

A Qualitative Analysis of New Norms on Transition Days in Blended Families

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Abstract

The current qualitative research study enhances the understanding of new norms on transition days for researchers and clinicians who focus on marriage and family issues among stepfamilies or blended families. Thirteen family members (biological parents, stepparents) who were in various stages of stepfamily formation were assessed. The current study explicated a main theme: New Norms. After further analysis, two subthemes emerged that families must navigate on transition day: Cohesive New Family and New Children. The researchers also describe the positives and negatives of new norms. By gaining a more in-depth understanding of the challenges blended families face during transition days, immediate assistance may be provided to families. The results of the study are applicable to any individual, clinician, or researcher who desires a deeper understanding of stepfamily narratives.

Keywords

Stepfamily, Blended Family, Qualitative Research, Transition Day, Transition Daze

1. Introduction

A half century ago, marriages were likely to end with the death of a spouse; however, in more contemporary times, marriage is more likely to end due to divorce (Sweeney, 2010). Stepfamilies are the new norm. Rising divorce rates create the unique opportunity to remarry and form blended families, or stepfamilies. In fact, it is quite normal in our society to see individuals who are marrying today, may marry a partner who has children from a previous marriage, this family then becomes a blended family. In these newly constituted families, there may be a stepparent, half-sibling, and stepsibling. It is not unusual for a family to have each one of these. If any of this is surprising, you are not alone.

According to the US Census, in 2009, the census data reported that 16 percent of children live in a blended family. It is possible that this number is higher because there are approximately 1300 new stepfamilies forming every day. There are numerous challenges to children growing up in a blended family, and certainly challenges in raising a blended family, and many of the challenges come in the form of establishing new norms within the newly constituted family. The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of adjustments stepfamilies face during transition days. For this study, thirteen parents who were in a reconstituted or blended family were interviewed. Their experiences were obtained through an interview process and their narratives recorded. The terms blended family, stepfamily or reconstituted family may be used interchangeably. This research hypothesizes there are new norms family members of newly reconstituted families that must adjust to on transition days.

2. Literature Review

According to [Ganong et al. \(2019\)](#) attempting to create a positive stepparent-stepchild relationship is a significant task toward family development. The researchers examined the perceptions of stepfathers and biological mothers' infinity seeking. It was hypothesized that the perceptions of these two individuals were different than all other perceptions noted in families studied. In particular, the researchers had four hypotheses in this study: "1) The frequency of stepfathers' infinity-seeking behaviors with their stepchildren will be negatively related to stepfathers' and mothers' perceived conflicts between stepfathers and stepchildren; 2) The frequency of stepfathers' affinity-seeking behaviors with their stepchildren will be positively related to the marital quality of stepfathers and mothers.; 3) The frequency of stepfathers' affinity-seeking behaviors with their stepchildren will be positively related to the marital confidence of stepfathers and mothers.; 4) The frequency of stepfathers' affinity-seeking behaviors with their stepchildren will be positively related to stepfathers' and mother's perception of stepfamily cohesion" (p. 523). The researchers found that, "stepfathers' perceptions of affinity-seeking with the focal child significantly predicted both stepfathers' and mothers' perceptions of stepfather-stepchild conflict, marital quality, marital confidence, and stepfamily cohesion. Mothers' perceptions of stepfathers' affinity-seeking were significantly related to her marital confidence and her perceptions of stepfamily cohesion, and approached statistical significance for mothers' perceptions of marital quality and stepfathers' perceptions of stepfamily cohesion. Comparatively, stepfathers' perceptions of their own affinity-seeking explained far more variance in stepfathers' and mothers' outcomes than did mothers' perceptions of stepfather affinity-seeking" (p. 527). This study is important to the current research in that it argued stepparents are often unsure how best to establish new norms in their families, and doing so may evoke deep emotions from both parents' as there are pre-existing relationships in play upon entering the reconstituted familial relationship. [Bernard \(1956\)](#) argued that

remarriage is similar to a first marriage except that family members must be incorporated. Bernard also argued that the word step, preceding any word like mother, father, or sibling was akin to a smear word. Similarly, [Tai \(2005\)](#) found that second wives in Hong Kong are referred to as, “worn shoes” (p. 193). To further examine reconstituted familial relationships and conflict that may arise in pre-existing relationships, [Hanson, McLanahan & Thompson \(1996\)](#) examined the role of conflict between parents and children in stepfather households. The conflict examined was conflict between parents who reside in the same household (intra-household conflict) and conflict between biological parents who reside in separate households (inter-household conflict). Children who reside in stepfather households are typically at risk for being exposed to both types of conflict and this may lead them to feel more sensitive toward parental conflict than other children. Researchers found that overall, children’s lower levels of well-being could not be attributed to experiencing intrafamilial or inter-familial conflict in stepfather households. [Pink & Wampler \(1985\)](#) researched problem areas in stepfamilies. The researchers compared the differences of family functioning between twenty-eight stepfamilies and twenty-eight first marriage families. The researchers sought families who were amid early formation of their family (1 to 7 years) and these families evaluated for: family functioning quality, relationship quality with the male parent in the family and the adolescent, and the ideal type of family functioning, along with the ideal role of the male parent in the home that was desired by other family members. The researchers found stepfamilies needed the most assistance around the areas of cohesion, feelings of togetherness, adaptability, and problem solving. [Visher & Visher \(1979\)](#) found there were differences between a nuclear family and a stepfamily. [Ulbricht et al. \(2013\)](#) found that when high marital conflict exists, biological mothers seem to be more responsive to the biological child’s influenced characteristics that are genetic. However, marital conflict as an environmental factor may affect fathers’ and adolescents’ negativity, simultaneously.

In an effort to understand how adolescents fair in stepfamilies, [Hawkins, Amato & King \(2007\)](#) examined whether active fathering by non-resident fathers was a cause or a consequence of adolescent well-being. On the basis of an assumption that non-resident father involvement improves adolescent adjustment, the researchers found that levels of adolescent well-being cause non-resident father involvement or lack of involvement rather than an adolescent’s well-being resulting from non-resident father involvement or lack thereof. [Meggiolaro & Ongaro \(2014\)](#) examined family contexts and adolescent’s emotional status. The researchers focused on stepfamilies and regarded them as an institution that was incomplete and argued that step-parents face ambiguous parental roles and norms which resulted in less effective parenting. Less effective parenting can lead to a negative influence on the emotional status of the children in the family. [Nicholson, Fergusson, & Horwood \(1999\)](#) examined the effects of living in a stepfamily during childhood and adolescence and what psychosocial

outcomes existed at the age of 18 for 907 children. Data was collected during an 18-year longitudinal study. The study focused on: exposure to living in a stepfamily during the period from age 6 to 16 years; measures of psychosocial outcomes including mental health, antisocial behavior, substance use, restricted life opportunities, and sexual risk-taking at age 18 years. The researchers found that children exposed to living in a stepfamily for the first time between ages 6-16 years had a higher risk of juvenile offending, dependence on nicotine, dependence or abuse of illicit substances, leaving school, sexual activity at an earlier age and lastly, multiple sexual partners. There was a reduction in these risks when the researchers adjusted for factors such as: the socioeconomic characteristics of the family, having a family history of instability, adversity, and conflict; the age of the child's mother, her religious status and whether or not she was a smoker; the gender of the child; and whether or not there were preexisting attentional and conduct problems from the child. Ultimately though, researchers found that issues present before the stepfamily was formed are what increased the risks, not the stepfamily formation itself.

In an effort to further examine role ambiguity and what parenting styles or affective or not, [Whiting, Smith, Barnett, et al. \(2007\)](#) found that upon a custodial father's remarriage, a stepmother may be viewed in her new role as a threat to previously established family roles. Exacerbating the problem may be the stepmother's clarity of her role in her newly reconstituted family. When there is uncertainty around expectations for each partners' role in the newly reconstituted family, this creates boundary ambiguity among the step-relationships. When there are not clear guidelines for each family member, the behaviors of the members may lead to relationship fragility ([van der Pas, Tilburg, & Silverstein, 2013](#)). The lack of established roles in stepfamilies increases uncertainty among its members and this uncertainty can serve to destabilize these marriages ([Teachman, 2008](#)).

[Wyverkens, van Parys, & Buysse \(2015\)](#) examined dialectical tension related to the societal perspectives about families. The researchers' study focused on donor-conceived children; but, the echoes of parents in this study is quite similar to that of stepparents and the researchers desired to understand more the parental experience of when non-genetic parents were challenged in their notions of a biological related, "normal" family. Many stepfamilies desire to be recognized as a "normal family" yet, the challenges to these ideals may impact the comfort of a couple, and may serve to undermine the confidence of a stepparent, just as it would any other non-generic parent in a non-traditional family. When stepparents find difficulty getting along with, or behavioral issues with their stepchildren, they may blame such problems on the genetic (biological) component and attach the negative behavior to a stepchild's biological parent (their current partner's ex). On the other hand, a stepchild who behaves in ways the newly reconstituted family deems appropriate, genetics may play more of a positive role in the newly reconstituted family, with such behavior being attached to the "good" genetics of their stepchild biological partner (the stepparent's current partner).

Sager, Brown, Crohn, Engel, Rodstein, & Walker (1983) found that functioning and the structure of stepfamilies is different from biological families. Sager, et al. also found that the members of these newly reconstituted families and trying to be an integral part of an ongoing group. After divorce family members must establish patterns of interaction with each other that are new. Pyke (1994) found that the process of courting after a divorce has the potential to throw a post-divorce family into more crises. The attempt to build relationships in a new system depends on the interactions with new family members. The best way to build these relationships is to identify what meaning the courtship has for the members within the family system. Establishing new norms certainly means doing essentially the same, by establishing what each person's role is in the newly reconstituted family by identifying what is expected for the biological children, stepchildren, biological parents, stepparents, and all other extended family members. This reduces the ambiguity of the unknown.

Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck & Ducket (1996) studied adolescents spanning 5th-12th grade, and 16,477 random moments in their lives. The time these adolescents spent with their families decreased from 35% to 14% of waking hours indicating possibly they were disengaged. After a decrease in early adolescence, older teens reported that family interactions were more favorable now that they were older. The researchers also found that the decrease in family time was not because of family conflict but because of opportunities and time spent outside of the family.

New norms of non-traditional families included the new norms of adjustment a family must react to. This research had a nationally representative sample of 50,000 households. The researchers focused on demographics such as age, gender, marital status, socio-economic status and other demographics. This study hypothesized when a child's parents separate or divorce the child may have lower levels of psychological well-being than children who live in a family that is traditional. The researchers found that children living in stepfamilies did not have poorer emotional functioning; but, children who had parents that suffered economic or social loss, did fair worse emotionally. De Jong Gierveld & Merz (2013) found that many children execute boundary work in an effort to guarantee the continuation of their family. Other (step)children employ sabotage or refuse the added parent in an attempt to set their own boundaries around their family. Some children will refuse their parents access to their grandchildren in attempts to guarantee the continuation of their families.

Whiteside (1989) also examined kinship connections in remarried families. The researcher argued kinship systems emerge in newly reconstituted marriages, and these systems can be confusing and very complex. Each family creates roles which are part of a new norm in these families, and each family must decide the roles of their members and what the expectations are of each person within the family. Whiteside examined three levels of remarried family identity: the step-family household: patterned family interactions, the binuclear family: family traditions, and lastly, the remarried family suprasystem: family celebrations. Whi-

teside found there are expanded and contracted kinship networks among step-families. There were two distinctions that emerged in the expanded kinship network, the first were different degrees of inclusion such as inviting various family members who created an expansive circle of family members. This created unity when creating new norms. For families in the contracted kinship network, many individuals had family members or were family members that were cut off or cut out of rituals which then led to negative emotional energy. When children are faced with the loss of some kin because of being cut off, their new norm is difficult to adjust to, and accept; which may then lead to overall difficulty for family members adjusting to their new norms. From the perspective of communications as a discipline, Galvin & Braithwaite (2014) researched the central role of communication by which post-divorce and stepfamilies interact and negotiate original and new identities. Through the process of negotiation, how relationships are defined, and the expectations attached to these new identities further define in stepfamilies what it means to be a family. Stepfamily members are reliant on interactions to define their family along with legitimatizing the family from the inside, but also a family's social network.

Capaldi & Patterson (1991) found that boys who had experienced multiple transitions in their families showed the poorest adjustment. Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims (1994) found that step-parenting styles affected adjustment for children. Using parentings styles such as: authoritarian, authoritative, supportive and disengaged, Crosbie-Burnett and Giles-Sims found that having a disengaged parenting style resulted in the lowest levels of adjustment, and the supportive parenting style resulted in the highest levels of adjustment in 8 families that were studied.

Jensen, Shafer, & Holmes (2017) found that transitions within stepfamily formation can be a source of stress for parents and children. Their study focused on the influence of parent-child closeness and stepchild stress. They found that stepchildren who felt close to their biological parent and stepparent with who they reside, have a significant decrease in stress. They argued this could be the case because stepparent-child relationships are a central component when forming stepfamily cohesion. One could then argue that taking on new norms and adjusting well to new norms may be dependent upon how close the members of a stepfamily feel.

It is important to note new norms are further pushed into difficult terrain due to potentially powerful third parties who may be motivated to sabotage or even dissolve the new couple bond that has formed (DeGreeff & Platt, 2016). When third parties seek to sabotage the very family unit that is trying to stabilize this created an uncertain atmosphere in the family structure of the newly reconstituted family. In this case, jealousy often emerged. The authors argued that as an example, children may resent the new parental figure in their lives. With so many potential shifting alliances in a stepfamily, there can be a potential for the new norms established to be reduced in their activity or even halted completely. This is due in part to jealousy in the stepfamily which had the potential to create

emotional fallout, which then resulted in paranoid thoughts for some of the family members. Fear, anger and other feelings are not conducive for creating cohesion among family members, and these emotions, when experienced can lead to difficulty creating new norms.

In summary, stepfathers affinity seeking played a significant role in their perceptions (Ganong et al., 2019); Pink & Wampler found stepfamilies needed the most assistance around specific areas such as: cohesion, feelings of togetherness, adaptability, and problem solving; it was found that children who had suffered economic or social loss fared worse emotionally Meggoliaro, Ongaro & White-side) found inviting various family members to family functions led to inclusivity which then led to cohesion and positive adjustment to new norms. On the other hand, children who had family members that were cut off from family rituals fared more negatively which led to negative emotional energy which then lessened cohesion; Jensen, et al. found that transitions within stepfamily formation can be stressful for parents and children; and lastly, Degreef & Platt found that third parties may attempt to sabotage newly reconstituted families which then may lead to resentment of the new parental figure.

3. Data

3.1. Methods

The data analyzed for this study was drawn from 13 qualitative interviews. Qualitative research methods were employed to explore the new norms during transition days among newly constituted families. Participants in this study were recruited by searching therapists in Los Angeles County, California, through the use of the public website Psychology Today. Therapists contacted then chose whether or not to pass along the information. The requirements to participate in the current study were twofold. First, the interviewee had to be a parent in a blended family or stepfamily, and secondly, the interviewee had to be willing to enter into a discussion about their experiences on transition days. Participants who met the conditions were then invited to participate in the current study and a time/date was scheduled at their convenience at the Pasadena, California at Fraser Associates Psychotherapy Office.

3.2. Participants

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured and private interview process to protect the rights of interviewees. The time with the interviewee ensured their story could be told without interruption and also ensured sensitivity towards their emotional state. Interviewees answered demographic questions prior to the interview and signed participation and informed consent forms. Transcripts of the interviews were maintained on a protected computer.

Narratives of the interviews were analyzed for information regarding new norms on transition days in stepfamilies. For many researchers who focus on familial processes, grounded theory is an approach that has been successful in

providing a greater understanding of families. For the current study, the use of grounded theory, specifically narrative inquiry, allowed for the emergence of themes which were analyzed and then applied to narratives. When used tactfully, narrative inquiry allows for the for the interviewees subjective experiences to be recanted in a meaningful way. While, analysis of the narratives required a reduction of the data, the narratives were carefully analyzed for information on transitional days in stepfamilies. The data was analyzed to identify factors relevant to the current research study, and common themes were identified across the interviews.

3.3. Research Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Participant identifiers were assigned to each individual and identifying information was removed. Transcripts were read, coded, reread, and recoded as necessary. Two themes emerged from the data. **Table 1** summarizes selected demographic characteristics of each of the 13 participants. Descriptions included the participant's age, relationship status, children in the household (biological/step) and custodial arrangement.

3.4. Findings

Most participants stories as a whole overlapped between the two themes, cohesive new family and new children as reflected in **Table 2**, the frequency with which the themes appeared across interviews.

Table 1. Selected participant demographic information (13 single individuals participated in this study).

Participant	Age	Relationship Status	Children Type	Custody
P1	30 - 39	Cohabiting	Both	45/55
P2	50 - 59	Cohabiting	Biological	50/50
P3	30 - 39	Married	Step	70/30
P4	30 - 39	Cohabiting	Step	80/20
P5	40 - 49	Married	Both	70/30
P6	50 - 59	Married	Both	50/50
P7	30 - 39	Married	Both	50/50
P8	50 - 59	Married	Both	95/5
P9	30 - 39	Married	Step	50/50
P10	40 - 49	Married	Both	50/50
P11	60 - 69	Married	Both	20/80
P12	50 - 59	Married	Both	80/20
P13	40 - 49	Married	Both	50/50

Table 2. Frequency of themes for research questions.

Theme and Subthemes	N Mentioning	Exemplar Quotes
New norms		
Cohesive new family	7	16
New children	3	6

Interviewees referenced cohesiveness of the new family unit. It was mentioned sixteen times in seven interviews. Participant 13 shared, “I’m the one female in a house full of boys. And it was—I never felt more loved. I never had more kisses and hugs. It was really, really nice.” Participant 13 opined, “You should actually take time out to do things together that will bring your unit together.” Participant 12 described her relationship with her stepchild by sharing:

“Yes, it wasn’t she’s coming here to see dad and that is it. It was she is coming here to see the both of us and we both took part in the activities, the trips, the vacations, the, whatever it might be. But when she was over, we would sit and do girly things too when her dad was not around.”

Participant 3 shared of the relationship between her spouse and biological children, saying, “They’re so happy to see him. And firstly, you know, cause he plays with them. And the first thing he wants to do is play with them and stuff.”

The second subtheme was new children. Interviewees referenced the dynamics of blending children from different parents in a household. It was mentioned six times in three interviews. Participant 11 said,

“I think our daughter started having problems because she was the only child where she came from ... but, at her home with us, she was one of two, three and then four. And that seemed like it was progressively more an issue for her cause she’d get there and she’d start having nervous stomach trouble ... and visitation was difficult for a while.”

Participant 12 shared, “Apparently, at some point told us also that she did not like coming to our house when the other kids were there because the attention was not on her.”

4. Conclusion

Cohesive New Family. Many participants in this study described positive experiences with the blending of their families. Interviewees described the cohesiveness of the new family unit. It was referenced sixteen times in seven interviews. One interviewee felt overwhelmed by the love she experienced because she was the only female in a house full of males. She explained how she felt incredibly loved, which was really nice. Other interviewees described the processes involved in bringing the family unit together. Another interviewee described bonding with her stepdaughter by doing girly things with the child when her husband

was not around.

While blending families can be difficult, in the current study, parents identified multiple positive factors that contributed to their involvement in the new system. Parents identified these circumstances in the most optimistic terms and seemed to believe that this was a bonus experience involving themselves with the new family. Primary among these was that the stepparent not only received unconditional positive affection when blending themselves into the family that already had two children but, also when they created a new family structure. In this situation the affection and love between the biological children and the parents were reported to have increased dramatically. Not only did the stepparent receive an unconditional sense of love and connection with the non-biological children, but the new biological child solidified the parent as a family member. This cohesion is not as often communicated in light of the difficult and sometimes exhausting changes that must be made when transitioning to a new family, but its importance cannot be underestimated. When stepfamilies stay together, it is because the cohesion and stability of the family are equal to or greater than the cohesion and stability of the previous family. Therefore, what is remarkable about this is that the benefits outweighed the challenges of reconstituting the family. The ability to create cohesiveness, stability and emotionally beneficial circumstances within a new family must reflect on the parent's ability to create a marital dyad that is as equally profound. Thus, the relationship between parents in the current dyad is the primary factor by which this new cohesion relies upon.

New Children. The second subtheme of the theme new norms was new children. Interviewees described the dynamics of blending children from different parents in a household. It was mentioned six times in three interviews. Interviewees described the tough times involved in visits with their biological children. In one home, for example, there was only one child. However, in the biological parent's home that child was one of four. When she arrived, she had a nervous stomach and this created difficulties during a visitation. Another interviewee described a conversation with her child, who stated that she did not like coming to their house because she was not the only child and the attention was not on her.

The second subtheme of the new norms is the circumstances by which an only child adapts to a blended family that includes other children. Several interviewees mentioned the role conflict between an only child in the non-custodial home who becomes one of several children in a newly reconstituted home. As was mentioned previously, children have divided loyalties when parents split. This child can become the target of or an emotional resource to one of those parents. Parents who do not understand the threat of this dynamic seek to enmesh with the only children. This may occur partly as a means to assuage the guilt of the break up, but it also may occur as an effort to do what is in the best interests of the child. The new family member may be seen as incomplete or may be blamed for the break up, and therefore the enmeshed relationship acts as a buffer from the emotional dissonance that the breakup created. From a child's

perspective, particularly within younger children, the perception of having to choose between parents is a “Sophie’s choice.” When the only child is with one parent that child becomes emotionally dependent and must conform to that parent’s narcissistic needs. They do this to receive positive affection which they deem as love. This kind of exclusive, dependent and enmeshed love becomes the new standard for how the child perceives a loving relationship. When the only child breaks from this enmeshed dyad and rejoins a family system, the exclusivity, dependence, and enmeshment of a relationship becomes challenged. The child’s perception of the new family system is at best confusing and at worst rejecting.

The parent of an only child not only has a responsibility to integrate the child into the new family unit, but also must maintain the new roles and rules that have been created within the newly constituted family. This can lead to role conflict as the child seeks to create an exclusive relationship with the parent while the parent cannot adequately engage with the only child. The only positive outcome of this newly constituted system is that each child may find his/her own specific relationship with one or more parents in the new system. However, this must occur while simultaneously processing many different alliances and relationships. This may be in conflict with the kind of exclusive love they felt in the prior household. Parents in these situations may feel conflicted because they too had an exclusive relationship with the child and now feel distracted and confused about the task of integration in the new family system. As a child compares households the parent may carry the emotional frustration of the child. In the interviews of this study, parents expressed frustration when children made comments about not wanting to visit their home when they had to share their parent with other siblings. The amount of dissonance that results from a normal, circumstantial development may not only alienate the child and parent but may also create distance between parent and stepparent. Further, in dysfunctional family systems, non-custodial parents may exaggerate these issues and use the child as a means to create problems within the reconstituted family as it attempts to become cohesive and stable. This provides considerable power to dysfunctional individuals and it may act as a means for such individuals to project their own frustrations about their previous relationships onto the newly reconstituted family.

The new norms of a step or blended family can have both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the cohesion that is experienced by some families creates a new, exciting, and empathic experience for these families. This is exemplified by the relationship that is emotionally engaging between a stepparent and children. On the other hand, new norms can be seen as frustrating and confusing. Children who do not have the support of the non-custodial parent may have a hard time integrating into the new blended family because of two important yet distinct issues. The first issue is the normal change that is created when having to add new family members to a family unit without having any

prior history with them. These newly negotiated relationships take time to develop, but they can be beneficial if developed properly. A second issue is more threatening to family unity and occurs when the non-custodial parents 'poisons the well' by not providing the means by which the child has permission to integrate into the new family.

There are limitations to qualitative research. Pindus, Mullis, Lim, Wellwood, Rundell, Aziz, & Mant (2018) argued potential limitations of qualitative research are that it may fail to provide firm answers due to generalizability. In the current study, some contextual detail is present; but, to gain a greater understanding of context, case studies should be the next step to gain in-depth information for the field of marriage and family therapy. Verhaeghe De Maeseneer, Maes, Van Heeringen, & Annemans (2015) found that a limitation of qualitative research is the impracticality when using large samples. When large samples are used, the idea is not to generalize to the overall population. In the current study, the researchers had a similar paradox due to the small number of participants. This is a limitation in the sense it cannot be applied to the general population of stepfamilies; but, the idea was to hear and understand the experiences of the participants. And that while this approach is limiting, it is important to remember that the quest for improving education on any topic is the benefit to such a limitation. This limitation then allows for us to consider individual stories and to think about the phenomenon we are faced with. There are limitations when considering one orientation of methodology to another when pursuing issues (Pugach, 2001; Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008; Moore, 2008).

Examining the strengths of qualitative research, Rhodes & De Jager (2014) argued narrative inquiry is a research method that is established and allows for stories to be told which then allows for dialogue to be created around the stories' individuals tell. Personal storytelling when used in research can provide hope and inspiration to audiences of other stepfamilies and clinicians. Narrative inquiry lends itself to go beyond just storytelling, and it does this in several ways. First, the researcher structures the time with an individual to allow for an order of characters to emerge and scenes from one's life (Howie, 2010). A second way narrative inquiry is beneficial to research is that it also allows for a privileged experience in that the researcher develops knowledge of the characters inside story (Dickerson, 2011) and lastly, narrative inquiry develops an opportunity for a researcher to deduce patterns and themes that emerge from the stories being told which can then serve to inform the practice of clinicians and to broaden knowledge around a particular subject (Hsu & McCormack, 2011).

Gockel (2013) argued that narrative storytelling is a way to bring meaning to our lives and is also an essential way organizing passing events in our lives. When we consider bringing meaning to our lives, narrative inquiry then becomes a natural fit for the storytelling experience as a way for researchers to gain greater knowledge on a chosen topic. It allows for deeper layers of an individual's experience to emerge and also makes it difficult for a researcher to manipu-

late the data.

The current study has important limitations that should be noted. The current study explored the narratives of biological parents and stepparents and did not include the experience and perceptions of other important stakeholders in blended families. As such, we draw what values and attitudes others may have without the benefit of hearing directly from the individuals themselves. Future research on transitional days in stepfamilies or blended families would benefit from a larger sample that includes a greater geographic realm. Our sample was limited to individuals who had entered into a blended family or stepfamily and those who were far enough along in the process to have developed a system of checks and balances in their own family system. Still, more work must be done to ensure a greater examination on this important topic for the benefit of individuals embarking on such experience, or those trying to cope with the difficulty of transitions in their blended families. Therapists who work with stepfamilies must incorporate educational opportunities to assist families in creating traditions and celebrations, this would facilitate assistance amid problem-solving opportunities in other areas. This is beneficial because it serves to create trust in the therapeutic relationship, leading individuals toward a greater understanding of the importance of problem solving when applied to numerous areas within the family system. As clinicians and researchers, we are accountable to the findings of our research and also to the voice of the clients we work with enhancing the dialogue between clinicians and clients can only strengthen the commitment toward improving the mental health of members in unique family systems.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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