared attachment to a grandchild or other relative. For each, this almost seemed to provide a substitute kinship connection. Further, many articulated regrets about not meeting earlier, and being able to share in the connectivity of creating a child together. As one individual stated,

“We have B (grandson). So kind of a surrogate. I mean it’s real, but it’s not the same. And I still have that in some sense, connection to my former wife, even though we live very different lives. But having shared that, and in having the same depth of feeling for those children I think . . . That is... you know, it’s, it’s very specific, and precious stuff. And even though we do love each other’s children, it is different. Of course, than having a child together. That’s in a sense what is missing, from this marriage” (Male, age 72).

As such, the element of a shared “child” was prevalent through each couple’s experience.

Further, this indicates a desire to have a tangible representation of the couple’s love.

Marital Lessons

Each couple in the study expressed lessons learned through their marital experiences. Over and over again, the resounding message provided is that marriage is work:

“It takes more than love. Love is, is for young people. . . I can remember, you know, being in love is a good feeling, you know, but unless it’s tempered with something else, it’s not going to last, you know. You have to really go through life with each other. . . and you know, marriage takes work. That’s not something I really knew in the first marriage” (Male, age 71).

Couples related story after story of not really understanding the concept of “marriage as work” during the first time around. Many provided examples of how, in this marriage, they conscientiously spent time working things out. Rather, they communicated, compromised, and negotiated around differences or concerns. Further, as many

suggested, they hold to the principles of “not sweating the small stuff”, and “choosing their battles”. In addition, many couples communicated that “respect is key”. As one individual provided:

“Well, we both had 25 years in our first marriages, and ... people start taking each other for granted too much. So, you learn from that experience. And then the second marriage, you try and not take each other for granted. I mean there’s, a whole lot more talking, and a whole lot more listening, and really it comes down to respect; we respect each other, and appreciate what each offers” (Male, age 64).

Despite most of these statements being commonplace idioms, these couples really seemed to take stock in the lessons learned. They gave examples of how they enacted these lessons in their own lives, and on a daily basis. They were not merely platitudes or expressions, but rather concepts through which they lived their lives.

Power and Equity

Within these marriages, all couples, with the exception of one, described relationships that were marked by shared power and equity. Couples shared in the decision-making process, the household chores, and the like. For example, as one female participant reflected,

“I wanted to be on a more level playing field. It was not level before (in past marriage), and, it is level now as much as you can make it level. I think its pretty level. I mean, decisions about money, the decisions about the house, decorating even, we make those decisions together” (Female, age 63).

Importantly, couples did not particularly stick to traditional gender roles:

“In my first marriage, I was a stay at home mom and housewife, and, did work a little bit, but, now it’s, it’s different because, now I work full time and he works part time, and as I said, it’s kind of like having a house husband. Which I never thought—in a way, in some ways the roles are reversed. He probably does more of the housework than I do” (Female, age 63).

Although, for the most part, as one participant suggested, “The gender lines are still there in some ways... but they’re not rigid” (Male, age 72).

As stated previously, one couple did provide the exception to this power and equity “rule”. In this relationship, both members seemed to value traditional ideals. As such, roles were divided in a rigid, traditional manner, wherein the woman was responsible for all of the cooking and cleaning; this despite her maintaining full employment while her husband stayed home as a retiree. Yet, this couple individually confirmed their desire to maintain such role dynamics.

Chemistry/Connectivity

Several of the participants in this study described their remarriage in terms of a very intense connection. Many made statements about being soulmates and the like. One couple even provided the following metaphor,

“It was like somebody sprinkled stardust on us or something . That’s what, we laugh about that, but that’s what it feels like . . . You know, like on the World of Disney, and the little fairy throws the dust, and everything’s wonderful. That’s how it felt” (Female, age 62).

All of the participants described having relationships based on shared interests, values, and activities. One couple even spent upwards of ten minutes enumerating on their similarities. Moreover, these couples verbalized a deep sense of support. For instance, one participant proclaimed, “He is my rock” (Female, age 48). Another provided,

“We’ve been through so much together. And, so we kind of depend on each other, and we’re each others advocate, medical advocate, and powers of attorney. And N’s been very supportive...Actually she’s very supportive of everything. She goes to every appointment with me” (Male, age 71).

Overall, these couples conveyed a clear sense of connectivity and support in their relationships. Many compared their relationships favorably to past relationships, and provided a deep appreciation for their current marriage.

Sexual Relationship

A contingent of five couples discussed the role of sexuality within their relationship. A chief point made by each of the couples is that sexuality holds a primary place in the relationship. As one participant stated in her journal entry,

“I appreciate and enjoy our sexual relationship. I do remember before D and I were together thinking that I would be sad if I never had a sexual relationship again, and that that was a possibility. It was wonderful to be attracted and to be found attractive again. It was also wonderful to be able to express ourselves and enjoy ourselves in that way. I think that is a really important part of it” (Female, age 67).

Another participant provided, “We have a great sex life. And it’s... it’s very fulfilling. I mean I, it was, like, this is exactly the way it should be. So, that has been, that’s a huge strength” (Female, age 48). As such, this indicates a clear sense of the importance of the sexual component within the relationship. This is quite contradictory to the societal lore of older couples as sexually bereft (Larson, 1992). Yet, it is important to mention that two couples provided some concern as to health issues interfering with sexual frequency and/or performance. As such, this indicates that the aging component does perhaps have an effect on the sexual experience.

Companionship

Many couples in this study acknowledged the important role of companionship. Rather, they verbalized a deep sense of friendship, familiarity, and closeness with their partner. As one participant stated,

“The way I’m looking at a later in life remarriage is, after it gets going, it’s just off the ground, but when you’re young it seems like love is everything. But when you get older you realize that it’s more the companionship. That love crazy feeling will come. But it’s more the companionship. It is more important that we are best friends” (Male, age 71).

Many in the study, including the participant quoted above, provided a shift in focus from a younger stage in development. Rather, companionship now seemed to be a primary element within the relationship. As seen above however, this does not delineate the important role of the sexual relationship. More accurately, it highlights the important role of friendship within the later-life remarried relationship.

Balancing Independence

One challenge that was voiced throughout the interviews is negotiating a balance between independence, as described above, and couple-hood. As one participant stated, “Both of us are pretty independent...The factor of the challenge is keeping it—not getting too separate. I think that’s a challenge” (Female, age 63). Other couples voiced similar sentiments. For instance,

“So, this year he went to Florida for 2 months.... And for a number of years before that, it was one month. And, so maybe particularly even back when this started, it was... now D’s thinking in terms of, we need to be individuated and this is what I need. And... and I was more, what about me? And... um... and... it was... and we had to... struggle a bit with... um... The, the balance, and... and I think our sense of it was a little bit different. Um... that... you know, when do we... stay home because the other person’s here, when do we go out, when do—when do we go out of town, when—those kinds of things. And I think they’re partly harder because in my first marriage there, there wouldn’t have been any question of... one of us going away for a month. And maybe that’s partly because we were younger, and. But, I, so I can’t, I don’t know how much of it is age and how much of it is, you know, difference in... that sort of thing” (Female, age 67).

As such, it is clear that the couples in this study recognize the existence of a dilemma in balancing one’s need for independence with the needs of the couple. It is further evident that such couples engage in a high level of independent pursuits. Yet still, this seems to be both an area of strength and an area of weakness in these relationships, wherein the perimeters around independence are unclear.

Work/Retirement Couple Challenge

Several couples in the study expressed concerns with regard to the retirement process, wherein one member was retired, or semi-retired, while the other member was still working. In most of these cases, the women, who were typically younger than the men, were still engaged in the work world, and were thus contemplating the couple's potential post-retirement experience. In general, most of these women seemed to show some concern with regard to the couple's engagement. Rather, members seemed to be concerned as to whether they would be able to relate with their spouse. Given that so much of the relationship, as described above, is based on these individual pursuits, which can include one's work identity, participants were thus worried that without such pursuits, their relationship would be challenged. For example,

“Sometimes I do wonder what we'll both do if we're both, both retired. I used to worry about that, but now I decided that was a waste a time. To worry about just sitting here looking at each other and having too much time together . . . I used to worry about that, but now I think, well, I can find stuff to keep me busy” (Female, age 63).

Another concern for these couples is the fear of heading in divergent directions. Rather, such couples articulated a sense of regularity in one or both members working. Without that regularity, couples presented a fear of becoming overly individualized in pursuing their own interests. Further, couples feared that such interests were not mutual or shared, but rather disparate in nature. As one couple put it:

Wife: “I'm 6 years younger than T, and so, you know, I don't know what in 6 years I'll feel like doing. I see myself sort of more doing, as moving forward. And I, and... which is different from what you see yourself, as, as more being. And... and so I just, I wonder how that's going to go. I meant in terms of the balance, you know, of... what I'm doing versus what you're doing” (Female, age 62).

Husband: "I think you still think of yourself as wanting to accomplish some things in different areas. And I've kind of not....So I think that, you know, for both of us, maybe, you know, we say, well, you don't know. In terms of what she does and what I do for 25 years, and then if I'm not doing that anymore, and you're doing something else, uh, you know, what would that be" (Male, age 68)?

As such, couples presented, in essence, a fear with regard to their individuality. This fear was driven by the concern that the event of both members' retirement would either take away their individuality, or that it would further drive a wedge in their coupledness.

Factors Specific to Aging

A prevailing theme throughout the study was the concept of aging. As a part of this, participants highlighted aspects of their experience that related to their personal growth and development. In other words, couples provided incidence of change within their relationship that related to their aging process. Further, couples provided a sense of incongruity between their mental age and physical age. Rather, participants related a sense of feeling younger mentally, than they in fact were. In addition, couples conveyed themes surrounding health changes and caretaking, as well as themes regarding death and loss. They further communicated aspirations and objectives towards living healthy. Lastly, themes regarding inheritance were provided.

Growth and Development

The majority of couples in this study reflected on changes within their life that resulted, in part, due to the aging process. More accurately, couples shared experiences of change as related to their lifespan experiences and their stage of development. As one participant expressed,

"You have to go through a certain stage, in order to get . . . where you're at. And, there's only one way to do it. Otherwise you get a different result. As a matter of fact, I kind of wish partly that I had known N first. But on the other hand, no, that

wouldn't have worked either, because I don't think she would have put up with me the way I was after Vietnam. Things happen when they're supposed to happen" (Male, age 71).

Many other participants echoed similar sentiments. They further discussed their need for growth with regard to developments in the relationship:

"But just the way that we communicate... you know, just the trust in the relationship we have. We probably couldn't have had that at a younger age, or at least, it would have been a pretty big struggle" (Male, age 57).

In discussing the decision to quit smoking, this same participant remarked,

"I quit when I wanted to quit. I mean that's, things like that really come down to an individual decision, and, much as you'd like to control the other person... And we would never recognize that in our 20's" (Male, age 57).

Altogether, this speaks of a path traveled, wherein one arrives at a point in development in which they are better able to sustain a relationship marked by differentiation.

Mental Age

Couples in this study also related a sense of not feeling their age. As one participant put it, "The mind's willing, but the body's weak" (Male, 71). Another couple stated it differently,

Wife: "It's a kind of a shock to wake up and look in the mirror some—who is that whole person looking back at me" (Female, age 69)?

Husband: "Well you said it one day. You said I looked in the mirror, and my mother was staring at me" (Male, age 71).

Wife: "I haven't used a mirror anymore. I'm just kidding" (Female, age 69).

By and large, individuals in this study tended to view themselves to be much younger than they in fact were, yet, as will be discussed below, many experienced physical limitations within their world.

Health Changes

Many of the couples in the study discussed experiencing changes in health.

Several related major shifts in their way of life. For instance, as one couple provided:

Wife: "I am losing the ability to do more and more things. Things that I love. Cooking, just being able to walk. At one point, I couldn't even pick up my cat because he weighs 14 pounds. I couldn't even pick him up because it would hurt so bad. I couldn't make our favorite meals, go, or even go shopping. Or just lift anything, or move anything, or push or pull anything, without... It's gotten somewhat better now, but at one point I was that close to, really giving up everything. We, we even thought about moving, didn't we? Because of the stairs" (Female, age 62).

Husband: "Well, she has, you basically have chronic pain, due to your back" (Male, age 64).

Wife: "It's, it's so bad. Yeah. I, I cannot go without my pain meds. So . . .It's, it'll be forever, for the rest a my life" (Female, age 62).

Male: "That basically, that means that... We have to organize our lives together . . . Taking that into account. For instance, you need to take a nap most afternoons. You can't go through a whole day. So, we have to organize activities and so on, what we're going to do, where we're going to go, taking into account the chronic pain syndrome" (Male, age 64).

Another spouse related in her journal entry,

"I think you will find also that health is the most important thing in life - as I live it every day now with P's health condition being what it is. He used to do everything around the house - and yard - and now he is unable to do a thing....so that is probably the most difficult. I do not ask for help from our kids.....as I know they have their own lives and are very busy themselves. I still know though, that I have P's support (mental) in every endeavor that I do" (Female, age 70).

As such, roles need to be renegotiated and accommodations made, but the one thing that seems to remain constant, is the couple's support for each other. As one participant put it,

"With all these health changes, we depend on each other an awful lot" (Male, age 71).

Couples thereby seem to be reorganizing their life and taking health changes into account.

Caretaking

In discussing the potentiality for providing a caretaking role, all participants, with the exception of one, stated that they would be ready and willing to supply assistance.

As one participant declared,

“You know, I’m... I’m fine with taking care of him if he needs it when, when he’s older. I wouldn’t want you to get too crotchety. Because you do when you don’t feel well” (Female, age 67).

Only the one participant admitted that she did not want to provide a caretaking role, “I’m not a very good nurse. I don’t want to be a caretaker. I’m not, I can be really honest, I would not be a very good caretaker” (Female, age 64). As such, this indicates that most participants are willing to redesign their life on behalf of their partner. Yet, in discussing the possibility of changes to each’s own health, wherein they would be in need of care, many asserted a sense of not wanting to impose upon their partner, “I worry. I don’t want him to be burdened.... I don’t want to be a burden on my husband. I love him and I adore him, and, I don’t want it to change his, his own creativity and his own energy” (Female, age 62). Another participant contended,

“I mean if I reach the point where... you know, I was an invalid and could not take care of myself, I would probably pull the plug on my own life, you know, quite frankly. I do not want to be in a position where someone takes care of me. So, at this point I don’t, I don’t worry about it, but I recognize it could be an issue down the road” (Male, age 54).

Several participants echoed this message of not wanting to worry about the future; rather, they felt as if they would cross that road if and when they came to it.

Living Healthy

Nine of the couples in the study mentioned taking direct actions towards living a healthier lifestyle. Several provided examples of maintaining an exercise regime or

changing their eating habits. Many suggested that such actions were for the purpose of living a longer life together. For instance,

“One of my biggest concerns is dying young, and leaving D alone, as a widow. The H men don’t have a good track record, although my dad was 70. And the N women live up in their 90’s, so. And then there’s 8 years between us, so, you know. You do the math, and you know, that’s probably one of my biggest concerns. And, I try to do battle with that. That’s one of the reasons I quit smoking, was to improve my... my health. And I do, I started working out and, trying to take better care of myself” (Male, age 57).

The age differences between many of these couples, wherein the men tended to be older than the women, was also discussed as a factor related to health maintenance.

Importantly, many provided that their spouse was their biggest supporter of living a healthier lifestyle.

Death and Loss

Almost all of the couples in the study mentioned themes with regard to death and loss. Several mentioned concepts regarding the impermanence of life: “As you get to this age, of course you think about, you know that... this whole, this whole map here is going to be diminished, the longer you live” (Female, age 62). Even more participants discussed fears related to the loss of their partner, and not having enough time with their partner.

An example is as follows:

“My biggest thing is just, you know, now that I’ve found somebody that... you know I love and loves me back the same way... having to be without him. And, you know, if something were to happen to him, and... and... you know heart attack, or... stroke or whatever, and, and in the blink of an eye he’s gone, I just... I just worry that I would just be completely lost. He keeps me grounded, and he’s... just a good fit for me. So I just... that’s the scariest thing for me is just, having to think about living life without him. But that, you know, there is the other times you know that I think about, you know, growing older” (Female, age 43).

Still others voiced concerns as to their partner’s well-being, should they die first,

“I have a real fear of leaving her alone without being prepared financially. You know, I’m thinking of things, okay, when should I do, redo the roof so she doesn’t have to worry about it for 25 years. Or what... maybe we should replace this appliance so she doesn’t have to worry about it right after something happens to me. Or, um, the furnace, how old is the furnace, you know. Maybe I should replace that” (Male, age 71).

Only one participant mentioned concerns with regard to the burial process,

“I’ll tell you one concern I have, I don’t know if I’ve quite said this out loud; I think it’s kind of come up. I don’t know where we’re going to get buried. Where will we get buried? Your family’s in Memphis, my family’s in Detroit, we’ve lived in Grand Rapids forever” (Female, age 67).

As such, it can be seen that many of these participants are considering the grim endgame of life. They further perceive the loss of their partner in relation to their new beginning, wherein they have not had enough time together. As a final example,

“But, ... it’s like now that I found the person I want to be married to, I realize that, you know, at this point in my life, we probably have like 25 more good years together and that’s it, and it seems like sometimes I regret the fact that, you know, I spent a lot of my life just getting here, you know. And, you know, maybe I’ll have more years than that, but it seems like realistically, you know. And so, I want to make the best of what I have left here, but, you know, I sort of regret that. I just feel like I wasted a chunk of my life getting here. I didn’t waste it, but...” (Male, age 54).

Overall then, it should be understood that such couples are significantly aware of the impermanence of life. They further articulate fears regarding the loss of their partner, as well as fears regarding their lack of time together.

Later-Life Remarried Couple Experience

Each of the themes discussed above are elements or strands of the later-life remarried couple’s experience. Woven together, they create a rich tapestry of life experiences, growth, and development. They further express unique patterns of relating both to each other and others within their larger system. Yet, what is at the heart of these later-life experiences? Rather, as one participant pondered,

“Why get married? That’s, maybe it’s a different question when you’re 60, than it is when you’re 23, or . . . I don’t have the biological imperative. I think it, with you (referring to partner), it was in fact, real clear to me. I wanted to be married to you, because I think that. . . I could be—be committed to in fact myself and you in the process, very differently from when I was young, and I was, I felt needs. And, I didn’t need to get married, but I wanted to. And I’ll tell you it was, a. . . this is a place to develop a companionship, intentionally in a different way” (Male, age 72).

Other participants echoed similar sentiments, “I wanted a relationship, I wanted to share myself with someone, and give myself to this one person, and dedicate the rest of my life to being with this person” (Female, age 62). As such, these statements suggest that such relationships provide a place of growth, development, connectivity, companionship, passion, and the like. They are relationships unencumbered by certain imperatives; wherein the primary focus is on self and other.

Yet, such relationships, as suggested by multiple participants, are marked by a lack of shared history. As one participant stated,

“You know you go through all those stages of change. We missed a lot of that, and a lot of memories. You know, the memories that you have with your child, growing up. And those are hard for us to share. So you kind of just do them in your head. So, but I think that’s a hard, a hard thing. That’s the hardest thing” (Female, age 64).

Similarly, another participant provided, “We met way up here and we missed, we missed out on . . . you miss a bit of that growing up together. But, it’s fun to have grown up separately too” (Male, age 57). These statements hearken back to the discussion of not having enough time together. Yet, as the majority of participants provided, “We’ve had the experiences we were supposed to have together. No more, no less” (Male, age 71).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of later-life remarried couples. It was hoped that by examining the context of such remarriages, better insight would develop as to the primary factors that reciprocally inform later-life remarried couple experiences. Further, it was hoped that knowledge would be gained as to how factors specific to aging play into couple experiences.

This research utilized the qualitative methodology of grounded theory, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1992), to provide an interpretive framework. Such a framework helped to create linkages in the data, thereby facilitating the researcher in understanding later-life remarried couple experiences. Further, As Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide, “theoretical concepts are developed through interconnecting observations of phenomena and concepts with existing theory and research” (p.21). As such, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) Human Ecological Theory, in combination with Symbolic Interactionism provided such a theoretical base. Further, in-depth interviews, ecomaps, and journals all combined to inform theory development. Moreover, interviewer memos, written directly after each interview, were a component in this process. Importantly, participants in this study included eleven older remarried couples. By emphasizing this specific population, this study provides a contribution to the remarriage and aging literatures. In addition, salient themes identified in this study suggest clinical implications towards working with older remarried couples, as well as future research with regard to this population.

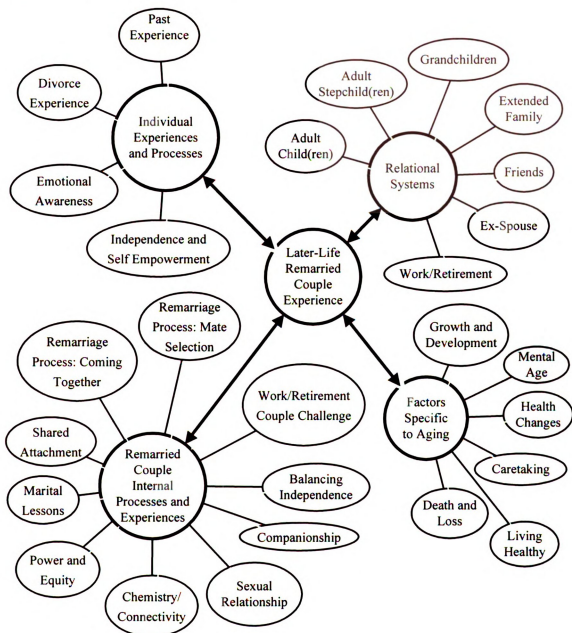
The goal of this chapter, therefore, is to present the conceptual model of findings, as well as the interpretation of such findings, wherein conclusions will be related to

current research. In addition, this chapter seeks to present clinical implications, limitations of the study, and make suggestions towards future research.

Conceptual Model of Findings and Research Overview

Throughout the research process, a grounded theory was developed. Such a theory signifies the need for slight changes to the conceptual model. Although the primary themes remained in similar contexts from the earlier conceptual model, many of the sub-themes were expanded or further developed. Importantly, the theme of “Internal Processes” was re-labeled “Remarried Couple Internal Processes and Experiences” to account for experiences related to remarriage. Similarly, sub-themes in this section reflect such experiences, and incorporate internal processes. The model, as provided in Figure 5.1, relates that individual experiences and processes, as well as interactions with relational systems, remarried couple’s internal processes and experiences, and factors specific to aging, reciprocally inform the later-life remarried couple experiences. Such a model thereby provides for the primary research question, which inquires as to the lived experience of older remarried couples. The model thus relates that each of these components is part and parcel to such a couple’s experiences. Such experiences will be summarized below; however, it is important to note that this model also suggests primary factors that reciprocally inform later-life remarried couple experiences, by way of relational systems and individual experiences, as well as factors specific to aging.

Figure 5.1 *Current Conceptual Model*



Theoretical Foundations

The use of Human Ecological Theory in combination with the theory of Symbolic Interactionism presented an ideal frame for this study. Together, these concepts provided for an in-depth understanding of the relational factors for which members of the remarried couple interact, as well as an understanding for the internal processes and

meaning systems that such couples create (See Table 5.1). As such, these theories allowed for a broad understanding as to the internal and external processes that work in tandem to create the later-life remarried couple experience.

More specifically, Bronfenbrenner's (1979,1986) model allowed for the influence of external systems with regards to the remarried couple experience. Rather, it provided a framework from which to explore the interaction of older remarried couples within multiple, external environments. As such, it allowed for the of understanding and interpretation of interactions with relational systems, such as adult (step)children, friends, work/retirement, and the like. Further, it allowed for the research to be placed in time and space (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In other words, it provided the researcher with the ability to interconnect observations with regard to individualized experiences, as well as factors specific to aging, to theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Overall, such a theory was essential towards providing a non-judgmental forum for participants to provide their experiences and perceptions (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993).

With regard to Symbolic Interactionism, such a frame provided a venue from which to examine how roles are constructed amongst older remarried couples, and how internalized processes influence such roles (White & Klein, 2002). As such, this theory allowed for the interpretation of remarried couple experiences and processes. Moreover, it allowed the researcher to examine dynamics within the relationship, such as the experiences with power and equity, as well as the drive towards balancing independence. It further allowed the researcher to see the relationship within the context of the individual, and such an individual's past history, processes, and experiences. Overall then, it allowed for an examination of individual and couple processes, wherein such

processes were developed through each member's experiences and the interactional processes between the couple (White & Klein, 2002).

Table 5.1 *Relating Themes to Theory*

Theory	Theme	Sub-theme
Human Ecological Theory	Relational Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Child(ren) • Adult Stepchildren • Grandchildren • Extended Family • Friends • Ex-Spouse • Work/Retirement
	Individual Experiences and Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past Experience • Divorce Experience
	Factors Specific to Aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth and Development • Mental Age • Health Changes • Death and Loss
Symbolic Interactionism	Remarried Couple Internal Processes and Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remarriage Process: Mate Selection • Remarriage Process: Coming Together • Shared Attachment • Marital Lessons • Power and Equity • Chemistry/Connectivity • Sexual Relationship • Companionship • Balancing Independence • Work/Retirement Couple Challenge
	Individual Experiences and Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past Experience • Divorce Experience • Emotional Awareness • Independence and Self Empowerment
	Factors Specific to Aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth and Development • Mental Age • Health Changes • Caretaking • Living Healthy • Death and Loss

Interpretation of Findings

As stated previously, several salient themes emerged from the research process. Such themes highlight various dimensions of the later-life remarried couple experience. The couple's discussions of their experiences, as well as the other research materials, underscored the influence of individual experiences and processes. It further related the complexities of engaging with relational systems, as well as the importance of both remarried couple internal processes and experiences, and factors specific to aging. Altogether, these themes reciprocally inform the later-life remarried couple experience.

Individual Experiences and Processes

Findings from this study suggest that individual experiences and processes play an important role with regard to later-life remarried couple experiences. Such individual experiences incorporate one's personal history, as well as themes of growth and development. As a part of this, many participants provided that family-of-origin aspects were underlying challenges in their relationship. This is congruent with a broad range of literature that examines family-of-origin aspects in relation to later marital experiences (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry & Kashy, 2005; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2008). A contingent of couples in the study further suggested that gender role assumptions from their families-of-origin were at the heart of many conflicts, although such gender traditional roles were no longer the primary mode of operation for the majority of these couples. Again, the present literature confirms such challenges with regard to the divergence between family-of-origin messages surrounding gender roles and the actual lived experience, not only amongst

older remarried couples (Clarke, 2005), but also amongst contemporary married couples (Baker, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2009).

Further, couples provided that experiences with their past marriage play a role in their present marriage. More specifically, couples shared experiences with regard to the imbalance of roles in their past marriage relating to the more balanced nature of their present marriage. Such perceptions are consistent with Clarke's (2005) study, finding that first marriages do tend to be more imbalanced with regard to domestic chores and other such roles, as compared to subsequent, later-life marriages. This same experience, however, has not necessarily been found to be shared with remarried couples earlier in the lifespan development, given ill-defined roles (Adler-Baeder, & Higginbotham, 2004).

As was found in this study, the divorce experience provided a formative aspect in many of the participants' lives. This indicates that the experience of "starting over" creates the opportunity for personal growth. This conclusion is compatible with Thomas and Ryan's (2008) study, wherein the authors found that divorce is affiliated with both hardship and opportunities. Further, participants in this study suggested having a sense of bringing "emotional baggage" into the marriage. Such a concept is prevalent within the remarriage literature, suggesting that in fact past marital experiences do play a role in the development of remarried couple experiences (Faber, 2004; Fredericson & Handlon, 1994; Hartin, 1990).

An important finding with regard to this study is the process of becoming attuned to one's emotions and needs. Few studies within the remarriage literature have accounted for such a concept. As such, it is unclear as to whether this process is due to this

population's stage of life, or whether this is the result of the divorce process. Further research is therefore needed to forge an understanding of this key element.

Another important finding relates to the theme of independence and self-empowerment. This finding, wherein couples expressed feeling at liberty to engage in their own individual activities, is congruent with other research studies that indicate that remarried spouses, especially women, desire more autonomy as individuals within their remarriage (Allen et al., 2001; Clark, 2005; Coleman & Ganong, 1989). Further, a theme of empowerment was present, wherein members of the couple expressed a sense of competency and self acceptance as a result of their divorce and remarriage experiences. Such a feeling of empowerment has been found to relate to positive post-divorce adaptation (Yáñez, Plazaola & Etxeberria, 2008). Although studies have examined the theme of independence and autonomy in terms of remarriage, few studies have examined the concept of empowerment in relation to the remarriage experience. As such, this would make for a potential area of research.

Relational Systems

Results from this study suggest that interactions with relational systems provide an important element with regard to the later-life remarried couple experience. Further, such concepts provide for primary factors that reciprocally inform later-life remarried couple experiences. Such factors include adult children, stepchildren, (step)grandchildren, friends, extended family members, ex-spouses, and the element of work/retirement.

A particularly key element in this study pertains to the parent-adult child relationship. As stated in chapter four, for the most part, relationships were described as good, yet marked by independence on the part of the adult child. This corresponds with

studies that suggest that remarriage decreases the contact between parents and their adult children (Aquilino, 2005; Kalmijn, 2007). Yet, a large contingent of remarried men in this study reported experiences of strained, cut-off, or friction-filled father-child relationships. This is again consistent with present research that documents a similar phenomenon, wherein father-child relationships are vulnerable to physical and emotional distance, as well as strained relationships, given the experience of divorce (I-Fen, 2008; White, 1992). More research is needed, however, to explain or predict such family responses, as well as to examine these relationships given health concerns.

In relating to adult stepchildren, the resounding message was that these “stepparents” did not necessarily feel as if they were in a “parenting” role. Rather, they related to the adult children as a relative or as a friend. Further, many participants provided that their relationship really depended on the individual child, and that such relationships ranged all over the spectrum, from being extremely close to being extremely distant. This is quite contrary to present research, which suggests that it is unlikely that emotional bonds will form (Sherman & Boss, 2007; White, 1994). Rather, this research provides that emotional bonds can and do form, depending on the adult-child’s acceptance of the relationship.

In examining relationships with grandchildren, a vast majority of these couples seemed to feel as if the grandchildren were mutual, or shared. Rather, step-grandparents related to the children as if they were their own. At present, little research within the remarriage field has examined these relationships. One exception is Kalmijn’s (2007) study, which provides that remarriage decreases the relationship quality and contact between grandparents and their grandchildren. This certainly did not seem to be the case

in this study. As such, this warrants further research into the remarried (step)grandparent-grandchild relationship.

With regards to extended family relationships, these again seemed to range from feelings of warmth to feelings of conflict and strain. Few studies to-date have examined such dynamics, with the exception of Booth and Edward's (1992) study, which reported that poor integration with friends and extended family predicted lower remarital stability. In this study, results seemed to suggest that it was more the divergent kinship styles, or rather each family's way of relating, that created stress in the couple experience. Given the lack of scholarly findings in this area, researchers would do well to further explore the dynamics of extended families in relation to later-life remarried couples.

Research provides little input with regard to the remarried experience of relating with friends. The study cited above is a clear exception; however, much more research is needed. In this study, once again, relationships with friends seemed to be complex; transitions in friendships seemed to occur for many throughout their marital experiences. One interesting finding suggested that within some couple relationships, they tend to favor having multiple acquaintances over close friendships. Such a finding should be further explored in the research process, given that it could have deep implications towards studies that suggest the growing importance of social networks as one grows older (Brown et al., 2006; Clark, 2005).

Given that individuals in this study are no longer involved in an active stage of childrearing, results suggest that most participants have limited, if any contact with their ex-partner. Family events, such as a grandchild's birthday, seem to be the one exception to the contact rule. On such occasions, participants related having general feelings of

awkwardness and stress in relating to their ex-spouse. No participant in this study, however, expressed strong, lingering feelings of resentment or hurt towards their ex-partner. This suggests that later-life remarried couples, in general, may have already undergone an experience of “emotional divorce” in relation to their former partner (as defined in chapter 2; Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Knox & Zusman, 2001). Further research should confirm these assertions.

Lastly, in relation to work and retirement, this study found that the majority of individuals had, or were considering post-retirement positions. Participants’ reasons for engaging in such a position ranged from financial concerns, resulting from the divorce experience as well as the present economic state, to the desire to keep active or engaged. Once again, few studies examined this concept of a post-retirement career in relation to older remarried couples. This is pertinent, given that studies find that over one-fifth of retirees engage in such careers (Schellenberg, Turcotte & Ram, 2005), yet, in this study, the vast majority of participants acknowledged having such a career. As such, it would be an important avenue of inquiry to explore reasons for such prevalence in the older remarried population, as it could relate to the concepts of independence and self-empowerment discussed previously.

Remarried Couple Internal Processes and Experiences

Primary to the later-life remarried couple experience is a theme revolving around the couple’s experiences, roles, and interactions. A primary experience articulated by many participants is that of the remarriage process. Couples discussed themes of mate selection, wherein they expressed a cognitive plan for finding a new mate. Most participants provided that such a plan comprised looking for someone that was the

opposite of their first partner. This is certainly consistent with both Bernstein (2000) and Hartin's (1990) research findings. Another theme expressed, was that of coming together and combining two households. Many voiced examples of initial adjustments that needed to be made, such as getting used to each other's habits, or combining all of the household "stuff". Another key aspect of this was the decisions with regards to merging financial assets. An important finding was that each couple seemed to design there own unique financial arrangement, rather than abiding by a one-pot or two-pot system, as articulated by Fishman (1983). As Allen and colleagues (2001) suggest, with age, one has had more time to establish patterns of savings, investing, and spending. As such, remarriage has brought together two people from different households with two potentially different ideas regarding money management. Yet, to date, few studies have posited potential financial arrangements that reflect aspects of both the one-pot and two-pot system. Clearly, research needs to account for the later-life remarried couple financial experiences. As such, this could be an important area of study.

Interestingly, every couple in this study described having an intense, shared attachment to a child or another relative. This seemed to provide an intense couple connection. Research studies support such a connection as a common element in couples without shared children (Lillard & Waite, 1993; Thomson, 1997). In fact, this phenomenon has even been dubbed the "marital meaning effect" (Thomson, 1997, p.4) by members of the scholarly community. Rather, this equates to the importance of a shared attachment as a symbol of the marriage.

With regard to the finding on marital lessons, wherein couples expressed lessons learned from their previous marital history, it seemed that such couples actually took

stock of their experiences, and incorporated the “lessons” into their lives. This is contrary to research findings, which suggest that, in effect, marital history, and thereby the lessons learned, do not matter with regard to the long-term stability of the marriage (Wilmoth & Koso, 2002). As Faber (2004) provided, rather than facilitating a second marriage, such lessons, or past experiences, only adds anxiety to the new marriage, wherein one feels compelled to prove that he or she is capable of having and maintaining a good relationship.

The findings in this study confirm Clarke’s (2005) assertion with regard to the egalitarian nature of older remarried couples. Couples in this study provided that their relationships were marked by shared power and equity. They further suggested that they were not particularly defined by traditional gender roles. As evidence, couples described sharing in major decisions and household tasks. This is a key aspect of the later-life remarried couple experience, given studies that suggest that long-term marriages tend to maintain a traditional division of labor, even after one or both partners retire (Cooney & Dunne, 2001).

Couples in this study presented a deep sense of chemistry and connectivity for their partner. Many articulated an intense feeling of support, and described having a plethora of shared interests, values, and activities. This is contrary to Berardo’s (1982) study, which suggests that due to the lack of available partners, older remarried couples may choose new partners who are not well suited to them. Findings from this study do concur, however, with Adler-Baeder and Higginbotham’s (2004) assertion that remarried partners tend to compare their current relationship favorably to their past relationship.

Couples in this study clearly conveyed a sense of the importance of their sexuality within their relationship. This is once again contrary to research studies that suggest that the sexual relationship becomes less primary as one ages (Stevens & Westerhof, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Sherman & Boss, 2007). Further, this is contradictory to societal lore, which proposes that older couples are inactive sexually. This finding, however, does warrant more research, as only a contingent of five couples provided such information. Further, as is consistent with current research (Atwood et al., 2006; Matthias et al., 1997) some couples did acknowledge health concerns as interfering with sexual frequency and/or performance.

As a part of the later-life remarried couple experience, many couples in this study acknowledged the important role of companionship in their relationship. They verbalized a shift in focus from a younger stage of development, wherein friendship, familiarity, and closeness with their partner were of primary importance. As such, this is consistent with research findings that provide that as one ages, companionship becomes more important (Clark, 2005; Sherman & Boss, 2007).

Another aspect of the later-life remarried couple experience is the challenge of balancing independence. Couples in this study acknowledged the existence of a dilemma in balancing one's need for independence with the needs of the couple. This corresponds with the above discussion on independence and self-empowerment, as well as the literature regarding autonomy. Yet, it is believed that this is a key finding of this study, as well as a key aspect of the later-life remarried couple experience, given that little research exists as to this dynamic. As such, scholars would do well to further examine the interchange and decision-making process around such concepts.

Lastly, the work/retirement couple challenge provides another primary facet to the later-life remarried couple experience. Interestingly, the experiences provided by such couples are quite contrary to the current retirement literature, which suggests that when one partner retires, but the other remains employed, there is an increase in marital conflict (Szinovacz & Davey, 2004). Further, studies show that after retirement, marital satisfaction tends to increase (Szinovacz & Davey, 2004; Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2007). With regard to later-life remarried couples, such couples in fact expressed concerns with regard to having both members of the pair retired. Several participants felt that having one partner work provided structure to the relationship. Without such structure, participants worried that they would, in essence, become bored with each other, or that the two would become overly independent, and go in divergent directions. As such, this seems to suggest that these couples have varying concerns when it comes to retirement that is not yet addressed in the present literature. More research thereby needs to examine such decision-making processes around retirement. Further, studies would do well to explore couple experiences after both members have retired.

Factors Specific to Aging

Components of aging play into the experiences of older remarried couples. Just how such factors of aging play into couple experiences, is provided below. Importantly, themes of growth and development, mental age, health changes, care-taking, living healthy, and death and loss all seem to take on unique elements in the context of remarriage.

One primary component is the theme of growth and development. Here, couples shared an awareness of change as related to their lifespan experiences and stage of

development. Couples further provided having a new understanding of relationship needs and not being as susceptible to “the emotions of youth” (11, p.27). Such concepts thereby depict that the aging process involves not only biological changes, but psychological and social changes as well. In part, this suggests that the remarriage experience provides for an important change within the lifespan. The lifespan developmental literature supports this theme of growth and change over one’s life course. One only needs to refer to Erik Erickson’s work to confirm such psychosocial developmental processes (Erickson, 1975). Further, theories of development now incorporate the divorce and remarriage experience as a component of change within the lifespan (Baltes, 2000).

In this study, individuals related a sense of not feeling their age. Rather, many tended to view themselves to be much younger than they in fact were. This theme was represented by the concept of mental age. Neugarten (1979) actually posits that such a phenomenon is quite common, given the “age-irrelevant society” (p. 887). Further, Neugarten (1979) suggests that such changes are slow to occur, and do not occur “in stepwise fashion” (p.887); meaning, it happens when it happens. This can further be facilitated by the remarriage process, wherein couples are concurrently in a honeymoon stage and a retirement stage. As such, further research needs to examine this process in comparison to long-term married couples.

Health changes are part and parcel of the later-life remarried couple experience. Several couples in the study related experiencing major shifts in their way of life, wherein they needed to renegotiate roles and make accommodations based on health concerns. Yet, through all of these shifts, couples expressed a deep sense of support. As

such, it seems that older remarried couples face the challenges together. It is unclear, however, as to the toll that such challenges take on the relationship. Spitze and Ward (2000) suggest that such couples could face a deep decrease in their marital satisfaction. As such, future studies need to further examine health-related changes in regard to the dynamics of older remarried couples.

In terms of this study, no couples were currently faced with the challenge of providing a caretaking role to each other. Yet, in discussing such potentialities, partners expressed a willingness to provide such a role, should the need arise. The primary message, however, was that participants did not want to worry about such an event; rather, they felt as if they would cross that road if and when they came to it. This is consistent with Wood, Conway, Pushkar, and Dugas' (2007) finding, suggesting that men and women do not worry about such health potentialities; rather, they worry more about their current stresses, such as financial and relational concerns. Importantly, it should be noted that Sherman and Boss's (2007) groundbreaking study did examine the caretaking context of older remarried couples, wherein one partner had dementia. This study found that remarried caregivers were proactive in their care (Sherman & Boss, 2007); further, such caregivers communicated no regrets in marrying their partner.

A significant number of participants in this study verbalized that they are taking direct actions towards living a healthier lifestyle. Such actions included incorporating healthier eating habits and an exercise routine into their schedule of events. Many credited their actions to a desire to be together longer. The age differences between many of these couples, wherein the men tended to be older than the women, was also discussed as a factor related to health maintenance. Given this age of health awareness, and the lack

of research regarding couple dynamics as pertains to health maintenance, it would be pertinent to study whether a similar health consciousness exists in older, first time married couples. Rather, it would be important to discover the factors related to health maintenance amongst couples, and whether such factors are unique to older remarried couples.

Lastly, a vast majority of participants in the study mentioned themes with regard to death and loss. The primary focus of such themes related to not having enough time with their partner, and the loss of such a relationship. This theme of not having enough time with a partner could perhaps be more prevalent within the context of remarriage. Rolland (1994) suggests that in the face of loss, many long-term couples react by either pulling away from one another or clinging to each other. An important avenue of research could be to examine older remarried couple's responses to such threats, given their verbalizations with regard to not having enough time.

Later-Life Remarried Couple Experience

Each of the themes discussed above articulate the narrative of a sample of older remarried couples with regard to their experiences. Such narratives provide a lens as to the individual factors, external systems, internal couple processes and experiences, as well as factors of aging that play into the later-life remarried couple experiences. Together, such elements create a rich understanding of older remarried couple's life experiences, growth and development, as well as such couples' ways of relating to each other and to others within their larger system. The themes that were developed through this study suggest that such relationships provide a place of growth, development, connectivity, companionship, passion, and the like to the members of such couples. They

are relationships wherein it seems that the primary focus is on self and other. Yet, such relationships are marked by a lack of shared history. They are further marked by a complex history, in terms of both individual components and relational components. Finally, such relationships face challenges in balancing drives towards independence.

Clinical Implications

Past research has documented clinical approaches towards working with remarried couples (Dupuis, 2007), yet, such approaches are targeted only towards couples in the midst of the child-rearing process. As such, the field is in need of clinical frameworks from which to base treatment with older remarried couples.

To begin, the most pressing issue seemed to revolve around the parent-adult child dyad. More specifically, a good number of fathers related experiencing distance or strife with their adult children. Research examining the parent-adult child relationship suggest that parental divorce results in less economic support exchange, less emotional support exchange, lower parent-child contact, greater geographic distance between parent and child, and lower perceived relationship quality with adult children (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990). Together, this provides that divorced and remarried fathers are prone when it comes to the aging process (I-Fen, 2008). As such, this indicates that therapeutic intervention is needed, wherein such therapists can facilitate that needs are met by asking questions such as, what type of aid is needed, and who is available to help? Therapists need to keep in mind that reliance on family support may not always be realistic given the history of divorce and remarriage (Coleman, Ganong, and Rothrauff, 2006).

Similarly, therapists can help older remarried couples think in advance as to what happens when health changes occur or physical caregiving is needed by one or both

members of the couple. Such thought and foresight seemed to be lacking amongst many participants in this study. Rather, such participants seemed unwilling to examine these potential realities. Yet, given Sherman and Boss's (2007) study, which suggests that remarried caregivers face complex dynamics, such potentialities need to be examined. In addition, therapists can help couples dialogue around other aspects of aging, such as changes in sexual functioning. Further, end of life intentions need to be clarified and resolved as much as possible both amongst the remarried couple, as well as with adult children and stepchildren to help ease potential conflict (Sherman & Boss, 2007). As such, therapists can help facilitate dialogue between family members with regards to inheritance and burial issues, and advise the couple to seek legal council in creating a will.

Therapists can also help older remarried couples navigate through the retirement process. Here, therapists can facilitate dialogues regarding retirement concerns. They can thereby help couples discuss financial issues, as well as the potentialities of an encore career, and concerns in staying connected. Therapists can further assist couples in articulating shared interests that they hope to pursue, as well as individual interests, in order to help couples stay engaged in the relationship and the community. Importantly, therapists can also facilitate post-retirement adjustments, wherein they help clients to discuss concerns or issues that resulted from the retirement decision.

In addition, therapy with older remarried couples can assist the couple in voicing concerns around independence. Couples can acknowledge such a challenge in their relationship, and thereby be facilitated in creating a plan for connectivity. They can further articulate their own needs and desires, and negotiate around any conflicts that occur.

Couples should also be facilitated in dealing with the initial aspects of remarriage. A therapist can help such couples find financial options that are right for them, and that are not limited to the one-pot or two-pot systems. Further, therapists can assist couples in adjusting to their new partner's habits and ways of being. Couples can be coached in expressing concerns and challenges, and can thereby dialogue as to changes that need to be made.

Further, couples can be aided in examining the effects of each member's past history. The Intergenerational Therapy model can facilitate an exploration of familial patterns and dynamics that play into the couple relationship. Bowen's (1978) genogram could provide an excellent tool for mapping out such concepts.

Moreover, therapists can help couples devise plans around interacting with relational systems. Parents can be assisted in understanding relational dynamics with adult-children and factors related to their independence. Meanwhile, older "stepparents" can be aided in understanding their role with adult-stepchildren, wherein they typically relate as a relative or friend. They can further be assisted in an awareness of family dynamics, and facilitated towards an understanding that such a relationship with adult children depends so much upon each individual child. A family therapy modality may be recommended to help family members process experiences of strain and work towards adjustment. Further, couples can be facilitated in adjusting to divergent kinship styles. Plans can be made for managing such events, wherein each partner is provided the opportunity to engage at a level of their choosing. In addition, couples can be assisted in dealing with family events that are inclusive of ex-spouses; they can be coached to dialogue in a business-like manner, rather than feeling the need to avoid such

interactions. A key aspect, however, would be working with older remarried couples towards the development of strong friendships and social supports. While participants related being heavily involved in activities, they articulated a sense of having multiple acquaintances over close friendships. Having such friendships is important given studies that suggest the growing dependence on social networks as one ages (Brown et al., 2006; Clark, 2005). As such, couples can be informed as to the need for such friendships. They can further be coached and advised towards developing friendships.

Lastly, couples can be facilitated towards the development of a shared history. Rather, a therapist can help the couple to discuss their common history and to relate past experiences to present experiences (Visher & Visher, 2003). They can further be assisted in sharing old memories by providing the couple with “permission” to talk about positive experiences from their past, and to look at old photo albums. Such experiences only work to strengthen the couple relationship (Dupuis, 2007).

Future Directions

Throughout this chapter, suggestions have been made as to future directions in research. This section will briefly highlight key suggestions.

To begin, as stated previously, a large contingent of remarried men in this study reported experiences of strained, cut-off, or friction-filled father-child relationships. Little research to-date, however, helps to explain or predict such family responses given an involved father post-divorce (Clawson & Ganong, 2002). Further, such a relationship should be explored in the context of health related concerns. Rather, what role does such an adult child play in assisting an ailing parent?

In addition, interactions with other relational systems need to be further explored. For instance, little research has shed light onto the remarried (step)grandparent-grandchild relationship. As such, it would be beneficial to gain an understanding of such a relationship from the perspective of the (step)grandparent, as well as the grandchild. Further, examining the concept of friendships, in relation to older remarried couples, would provide for an important avenue of research. As stated earlier, many couples in the study professed to have more acquaintances than friends. Given the important role that friends play in mid-life remarried couple relationships (Roberts & Price, 1989) and as individuals grow older (Brown et al., 2006), such dynamics need to be further explored amongst older remarried couples.

Another direction in research could be around the issues of retirement and post-retirement positions. Older remarried couples in this study seemed to express varying concerns with regard to retirement that have not yet been addressed in the present literature. More research thereby needs to examine such concerns, as well as the decision-making processes around retirement, and the post-retirement experience. Further, studies should explore the phenomenon of post-retirement positions amongst later-life remarried couples.

Lastly, researchers would do well to study the concept of health in older remarried couples. For instance, examining how couples negotiate health-related changes would provide for critical clinical insight. In addition, a focus on the concept of health maintenance could facilitate an understanding as to the motivators for such a positive lifestyle.

Limitations

The most substantive limitation of this study is that it reflects only the perspective of the remarried couple. Highlighting the experience of such couples adds an important new voice to the remarriage and aging literatures. Yet, one cannot fully grasp the relational dynamics without the incorporation of other systems. The present findings, while valuable, are limited, due to their “one-sidedness”. Future work will have to incorporate the voices of other members of the system, such as adult children and stepchildren, in order to provide for a more ecologically sound understanding of the older remarried experience.

In addition, the small size of the study presents another limitation. While the goal of a qualitative study is not toward generalizability, it did preclude certain opportunities. For instance, this study would have benefited from more ethnic diversity amongst participants. Without such diversity, this limits the potential application of study findings. It is essential to explore such experiences in families that represent broader racial, cultural, and economic diversity. Such an understanding would provide greater insights, and expand the current literature.

In relation to the small sample size, couples who had been married for varying lengths of time were grouped together for analysis. Ideally, a sample size would be large enough to determine whether differences exist between participants. Such distinctions could provide for important information.

Another option that could have facilitated this study would have been to set further limits as to the participant length of marriage and age at marriage. This would have provided a more focused study as to the experiences of couples getting remarried

later in life. This is perhaps a divergent topic altogether, which requires further research in and of itself. Future research will have to carefully consider the options provided above in order to avoid making the mistake of assuming homogeneity within the group.

Lastly, the human element in this process must be acknowledged. As Rosenblatt and Fischer (1993) provide, in conducting qualitative research, unexplicated biases, selective memories, and self preservation on the part of participants can set limits on the qualitative process. As such, researchers must recognize that experiences or insights may be withheld, and that the findings may be compromised in unexpected ways. In the course of this study, it is impossible to know whether participants altered descriptions of family interactions and the like.

Further, it is possible that the researcher provided a place of bias within the study. To help minimize this, the researcher engaged in several tasks, including maintaining a clear audit trail, as well as using multiple sources of data, as described in chapter three. Further, the faculty advisor offered substantive feedback as to proposed codes and themes. Yet, future work would benefit from a more public process, such as ongoing presentations, and the incorporation of a broader number of research colleagues in formation of a research team.

Final Reflexivity

To begin, I must express the deep feelings of gratitude and appreciation that I have for the 11 couples that participated in the study. They have truly enriched my world, and taught me the meaning of strength and fortitude. They have opened my eyes towards the bonds that can form, and the levels of commitment that are available. They have taught me that in forming a relationship, one does not have to compromise on one's

meanings and ideals, rather, relationships can be strengthened by each's individuality and independence. Further, they have displayed a true strength in their relationship that comes about through a sense of security in one's self. Yet, I am left wondering how one can go about developing such a relationship, without having to go through the pain of divorce. Rather, are these relationships formed as a result of the depth of struggle caused by divorce, or are they developed as a result of the aging process? Given this primary question, I am left struggling as to how to incorporate the lessons learned not only into my clinical practice with individuals and couples that have not faced the struggles of time or divorce, but also in my own life. Can I get to this point of development, at the age of thirty, without enduring the struggles of divorce and time? Is there a way to incorporate the lessons of independence into younger couple's definitions of a healthy relationship? Such questions are perhaps beyond the focus of this study, yet, it teaches the lesson that this research has only hit the tip of the iceberg in terms of what needs to be discovered and explored.

Conclusions

It is hoped that this study has shed some light as to later-life remarried couple experiences. Factors of such experiences were highlighted, leading to the understanding that individual factors and experiences, as well as external systems, couple processes and experiences, and factors of aging all play a part in the later-life remarried couple experience. Further, several clinical areas of need were brought to light, and future areas of research were suggested.

Appendix A: Consent Form

An Examination of Older Remarried Couples: A Dissertation

Consent Form

Background Information:

This research study seeks to explore the lived experience of older remarried couples. It is hoped that through this study, a greater awareness will develop as to older remarried couple processes, leading to the development of more sensitive and appropriate support services.

My name is Sara Dupuis, MA, and I am a doctoral candidate in Marriage and Family Therapy, at Michigan State University. This study is being conducted in order to fulfill requirements towards my doctorate degree.

Procedure:

If you and your partner agree to participate in this study, you will both be asked to engage together in an interview. In this interview, topics covered include, but are not limited to the following: your experiences as a remarried couple, issues that are unique to remarriage, strengths and challenges in your relationship, your last argument, lessons learned from your past marriage, and concerns as you age. In addition, you will be asked to maintain a journal for the period of a week, in which you will reflect upon experiences that occur that pertain to life as an older remarried couple. Lastly, you will be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience, and will take approximately 1-2 hours to complete. Further, the demographic questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Lastly, the journaling can take anywhere from five minutes to thirty minutes to complete, depending on the length of your response. Interviews will take place in your home or at another suitable meeting place of your choice. Interviews will also be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. At the end of this process, you will receive a \$40 gift card in thanks for your participation with this study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Given the nature of this study, wherein you may be asked about your past marital experiences and present family and stepfamily relationships, it is possible that you may experience some strong feelings or emotions as a result of your participation in this study. Importantly, you will not be pressured to answer any questions or discuss any topics that you do not wish to discuss. In addition, you may choose to stop the interview at any time. As a part of this study, all participants will receive a referral list that provides for local support services. Participants will not directly benefit from participation in this study; however, as an indirect benefit, your participation will help to further research on older remarried couple processes. This could provide information that may help other individuals and families in the future.

Confidentiality:

Your confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study. As such, your privacy will be protected to the fullest extent of the law. As a part of this, each individual will be assigned a numeric identification code. Given this, no names will be attached to interview audio tapes, transcripts, or questionnaires. Further, such information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only the doctoral candidate, the committee chair, and the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) will have access to these materials. In addition, the audiotape will be destroyed after it is transcribed. An electronic file of the audio will be kept for three years, and will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer. Further, in any presentation or published report of the study, information that could identify any participant will not be included.

As with all family research, any report of ongoing or recent violence and/or abuse will require mandated reporting to the appropriate social service agency.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. As such, you may refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. If you decide not to participate, or to withdraw from the study, current or future relationships with the researcher will not be affected in any way.

Questions and Contacts:

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher (Sara Dupuis, 8635 Kalamazoo River Dr., Fowlerville, MI 48836, rudolp21@msu.edu, 517-944-4232). You can also contact my graduate advisor, Dr. Marsha Carolan (13B Human Ecology, East Lansing, MI 48824, carolan@msu.edu, 517-432-3327).

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Your signature also indicates your agreement to be tape recorded during the interview process. Given the nature of this study, audio recording is a necessary requirement.

As such, individuals that do not consent to the audio recording process will be ineligible to participate.

Signature of Participant	Date
--------------------------	------

Signature of Researcher	Date
-------------------------	------

Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

What is your age? _____

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is your marital status?

- ☐ Married: If so, how long: _____
- ☐ Living with my partner: If so, for how long: _____

Have you even been divorced?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How far have you gone in school?

- ☐ Have not yet graduated from high school
- ☐ High school diploma/GED
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ College Diploma
- ☐ Graduate School

What is your total family income each year?

- ☐ Less than \$5,000
- ☐ \$5,000-\$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000-\$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000-\$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000-\$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000-\$69,999
- ☐ \$70,000-\$100,000
- ☐ Over \$100,000

What is your work status? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Full time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Not employed outside the home

Family Race/Ethnicity:
(Check all that apply)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Not Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other _____

Thank you for your participation!!!!

Appendix C: Demographic Overview

Couple	Age	Years Married	Divorced	Education	Income	Work Status	Race/Ethnicity
1	M: 68	6 years	M: yes	M: College Diploma	\$70,000-\$100,000	M: Full time	M: Caucasian
	F: 54		F: no	F: Some College		F: Part-time	F: Caucasian
2	M: 66	7 years	M: yes	M: College diploma	\$70,000-\$100,000	M: part-time	M: Caucasian
	F: 63		F: yes	F: Grad		F: Full time	F: Caucasian
3	M: 72	7 years	M: yes	M: Grad	Over \$100,000	M: part-time	M: Caucasian
	F: 67		F: yes	F: Grad		F: full time	F: Caucasian
4	M: 77	30 years	M: yes	M: College diploma	\$50,000-\$69,999	M: Retired	M: Caucasian
	F: 70		F: yes	F: Grad		F: part-time	F: Caucasian
5	M: 68	20 years	M: yes	M: Grad	\$50,000-\$69,999	M: Retired	M: Caucasian
	F: 62		F: yes	F: College diploma		F: part-time	F: Caucasian
6	M: 59	4 years	M: yes	M: Some High school	\$20,000-\$29,999	M: Retired	M: Caucasian
	F: 43		F: yes	F: Some College		F: Full time	F: Caucasian
7	M: 64	16 years	M: yes	M: Grad	Over \$100,000	M: Full time	M: Caucasian
	F: 62		F: yes	F: Grad		F: Retired	F: Caucasian
8	M: 59	14 years	M: yes	M: College Diploma	Over \$100,000	M: Part-time	M: Caucasian
	F: 57		F: yes	F: Grad		F: Full time	F: Caucasian
9	M: 64	14 years	M: yes	M: College Diploma	\$70,000-\$100,000	M: Retired	M: Caucasian
	F: 64		F: yes	F: College Diploma		F: Full time	F: Caucasian
10	M: 57	9 years	M: yes	M: College Diploma	\$50,000-\$69,999	M: Full time	M: Caucasian
	F: 48		F: no	F: Some College		F: Full time	F: Caucasian
11	M: 71	10 years	M: yes	M: College Diploma	\$40,000-\$49,999	M: part-time	M: Caucasian
	F: 69		F: yes	F: Grad		F: part-time	F: Caucasian

Appendix D: Interview Outline

Interview

- ❑ Introduction of researcher
- ❑ Review of research process
- ❑ Review informed consent

Ecomap:

An ecomap is a way to “map” significant connections to persons and things in your environment. – all the different people that you feel are a part of your family, all the different elements in your life, and the relationships with those people and elements. It is a visual way to depict who is in your life, what elements effect your life, and how you interact with those people and elements. I am going to draw this map with your help. As we do this, I will be asking you some questions about your experiences and interactions with these elements:

1. Who plays a role in your life?
2. What type of relationship do you have with this individual?
Prompt: Who else plays a role in your life?
What type of relationship do you have with this individual?
3. What are some other factors in your life that provides strengths?
Prompt: What are some other elements that provide strengths?
4. What are some other factors in your life that provides stressors?
Prompt: What are some other elements that provide stressors?

Semi-Structured Interview:

1. Tell me about your experiences as an “older remarried couple”.
2. What issues do you face that are unique to remarriage?
Prompt: finances, relating to family members, friends, new rules and roles.
3. What are some strengths in your relationship; what are some challenges?
Prompt: friendship, finances, experience, family members, friends, etc.
4. Can you tell me about your last argument – what were you arguing about?
Prompt: finances, relating to family members, sexual relationship, etc.
5. What lessons did you learn from your past marriage?
Prompt: How is this relationship different from your last marriage ie - roles, rules, decision-making, relating with friends, family, etc.
Prompt: What types of characteristics did you look for in a new partner?
6. What are some concerns that you have going forward as you age?
Prompt: retirement, health, inheritance?

7. What do you think of when you hear the term “older remarried couple”?
- Prompt: what are some societal perceptions – ie., how are they different from an older, first-time married couple?
- Prompt: Legal considerations, relationship to adult children, etc.

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