

Marilyn Ihinger-Tallman  
and  
Kay Pasley

# REMARRIAGE

FAMILY STUDIES  
TEXT SERIES

7

# **REMARRIAGE**

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Marilyn Ihinger-Tallman  
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Kay Pasley

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**SAGE PUBLICATIONS**

*The Publishers of Professional Social Science*

Newbury Park London New Delhi

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*For information address:*



SAGE Publications, Inc.  
2111 West Hillcrest Drive  
Newbury Park, California 91320

SAGE Publications Ltd.  
28 Banner Street  
London EC1Y 8QE  
England

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.  
M-32 Market  
Greater Kailash I  
New Delhi 110 048 India

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Ihinger-Tallman, Marilyn.  
Remarriage.

(Family studies text series ; 7)  
Includes bibliographies and indexes.

1. Remarriage. 2. Stepfamilies. I. Pasley, Kay.

II. Title. III. Series: Family studies text series ;  
v. 7.

HQ1018.I36 1987 306.8'4 87-4713

ISBN 0-8039-2628-6

ISBN 0-8039-2629-4 (pbk.)

SECOND PRINTING, 1989

To RRW    *Because we see the same beauty  
              in the world.*  
              KP

*For Irv and Robert  
              Lance  
              Shannon  
              Phillip and  
              Erika*

*Because your love, encouragement,  
              and just being help me to  
              reach further than I can grasp.*  
                                  MIT



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# **Preface**

THE SLIM VOLUME you hold in your hands is intended to convey as much information as is available about remarriage and stepparenting. Gathering that information was not as difficult as it would have been had we elected to focus on another family topic. This is because remarriage and stepparenting have only recently captured the interest of family scholars; the field is relatively new.

When the divorce rate began to climb in the mid-1960s it was—and still is—accompanied by a high remarriage rate. For remarried adults who have no children, the marriage experience is probably not too different from that of first-married couples. However, the majority of remarrying couples do bring at least one child from a previous union to their new marriage. These couples face a unique challenge, one that involves creating a “family” with a new and distinct identity from the one or ones they lived in before. Both adults and children in a step-family bring with them memories, expectations, and behaviors that were developed in another family “culture.” These may slow the development of a new family identity. Also, the children may not feel positive about being a part of a new family, and may wish very much to have the old one back.

For the majority of remarried families the difficulties associated with establishing a new and stable family unit are not surmountable. This is evident in a redivorce rate of about 60%—a figure slightly higher than the 50% divorce rate for first-married couples (Glick, 1984). The pages that follow spell out in some detail the many ways that remarriage is different from first marriage. Although we focus on some of the problems of remarriage, we also attempt to call attention to the processes of adjustment and the strengths of remarriage and step-family life.

The book is organized in the following way. A short introductory chapter calls attention to the key features that make second (or subsequent) marriages distinct from first marriages. In Chapter 2 we present a historical account of how remarriage in our time differs from earlier eras. This chapter also reports the different rates of remarriage for males and females, blacks and whites, and for people with different levels of education and income. Chapter 3 identifies several important family processes associated with marriage and shows why these processes are more complicated in remarriage. Several “types” of remarriages have been identified and they are described and analyzed in this chapter. The effects of cohabitation on remarriage are examined in Chapter 4. This chapter also compares marital satisfaction between first-married and

remarried couples and discusses the difficulties couples face when they merge two households. Chapter 5 describes the problems and satisfactions that remarried couples experience when one or both partners bring children into the new marriage. Here, too, we explore how remarriage and stepfamily life affects children's development. In Chapter 6 we consider the problematic nature of the stepparent-stepchild relationship and sibling and stepsibling relationships. We also report on how involvement with friends and extended kin influences stepfamily life. Chapter 7 reviews the advice offered to remarrieds. We discuss some approaches to enhancing stepfamily development and examine public policy issues. The final chapter could be viewed as an Appendix. It focuses on research and emphasizes why we must be cautious about interpreting the findings from the early studies on remarriage and stepparenting. This chapter calls attention to the special methodological problems facing scholars who study this topic.

We have included several discussion questions at the end of every chapter, as well as suggestions for further reading. The questions are intended to get the reader thinking about and beyond the specific content offered in the book. The related readings can help readers pursue their interest in the topics covered in the chapter. These readings consist of both scholarly and popular writings on remarriage and stepfamilies.

Like many social scientists, our interest in this particular subject was sparked from our experiences with stepfamilies and our interest in the changing nature of the American family. This book is not a how-to-make-a-remarriage-work volume. Rather, we have tried to produce a text that reviews and reports as objectively (and as interestingly) as possible what the available research and theory have to say about remarriage and stepfamilies.



# **Acknowledgments**

AS WE CONCLUDED our writing task, our indebtedness to many others became increasingly obvious. First, we are grateful to the several anonymous reviewers and to Rich Gelles and Alexa Albert, the two coeditors of this miniseries, for their helpful evaluations. These folks did not hesitate to call our attention to first-draft problems, but softened their critiques with enough positive feedback to keep us writing. Because our reviewers were all professors (we think) and beyond the age of our younger readers, we are especially grateful to Rob, Peg, Shannon, and Erika who reacted honestly to their mom's request for feedback ("that's boring"; "give us Dear Abby's answers"; "Workman's compensation is a sexist term"; "What's the point of this section?"). We are thankful, also, to John Crosby and Jerry Bigner for their comments on an early version. And finally, thanks to Irv for his forever willingness to read another draft. The credit for much of the technical and tedious work of editing disks, typing the bibliography, and printing and xeroxing numerous copies at a moment's notice that was necessary to get this volume "out the door" on time goes to Dorothy Casavant, with help from Ruth Self and Anne Lewandowski. We are indeed appreciative for their unflagging goodwill and eagerness to help, and their extreme competence in doing so. We want to thank the very special men and women in Spokane County who participated in our study on remarriage. Their cooperation and willingness to help provided many insights into remarriage and stepparenting. We want to acknowledge the many colleagues with whom professional dialogues and intellectual exchanges about remarriage and stepfamilies have kept us stimulated and hopeful that these topics will get the research attention they deserve. We especially want to recognize the members of the S.R.C.D. study group on remarriage and stepfamilies: Connie Ahrons, Glenn Clingempeel, Marilyn Coleman, Frank Furstenberg, Jr., Larry Ganong, E. Mavis Hetherington, and Doris Jacobson. Jean Giles-Sims, Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, and Emily and John Visser are also valued colleagues in our mutual endeavors.

**CHAPTER**

**1**

**How Are  
Remarriages  
Different?**

Dear Abby: Please settle a giant family dispute. Is your mother's or father's new spouse your stepfather or stepmother only if you are living with them? You are the only one who can settle this, so please put your answer in the paper as soon as possible. (C. J. in Newport Beach)

Dear Abby: I have a question I hope you can answer. My dad was married three times.

With wife No. 1, he had a son.

With wife No. 2, he had two daughters.

With wife No. 3, he had me.

What relation are his son and daughters to me—stepbrother and step-sisters? Or half-brother and half-sister? Would wife No. 2 and wife No. 3 be his son's stepmothers? Would wives No. 1 and 2 be any relation to me? (All Screwed Up in Ohio)

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MANY OF YOU will read this book simply because it is required as part of a course. Others may fulfill an assignment, and also be eager to find out about a type of family that is part of your own personal experience. You're likely not as ignorant as C. J. in Newport Beach or All Screwed Up in Ohio,<sup>1</sup> but you may have wondered why your friend hated her stepparent so much that she ran away from home, or what it is like to spend all summer in another state, living with a parent you only see once a year. Or maybe you wonder if you and your stepmother will ever get along. This book will not be able to answer these specific questions because they pertain to you, a particular individual. However, it will shed some light on what is happening in some remarriages and step-families across the country, as reported by researchers and clinicians who study and work with these families.

One of the conclusions stemming from this body of literature is that there is some confusion about step-kin terminology and relationships. This is illustrated by the appeals to Dear Abby to help people define their steprelationships. However, there are other sources of confusion associated with remarriage besides knowing the right terminology or correct relationship to a parent's former spouse. The issue of what to call these new relatives is a problem for some. Is a new stepfather “dad” simply because your mother decided to remarry? Many people wonder how to behave toward strangers who suddenly become family. There are few rules that define how to interact with a new stepparent,