

The Spectrum of Stepfathering

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Diversity of Stepfathers



Traditional Stepfamily Definition



Remarried couple with young children from a previous marriage (< 18), all living together in the same household

Focus of Early Stepfamily Research

(Re)marriage

Childrearing

Co-residence

White

Middle-Class

Heterosexual

The changing demographic profile of stepfamilies

- Nonmarital childbearing
- Cohabitation
- Father/joint custody of children
- Racial and ethnic diversity
- Parenting among same sex couples
- Aging of the population

Table 1.1 Traditional Versus Revised Definition of Stepfamilies

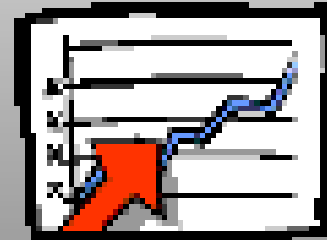
<i>Assumption</i>	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Revised</i>
Union type	Remarriage	First marriage, remarriage, cohabitation
Residence of children	Coresident, static	Coresident and nonresident, dynamic
Stage of family life cycle	Childrearing, children 0–18 years	Parenting across the lifecourse (includes children 18+ years)
Race and ethnicity	White	White, African American, Hispanic, etc.
Social class	Middle class	All classes (lower, middle, upper)
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual (“straight”)	Heterosexual or homosexual (gay or lesbian)

Source: Stewart (2007). *Brave New Stepfamilies*

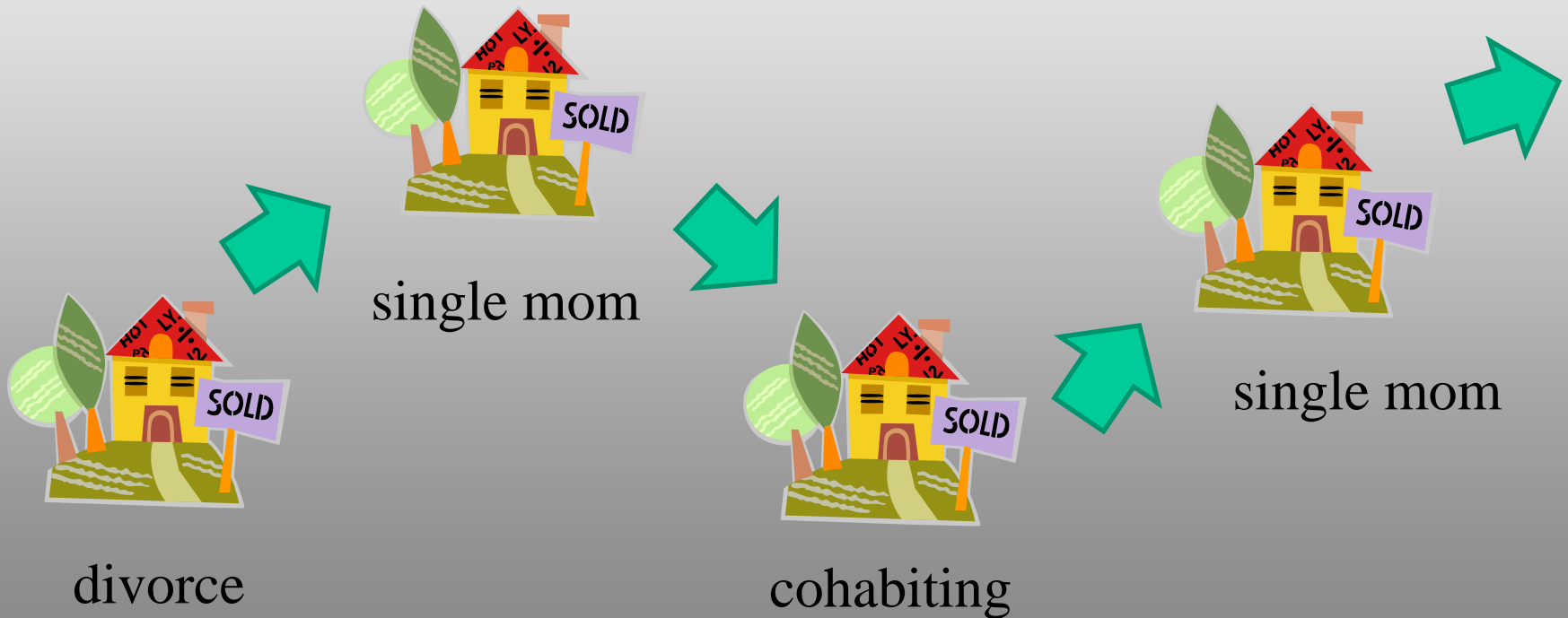
Becoming a Stepfather

- “The absence of a biological relationship between one’s children and one’s serious romantic partner.” (Stewart, 2007)
- “Being actively involved in the lives of their romantic partner’s children.” (Marsiglio, 2002, p. 13)
- “The union of two adults where at least one partner has a child from a previous relationship.” (Ganong & Coleman, 1994 cited in Sweeney, 2010, p. 671)

Static versus Dynamic



Not any one family structure but the number of family transitions



Additional Considerations

Race and ethnicity

Class

Custody arrangement

Sexual identity

Age of children and parents

Pathways into Stepfatherhood

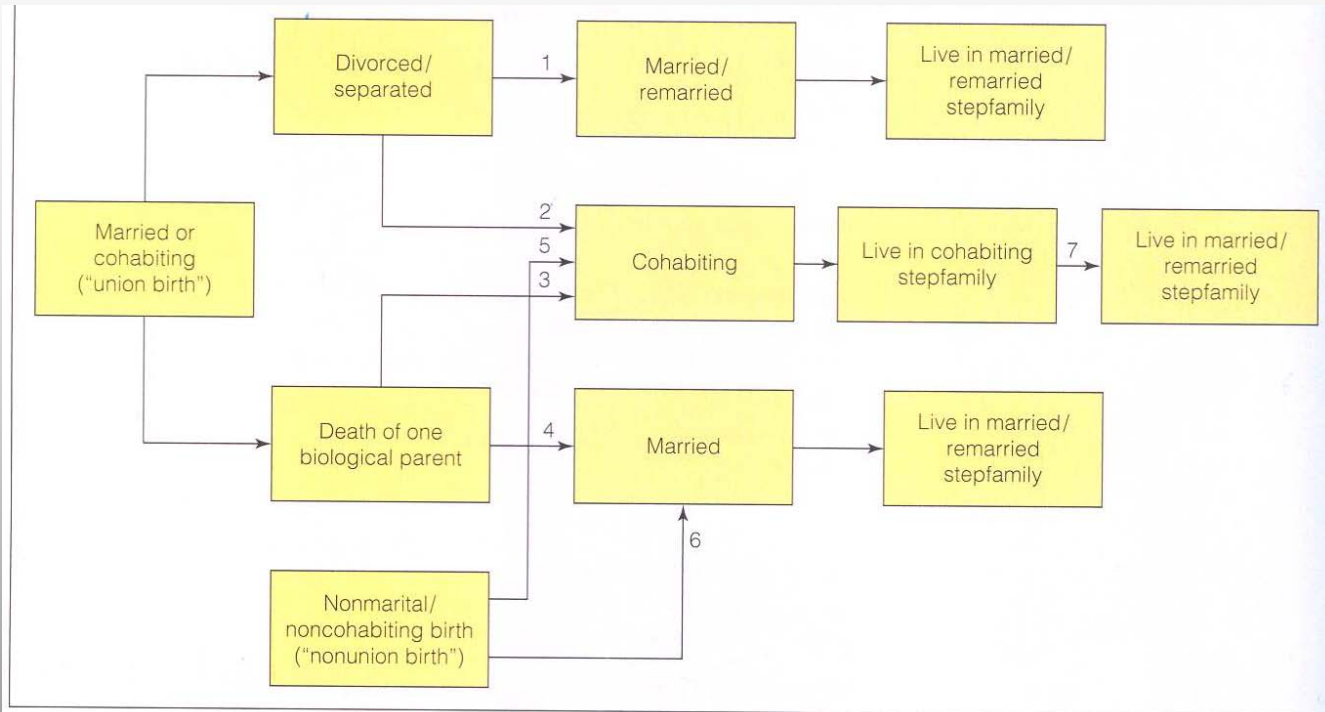
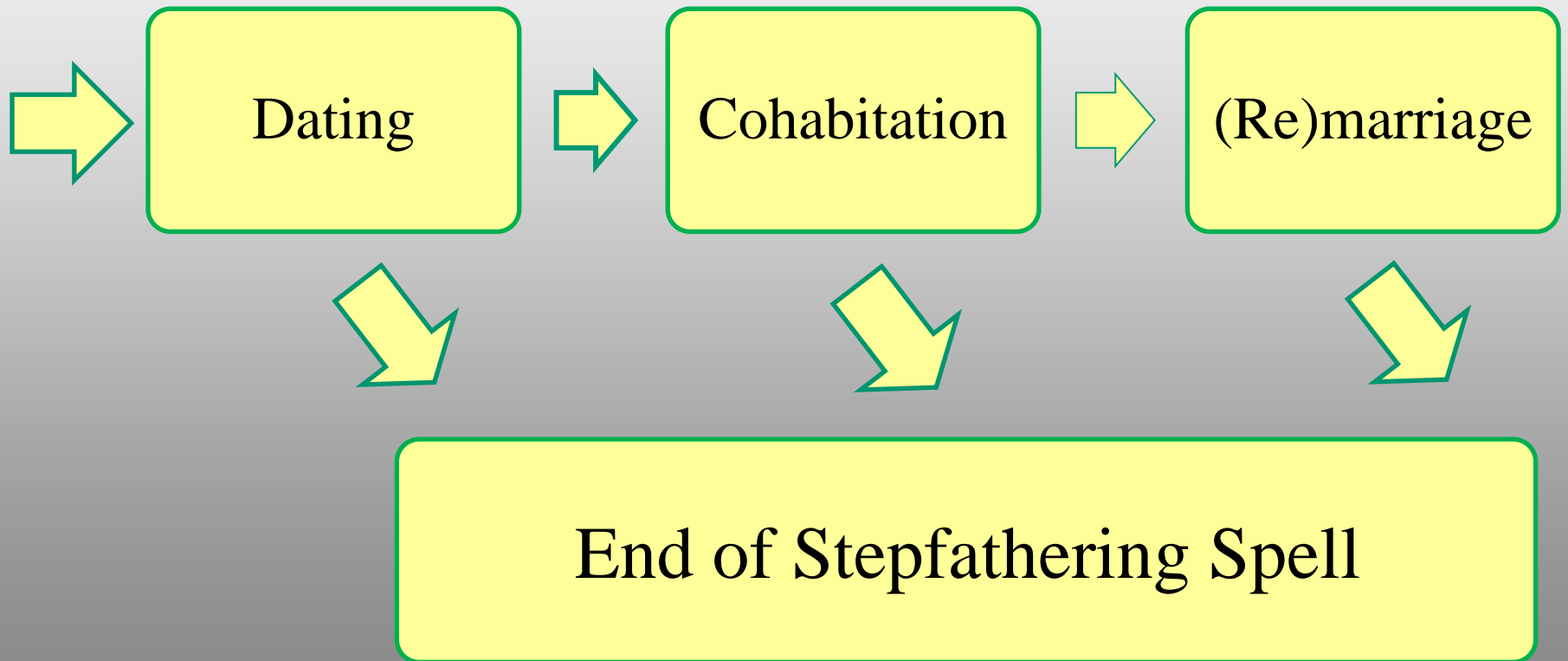


Figure 16.1 Various Pathways to Stepfamily Living. The various possible pathways to stepfamily living begin with a marital or cohabiting union or with nonunion birth or adoption. A union birth/adoption may be followed by divorce, then remarriage, resulting in life in a married or remarried stepfamily (Path 1). A union birth or adoption may also be followed by cohabitation after divorce, resulting in a cohabiting stepfamily (Path 2). When a union birth or adoption precedes the death of one partner, the remaining parent may choose to cohabit (Path 3) or to remarry (Path 4). Following a nonunion birth or adoption, the parent may cohabit (Path 5) or marry (Path 6). In some cases, the partners in a cohabiting stepfamily may marry, resulting in a remarried stepfamily (Path 7). These various paths result in married, remarried, or cohabiting stepfamilies that further differ according to the gender of the biological/adoptive parent and also according to the existence of a living ex-spouse or former cohabiting partner (nonresident parent).

Source: Adapted from Tillman 2007, Figure 1, 383-424.

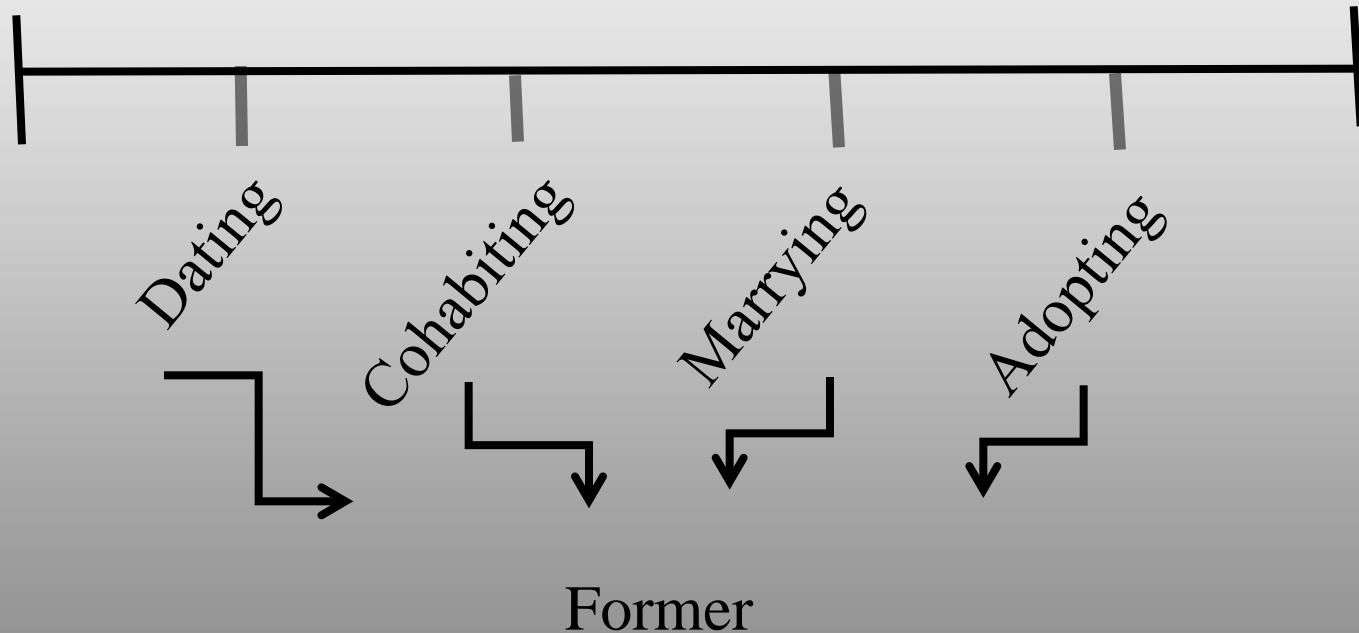
Pathways out of Stepfatherhood



“From the perspective of a birth mother or stepfather, life together as a stepfamily seldom begins on a given day; it evolves from the bits and pieces of experience woven into the fabric of their dating relationship.”

From *Stepdads*, by William Marsiglio (2004, p. 33)

Continuum of Stepfathering



Dating Stepfathering

“We played with him for a day at the park and it was a blast! It was fun...It was just a lot of fun going to the park with Shaun and everything. It was neat...I was like—oh my goodness, this thing is—he’s awesome...I was still kind of uneasy because I wasn’t around kids a lot...but it was a really fun day for both of us...”

--Jesse, speaking about his girlfriend’s seven month old child

From *Stepdads*, by William Marsiglio (2004, p. 41)

Cohabiting Stepfathering

“I think it was awkward. I mean, the house was roomy, but I just was not used to living with one woman, let alone two...I spent a lot of time in the back room, my office...I was there often. Then little by little [he began to spend more time in the main living area].

--Gerald, on living with his future wife and her daughter

From *Stepdads*, by William Marsiglio (2004, p. 67)

Married Stepfathering

“I know, biologically they are not mine. But I feel, I love those two kids just like I love my biological daughter. And I would do anything for them...I am the father figure in their life.”

--Robbie, speaking of his two stepchildren

“I don't think I can love Jamie any more if I really was his father, than I do right now. And maybe in some ways, maybe even more because ours is simply based on trust.”

--Carl, age 30, speaking of his stepdaughter

From *Stepdads*, by William Marsiglio (2004, p. 152-153)

Stepfathers Adopting Stepchildren

“I told her, I’ll marry you, but that’s my son legally. No step involved, nothing like that. That’s my son. So, that’s when she went back to him [the biological father] and said she don’t want no alimony, child support, nothing. He signed the papers; he said no problem. So when the papers came back, they just simply read my name, they didn’t say stepfather or nothing else.”

--Doug, adopted stepson (age three)

From *Stepdads*, by William Marsiglio (2004, p. 152-153)

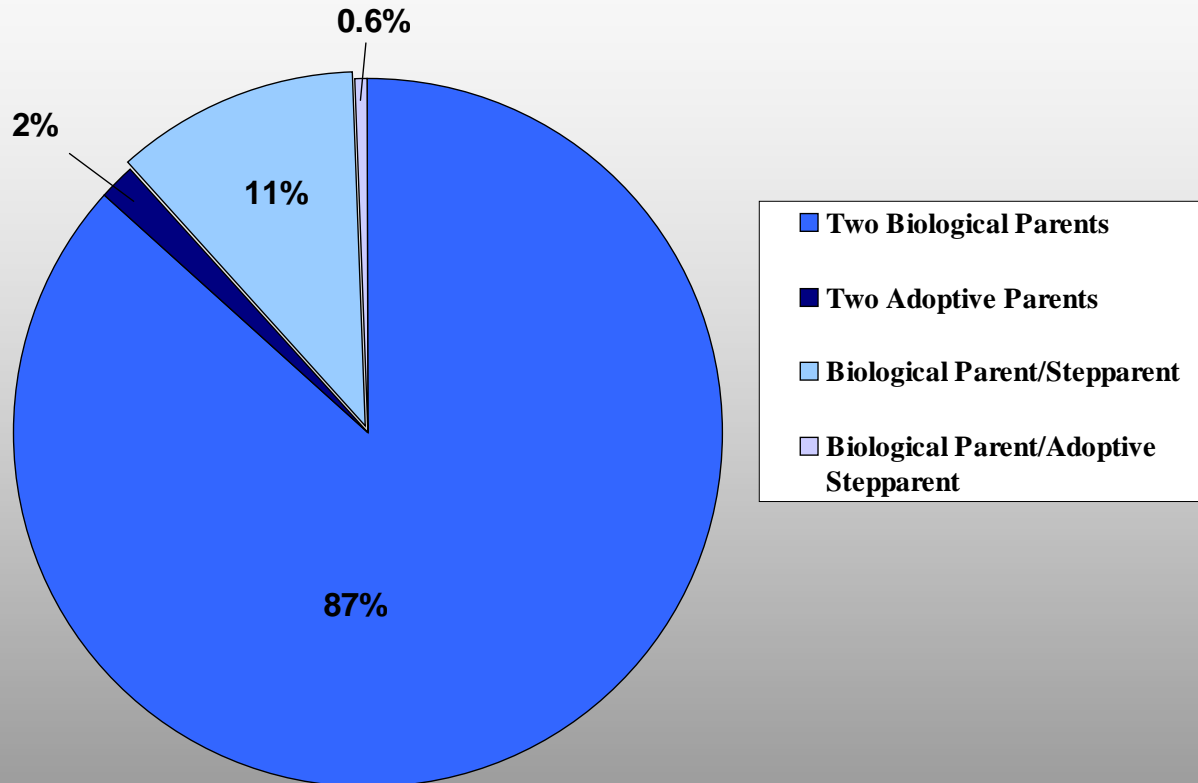
Stepfathers Adopting Stepchildren

“I don’t know why, but I did notice a change when the adoption went through. But just a genuine affection I felt for him really for the first time, it seemed like. Not for the first time, not affection—but just a real natural love feeling for him, like he was mine, my own...”

--Kevin, adopted stepson (age seven)

From *Stepdads*, by William Marsiglio (2004, p. 155-156)

Figure 2. Children in Married, Two-Parent Households



Source: 2002 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF). From Stewart, S.D (2010). Stepchildren who are adopted by their stepparents: prevalence, characteristics, and well-being. *Family Relations*, 59, 558-571

Prevalence of Stepchild Adoption

- 5% of all stepchildren have been adopted by a stepparent
- 25% of all adopted children have been adopted by a stepparent
- Over 75% of stepparents who adopt stepchildren are men

Source: 2002 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF)

Table 4.1 Reasons for Stepparent Adoption

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>
Name change	22
Family unity and stability	17
Adoptee's good relationship with stepparent	15
Transfer legal rights to stepparent	13
Sever from or denial of other parent	13
Request of adoptee ^a	10
Deterioration of relationship with noncustodial birth parent or fragmentation over visitation	10
Protection from birth parent	6
Coming of new baby	5
Present infertility	3
Medical or financial benefits	4
Availability of funds ^b	2
Legalization of birth father's rights ^c	2

Source: Wolf and Mast (1987). Counseling issues in adoptions by stepparents. *Social Work*, 32, 69-74.

State of the Research on Stepfathers

- (1) Field is somewhat stagnated (esp. remarriage)
- (2) Even less data available than before
- (3) Research that includes nontraditional stepfathers is not from men's perspectives

State of the Research on Stepfathers

- (4) Research casts stepfathers in negative light
- (5) Lots of room for new ideas and innovation: (a) demography, and (b) social psychology
- (6) Longitudinal data addresses selectivity and provides opportunity

Research Gaps

- More research from stepfathers' perspective
- Focus on positive qualities and contributions of stepfathers to children and society
- Assess whether stepfather involvement increasing as is the case with father involvement more generally?
- Examine trajectory of stepfathers vis-à-vis family life
- Determine nature and duration of stepfathering spells

More Research Gaps

- Effects of *within-family* stepfather status changes (marriage, divorce, etc.) and other lifecourse events (e.g., birth of new children) on stepfather-stepchild relationships
- Assess change in stepfather-stepchild relationships over time
- More research on diversity: race/ethnicity, sexual identity, residence, age
- More qualitative research

Policy Recommendations

- Establish legal rights and responsibilities between stepfathers and stepchildren
- Give stepfathering greater weight in relation to other aspects of men's lives
- Recognize that stepfathers are the lynchpin responsible for managing two women and two sets of children
- Support men's interest in fathering their partners' children

**International Association for Relationship
Research (IARR) Annual Conference
July 12-16, Chicago, IL**

Interest Group on *Interdisciplinary Research on Post-Divorce
and Stepfamily Relationships*

Chairs: Dawn Braithwaite (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) , Marilyn Coleman, and
Lawrence Ganong (University of Missouri)

Participants: Francesca Adler-Baeder (Auburn University), Brian Higginbotham
(Utah State University), Amy Janan Johnson (University of Oklahoma), Mindy
Stafford Markham (Kansas State University), Sandra Metts (Illinois State
University), David Schramm (University of Missouri), Andrea Lambert South
(Northern Kentucky University), Susan Stewart (Iowa State University), Jessica
Troilo (West Virginia University), Shannon Weaver (University of Connecticut)

