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Remarriage Preparation: Usage, Perceived Helpfulness, and Dyadic Adjustment

This study provides a contemporary evaluation of 10 different forms of remarriage preparation. Utilizing a subsample of 303 remarried couples from a larger study of newlyweds, we report usage of remarriage preparation and perceived helpfulness as well as differences in dyadic adjustment between respondents who did or did not prepare. Those who participated in some form of preparation generally found it helpful. The majority of those who did not prepare felt it was unnecessary. Differences in dyadic adjustment varied by the form of preparation. Implications for scholars, practitioners, and policy makers include the need for more research-based materials that counter popular stepfamily myths as well as resources that can be made available to the public through mediums that are trusted and commonly accessed.

Remarriage has gained special attention in the past two decades from clinicians, researchers, and educators (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). The attention stems from the prevalence of divorce and repartnering in the United States (see Bramlett & Mosher, 2001; Schoen & Canudas-Romo, 2006) and an interest in how unique issues commonly encountered in remarriages affect relationship quality. In addition to normative marital challenges, most remarried couples are also faced with stepparenting responsibilities, ongoing interactions with ex-partners, and negative cultural stereotypes about their family structure (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 2004). There is also a higher dissolution rate for remarriages than for first marriages (Schoen & Canudas-Romo).

In light of these distinct challenges, clinicians and family life educators have argued that remarriages “require even greater preparation and planning than first marriage[s]” (Lyster, Russell, & Hiebert, 1995, p. 143). It has been noted that problems commonly encountered by remarried couples stem largely from preventable situations, not individual psychopathology (e.g., Visser & Visser, 1996). For years professionals have advocated for educational interventions as a cost-effective mechanism that prepares couples to face difficulties that may lie ahead (e.g., Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham,

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2004; Messinger, 1976; Robertson et al., 2006). Theoretically, preparation—a form of early intervention—not only establishes or reinforces protective factors but, by dealing with risk factors before they become stable, also decreases the chances of later dysfunction (Coie et al., 1993; Stanley, 2001).

Although clinicians and social scientists have recommended preparation for many years, there is a dearth of up-to-date information regarding the usage and effectiveness of remarriage preparation. In 1989, Ganong and Coleman studied if and how 100 men and 105 women prepared for remarriage. The majority of individuals in their sample prepared for remarriage by cohabiting or by reading written materials or both. The various preparation activities were analyzed independently to determine if they individually affected relationship quality. Respondents considered most forms of preparation to be beneficial, even though some of the forms of preparation were statistically associated with increased couple and family problems. The researchers also found that women were more likely than men to participate in the different forms of preparation and more likely to rate them as helpful.

Ganong and Coleman (1989) prefaced their study by acknowledging several unknowns facing the field in the 1980s:

Although educational programs and approaches have been widely recommended by family helping professionals, little is known about how remarried adults with children actually prepare for remarriage. Do people read self-help literature? Do they consult with clinicians or attend remarriage preparation programs? . . . A related area of questions concerns the efficacy of remarriage preparation. . . . Does preparation help? (p. 28)

Nearly 20 years later, these questions have not been revisited. Despite the continued call from clinicians and family life educators for remarriage preparation (Adler-Baeder & Higinbotham, 2004; Visser, Visser, & Pasley, 2003), the increased prevalence and social acceptance of remarriage (Ganong & Coleman, 2004), the availability of government-sponsored remarriage education programs (see www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/funding/), and the plethora of remarriage self-help books on the market, there is no contemporary research on what, if anything, couples do to prepare for remarriage. Our objective in conducting this

study was to provide practitioners and policy makers with usage data for available forms of remarriage preparation and their perceived helpfulness.

We had several goals in conducting the present analysis. First, we patterned our study design after Ganong and Coleman's (1989) approach, to describe usage of various forms of remarriage preparation. In addition to the forms of preparation assessed by Ganong and Coleman (1989) (e.g., counseling and seeking advice from books or friends), we included contemporary preparation forms that were not available or as widely accessible in the 1980s (e.g., websites and educational classes). In addition to identifying what individuals did to prepare for remarriage and how helpful they consider the preparation to be, we also evaluated the reasons why people did not prepare. Respondents who participated in preparation activities were then compared with those who did not on reports of dyadic adjustment during their first and second years of marriage. Finally, we wanted to explore which of all the forms of preparation were predictors of later dyadic adjustment; thus, we incorporated multivariate analyses into this study.

On the basis of the aforementioned goals, we asked the following research questions: (a) Which forms of preparation were utilized by remarrying individuals? (b) Does preparation differ by gender? (c) For those who chose not to prepare, what were their reasons? (d) How helpful were utilized preparation forms rated? (e) Does remarital preparation have an association with later dyadic adjustment?

METHOD

Sample Selection

The data for this study came from a larger study of newlyweds (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2005). Newlywed couples were randomly chosen (every fourth license) from all marriage licenses on file at the state's Department of Vital Records. The selected licenses were issued between January and July of 2002. Couples had been married for 6 months, on average, when the first wave of surveys was mailed (Time 1). Of the 2,823 survey packages sent out, 12 were not completed because the couples declined to participate, 282 were undeliverable, 1,519 were not returned, and 1,010 were completed and returned. The response rate for Time 1 was

40%. Of the 1,010 couples who responded, 303 reported being in a remarriage.

One-and-a-half years after the first survey was administered, a second survey packet (Time 2) was mailed to couples who had completed the first survey. At this point, couples had been married for approximately 2 years. Of those 1,010 couples who completed the survey at Time 1, 436 returned the second survey. The overall response rate for Time 2 was 43%. Of the 436 couples who responded at Time 2, 125 reported being in a remarriage. These 125 couples represent 41% of the 303 remarried couples who responded at Time 1.

The sample used to identify preparation usage and Time 1 dyadic adjustment was comprised of the 303 remarried couples who completed the survey at Time 1. Data from the subsample that completed both Time 1 and Time 2 surveys (125 remarried couples) was used to assess the relationship between remarriage preparation and Time 2 dyadic adjustment.

Remarried Sample Characteristics

Marriage Number. Approximately half of the remarried sample (49% of women; 52% of men) reported their current marriage to be a second marriage. Twenty-four percent of women and 23% of men reported their current marriage to be their first marriage but a second or higher order marriage for their spouse. The remaining quarter of respondents reported their current marriage to be their third or higher marriage. These percentages are consistent with national figures provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (1999). One hundred and thirty-six couples (45% of the respondents) reported cohabiting before remarriage.

Age. The age of women ranged from 19 to 85, with a median age of 34.5 years. The women's average age was 37. The men in the sample were slightly older with an average age of 39.6 years ($MD = 37$, Range = 20–87).

Ethnicity. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (84% of women; 85% of men) and Latino (6% of women; 4% of men). The remaining 10% of the women and 11% of the men were African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Asian.

Religious affiliation. The most common religious affiliations for women were Mormon (60.9%), Catholic (8.1%), and Protestant (4.7%). For men, 59.7% identified as Mormon, 6.1% as Catholic, and 5.8% as Protestant. In total, 17% of women and 20.5% of men reported “no formal religious affiliation.”

Procedure

This paper reports on the secondary analysis with the remarried sample of the larger newlywed study. At Times 1 and 2, all couples were mailed a set of questionnaires. Each package contained self-addressed return envelopes and separate questionnaires for the husband and the wife to complete and return independently. Consistent with recommended practices for survey research (see Dillman, 2000), a \$2 cash incentive was included with the surveys.

Measures

The questionnaires for the larger newlywed study included 38 items and covered demographic information, premarital preparation, cohabitation history, and dyadic adjustment. Participants were asked if they had engaged in various forms of marriage preparation and, if so, how helpful each one was. The list of marriage preparation forms included professional counseling; visiting websites; talking to other couples, parents, or religious leaders; reading books, pamphlets, magazines, or newspapers; watching videos or movies about marriage; attending classes (two or more sessions); or attending a lecture/workshop (one session). Respondents rated the helpfulness of each form of preparation on a 5-point scale, ranging from *very helpful* to *not helpful at all*. Respondents who did not participate in a given form of preparation were instructed to mark “Not applicable” and to indicate why they did not participate. Five options were provided: “Didn’t think was needed,” “Not available,” “Took too much time,” “Spouse wasn’t interested,” and “I wasn’t interested.”

All respondents were asked whether they cohabitated before marriage. In light of the inconsistent literature on the effects of remarital cohabitation (e.g., Teachman, 2008; Xu, Hudspeth & Bartkowski, 2006), these data were specifically included in the present analyses of the remarried subsample. Although cohabitation

was not listed as a specific preparation activity on the survey, the literature indicates that many individuals may consider premarital cohabitation to be a form of preparation for remarriage (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Also included on the surveys was the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995), which is a shorter version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). The RDAS consists of 14 items that comprise three subscales: satisfaction (4 items), cohesion (4 items), and consensus (6 items). The satisfaction subscale measures how satisfied an individual is with his or her marriage. The cohesion subscale measures the relative frequency of joint activities and discussions. The consensus subscale measures agreement on various issues, such as values, affection, and career decisions (Busby et al.). For each subscale, a summative score was created, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction, cohesion, or consensus. For husbands and wives, at Time 1 and Time 2, the alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from .86 to .89.

RESULTS

Remarriage Preparation

Forms of Remarriage Preparation. Talking with other people (i.e., religious leaders, other couples, and parents) was the most frequently reported type of remarriage preparation, followed by reading written information such as magazines, pamphlets, or news articles. Reading books was also common but had a somewhat

lower frequency (Table 1). Preparation forms that required more of an investment or commitment in time, money, or both such as classes or professional counseling, were less frequently used. Preparation aided by technology, such as watching videos on marriage or visiting a website, had the lowest reported usage. Women's and men's use of preparation only differed significantly for two of the preparation forms. Specifically, women were more likely than men to read a book ($\chi^2 = 7.12, df = 1; p = .008$) and read pamphlets, magazines, or news articles ($\chi^2 = 9.02, df = 1; p = .003$).

Reasons for Not Participating in Preparation.

The majority of respondents who did not use a particular form of preparation reported "Didn't think was needed." The second most common response was a lack of personal interest, which was followed by unavailability. Few reported that they did not engage in a particular form of preparation because of the amount of time it would require. Fewer still marked "spouse wasn't interested" as a reason for nonparticipation (Table 2).

Remarriage Preparation Helpfulness. Just as nonparticipants were asked to explain why they did not participate, remarried respondents who did participate in marriage preparation were asked to rate the helpfulness of each form utilized. With few exceptions, most forms of preparation were rated as very helpful or helpful by at least half of the respective participants (Table 3). Women most often indicated "Very

Table 1. Remarriage Preparation Participation

Preparation Form	Women (<i>n</i> = 303)		Men (<i>n</i> = 303)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Read a book on marriage*	117	38.6	86	28.4
Professional counseling	56	18.5	65	21.5
Talked with religious leaders	160	52.8	144	47.5
Visited a website	22	7.3	17	5.6
Talked with other couples	183	60.4	166	54.8
Talked with parents	201	66.3	190	62.7
Read pamphlets, magazines, or news articles*	135	44.6	99	32.7
Watched videos or movies on marriage	47	15.5	40	13.2
Attended a class (2 or more sessions)	59	19.5	52	17.2
Attended a workshop or lecture (1 session)	44	14.5	37	12.2

Note. Percentages add up to more than 100 because respondents could mark all that applied.

*Significant difference ($p < .01$) between women and men.

helpful” for professional counseling, talking with religious leaders, and attending a one-session workshop. For men, “Very helpful” was reported most often for talking with a religious leader, reading a book, and attending a class (2+ sessions). The forms of remarriage preparation that were rated on the low end, between “Somewhat helpful” and “Not at all helpful,” by more than 50% of both husbands and wives were visiting a website; reading pamphlets, magazines, and news articles; and watching videos.

Dyadic Adjustment – Bivariate Analyses

A series of independent samples *t* tests were carried out, in which participants and nonparticipants for each form of remarriage participation were compared on the RDAS subscales. Following Ganong and Coleman’s (1989) approach, *t* tests were carried out separately for men and women and run for each of the three subscales of the RDAS—satisfaction, consensus, and cohesion. Only those *t* tests that identified significant differences are presented below.

For only one form of preparation were there significant findings on all three of the RDAS subscales. This occurred when women’s premarital cohabitation was analyzed. Those who did not cohabit before remarriage reported higher scores of adjustment at Time 1 than women who did (satisfaction: $t = 2.15, p = .032$; cohesion: $t = 2.87, p = .004$; consensus: $t = 2.34, p = .020$). However, for Time 2 adjustment, the differences were no longer significant.

On the satisfaction subscale, women who read pamphlets, magazines, and news articles reported lower satisfaction at both Time 1 ($t = 2.11, p = .036$) and Time 2 ($t = 3.21, p = .002$) than women who did not. Similarly, women who talked with their parents as preparation for remarriage had lower satisfaction at Time 2 ($t = 2.20, p = .030$), as did women who prepared by watching a video or movie on marriage ($t = 2.55, p = .012$).

Women who attended professional counseling had lower consensus scores at Time 2 than women who did not ($t = 2.31, p = .020$). However, women who attended a workshop or lecture reported more consensus at Time 2 than nonattending women ($t = -2.13, p = .038$). Similarly, women who

read a book ($t = -2.20, p = .029$), attended a class ($t = -2.66, p = .008$) or a workshop or lecture ($t = -2.24, p = .026$) reported greater cohesion at Time 1 than women who did not.

For men, only one *t* test was significant. Men who attended a workshop or lecture (one session) had higher consensus scores at Time 2 than men who did not ($t = -2.13, p = .036$).

Dyadic Adjustment – Multivariate Analyses

In order to explore which forms of preparation were most related to later adjustment, two sets of regressions, one for women and one for men, were conducted with Time 2 consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion scores as dependent variables. In each analysis, a number of possibly confounding variables were statistically controlled: age, ethnicity, education, religion, income, and Time 1 levels of consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion, respectively. All of these control variables were entered in an initial block. Each of the 10 preparation activities listed on the survey, as well as cohabitation, was dummy coded and included in the second block of the regressions. All models had significant *F* values ($p < .01$); however, the specific preparation activities were generally not significant predictors of dyadic adjustment (detailed and complete results are available from the first author). For females’ satisfaction, watching videos/movies ($\beta = -.185, p = .081$) and cohabitation approached significance ($\beta = .214, p = .054$). Cohabitation was also marginally significant for females’ cohesion ($\beta = .210, p = .094$). Males’ participation in one-session workshops was positively related to consensus ($\beta = .213, p = .084$) and cohesion ($\beta = .265, p = .040$). Cohabitation was also positively associated with men’s cohesion ($\beta = .255, p = .018$). For males, reading pamphlets and magazines was marginally negatively associated with both cohesion ($\beta = -.290, p = .051$) and satisfaction ($\beta = -.219, p = .079$). Collectively, the multivariate analyses suggest popular media may have an adverse affect, whereas cohabitation may have a positive influence on later adjustment. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution as the sample size at Time 2 may have constrained the power of the analyses.

DISCUSSION

Forms of Remarriage Preparation

Nearly 20 years after Ganong and Coleman's (1989) study was published, it appears individuals today prepare for remarriage in much the same way. Talking to others (e.g., religious leaders, other couples, or parents) was the most frequent approach to preparation. This finding is likely because of an issue of trust and accessibility. Furthermore, advice from family, friends, and clergy is generally free. In the case of religious participants, meeting with clergy may have also been a necessity or requirement. Because 60% of the sample identified themselves as Mormons, the Mormon culture merits particular consideration. Remarriage is accepted in the Mormon faith, and there is some evidence that remarriage is more common for Mormons than other religious groups such as Protestants and Catholics (Heaton, 1987). Mormons desiring to marry in a Mormon temple, whether for a first time or for a remarriage, are required to have an interview with their bishop before the wedding. However, the purpose of this interview is to discuss moral worthiness (i.e., whether the partners keep the commandments) and may or may not involve any relationship counseling or what secular family life educators would consider marriage preparation (cf. Ashton, 2005).

Mormon bishops are lay church members without professional counseling training (Ashton, 2005). What, if anything, these clergy know about remarriage and stepfamily issues is unknown. A bishop who feels that a couple is not sufficiently prepared for marriage is likely to refer the couple to a professional counselor, who is likely a member of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists (AMCAP). A study of AMCAP counselors found those who do remarriage preparation tend to use handouts (67.7%) and assign reading materials (62.2%; Ashton). These statistics are consistent with, and may help to explain, other findings in the present study. For example, the second most common approach involved reading written material (i.e., books, magazines). The attraction to written materials is understandable. Written materials are generally inexpensive, readily available, require a minor time commitment, and can be read in private around one's own schedule. Written materials may also attract individuals by the

promise of packaged information readers think they want or need.

Preparation forms that could be viewed as more intrusive, expensive, or intensive, such as counseling and workshops, were not used as frequently. Although pre-remarital education is recommended by scholars and practitioners (e.g., Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Visher & Visher, 1996) and marriage education is being funded at unprecedented levels (e.g., Brotherson & Duncan, 2004; Ooms, Bouchet, & Parke, 2004; www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/funding/), concerns have been raised about the accessibility, applicability, and availability of educational opportunities that meet the needs of remarried families (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham; Robertson et al., 2006). Embarrassment, fear of stigma, and the associated costs of formal types of preparation, appear to be major barriers to remarrying couples and first marriages alike (cf. Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). The results from this study confirm that relatively few remarrying couples take advantage of formal educational programs. Less than one fifth of women and men reported attending two or more sessions of a marriage preparation class, and only 14.5% of women and 12.2% of men attended a single-session workshop or lecture. These figures provide some support for critics of the Federal Healthy Marriage Initiative who have expressed doubt that formal relationship education programs will be utilized by or benefit, or both, more than a select few. Furthermore, for those who do attend, it may be that there is a "selection effect," in that they already have a greater commitment or desire to make the relationship work (Stanley, 2001).

Despite living in an age of technological advancements, very few individuals chose to prepare for remarriage by watching a video or movie about marriage or visiting marriage-related websites. Given the vast amount of information available on the internet, it is surprising that more did not use it to prepare. However, given the age range of participants, the individuals in this study may not have been as technologically savvy as younger generations or as aware of the vast amount of information currently available on the internet. Alternatively, they may have been skeptical about the information that was available. The lack of internet usage as a form of preparation may actually be a good sign in that many sites

contain misinformation or biased advice that could do harm if accepted and followed (Ganong & Coleman, 2004, p. 226).

Reasons for Nonparticipation. From the existing literature, there are several factors that may explain why many chose not to participate in remarriage preparation. Remarrying couples may believe that “if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it” (Ganong & Coleman, 1989, p. 31). In the current sample, depending on the form of preparation under consideration, roughly 45 – 65% of respondents reported that type of preparation was not needed. Scholars have noted that engaged couples in general “are blinded by romance, so they fail to see potential pitfalls; they focus on the wedding rather than the marriage” (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004, p. 551). Consequently, remarrying couples may dismiss the value of preparation when they are experiencing high levels of positive emotions during their courtship (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

A related reason for nonpreparation could be that in the absence of major, overt problems, individuals may purposefully avoid remarriage preparation out of a notion that ignorance is bliss. In other words, if things are going well there is no reason to upset the situation by introducing information that may lead to problem awareness (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Yet, the results of the current study suggest that remarrying couples today may be less avoidant than those in the 1980s sample (cf. Ganong & Coleman, 1989; Table 1). The percentage of contemporary respondents who reported “Not interested” as their reason for not participating ranged from roughly 25 to 40% for men and 15 to 32% for women depending on the form of preparation being considered. Personal disinterest was indicated more frequently than reports of a partner’s lack of interest. Men almost never reported that their partner was uninterested, which supports the notion that women are more interested in remarriage preparation (Ganong & Coleman, 1989). However, for any given form of preparation, fewer than 6% of nonparticipating women reported a lack of interest by their husband, which suggests that neither men nor women view their partner as the primary deterrent for preparation.

Additionally, remarrying couples may believe that preparation is unnecessary because of previous life experiences. They may feel they have

already been prepared through the hands-on experience gained from their previous marriage(s) or current cohabitation (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Roughly half of the sample cohabited before their remarriage and may likely consider that experience to be more useful preparation than anything that could be learned from a book, relative, or workshop.

Remarriage Preparation Helpfulness

The majority of those who participated in any given form of remarriage preparation rated it as helpful, which is consistent with a recent meta-analysis of relationship education (Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008) and Stanley’s (2001) observation that most people who participate in marriage preparation do find it to be beneficial. Preparation for remarriage, in any form, helps increase awareness of the issues people might face when they remarry. Perceived helpfulness likely stems from getting suggestions (if not specific tools or skills) about how to address negative aspects of relationships and how to increase positive interactions. Theories and literature invoking formal and informal social relationships may provide valuable vehicles for further investigation. Although such a connection must be considered tentative at this point, many of the forms of remarriage preparation cited by the present respondents—such as conversations with other couples, consultation with clergy, and attending lectures and workshops—appear to fall within the theoretical framework of *social capital* (e.g., Putnam, 2000). According to this perspective, active maintenance of social ties within one’s community benefits not only the individual participants on specific occasions, but the community as a whole.

Gender and Preparation Participation

The finding that men use most forms of preparation just as often as women is encouraging for those who advocate for involving both partners in preparation efforts (e.g., Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003) and suggests at least two possibilities. One, men may be increasingly more amenable to remarriage preparation. The cultural stigma toward preparation may be waning, and men, who are more likely to become residential stepparents through remarriage (Ganong & Coleman, 2004), appear to be

increasingly willing to seek information on how to deal with the situations they will likely face.

However, although men in this sample participated more in preparation activities than their counterparts in the 1980s (cf. Ganong & Coleman, 1989), it is possible that fiancées may be the driving force behind men's participation. Men participated just as often as women when the preparation took the form of an activity that couples could do together (e.g., attending a workshop or watching a movie). Women, however, were still more likely than men to utilize self-directed and less formal preparation activities, such as reading books, pamphlets, and magazines. This could be one explanation as to why there was only one significant difference on dyadic adjustment between the men who did and did not participate. Although anyone could theoretically benefit from any marriage education experience, the maximum benefit should not be expected if someone participates merely to comply with a partner's request.

Dyadic Adjustment

The bivariate finding of lower consensus scores associated with counseling may be due to the fact that many common therapeutic strategies are perceived as unhelpful by stepfamilies (see Visher et al., 2003). Alternatively, the findings could be an artifact of additional clinical problems or that the initial dissatisfaction that led to counseling was not resolved. Ganong and Coleman (1989) reported that the wives and husbands who attended premarital counseling had more disagreements and stepfamily problems. Consistent with Ganong and Coleman's findings, satisfaction at Time 2 was also lower for those who prepared by going to a professional counselor, although not quite statistically significant ($t = -2.35$, $p = .063$).

Although the overwhelming majority of female participants who prepared by talking with parents reportedly found the experience either somewhat helpful, helpful, or very helpful (90% of women), their satisfaction at Time 2 was lower than that of respondents who did not prepare by talking with parents. These findings call into question the quality of information provided by parents. If talking to parents is viewed as helpful, but subsequently lowers dyadic satisfaction, parental involvement may

help women think about remarital issues but does little to help solve them in satisfying ways. The same is likely true for preparing by talking with other couples; those women who did reported less satisfaction at Time 2, another finding that approached statistical significance ($t = 1.95$, $p = .053$).

The multivariate analyses and the bivariate comparisons between those who did and did not use media as a form of preparation (whether in printed or electronic form) suggest that individuals who do use media may receive inadequate, misleading, or negative information. The popular press and media are not subject to scholarly peer review. Consequently, such materials may provide a false sense of preparation while fostering unrealistic expectations or false stereotypes (see Leon & Angst, 2005). Our contemporary findings of a negative association between media and females' dyadic satisfaction are consistent with those of Ganong and Coleman (1989), who found that those who sought advice from printed material reported more problems and disagreements.

The multivariate analyses suggest only a few associations with adjustment at Time 2, which is likely due to the low power in the relatively small subsample that completed both Time 1 and 2 surveys. With that in mind, cohabitation in the multivariate tests was positively associated with adjustment, whereas in the bivariate analyses the association was negative. Although this inconsistency probably stems from the inclusion of control variables in the multivariate analyses, the discrepancy is consistent with the extant literature that has found both positive and negative relationships between cohabitation and remarital outcomes (Teachman, 2008; Xu et al., 2006).

Several findings from the analyses did support respondents' subjective reports that preparation was helpful. Women who read a book on marriage, attended a class, or attended a workshop or lecture reported higher levels of cohesion at Time 1 than women who did not prepare in similar ways. Consensus was also higher for women at Time 1 and for men at Time 2 who attended a workshop or lecture. The analyses taken as a whole, particularly the self-reported perceptions of helpfulness, lends some support for previous arguments in favor of premarital preparation (i.e., Stanley, 2001).

Implications for Policy and Research

It still remains unclear whether remarrying couples consider cohabitation as a form of preparation to the point that other preparation activities are deemed inferior or unnecessary. Although individuals in the present study were asked to report whether they had cohabited before remarriage, they were not asked whether their cohabitation experience specifically prepared them for remarriage. Some researchers have suggested that premarital cohabitation may not be a deliberate form of marriage preparation (e.g., Manning & Smock, 2005; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Rather, couples “slide” from noncohabitation to cohabitation to marriage via the “inertia” effect (Stanley et al., 2006), a non-deliberate and incremental process propelled by greater constraints to leaving the relationship relative to lower dedication to remaining in the relationship (Manning & Smock).

The idea of the “inertia” effect has been formulated primarily with regard to cohabitation before first marriages. Remarriages, however, differ from first marriages in a number of significant ways, which is why some researchers suggest that cohabitation may be a good way to prepare for remarriage, especially for individuals who bring children into the remarriage (e.g., Wineberg & McCarthy, 1998). In that situation, cohabitation may signal commitment to remarriage and be equivalent to what engagement was for individuals headed for a first marriage (Wineberg & McCarthy). Even though research findings are still inconclusive, studies have shown that cohabitation before remarriage may have a positive effect on remarriage quality (e.g., Hanna & Knaub, 1981) and stability (e.g., Teachman, 2008). However, others have found inverse relationships between cohabitation and remarital happiness and stability (e.g., Xu et al., 2006). Knowing if cohabitating stepfamilies do in fact see themselves as preparing for marriage would be of particular interest to the field in light of the Federal Healthy Marriage Initiative, which targets, among other groups, nonmarried couples with children (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/build_fam/) and couples in stepfamilies (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/sup_stepfamilies/).

Although many of the preparation forms did not reach statistical significance (in bivariate or multivariate tests), this does not necessarily imply that remarriage preparation, in its various

forms, is not helping individuals. Rather, it may be, as with general marriage preparation, that the positive effects on marital quality are short-lived (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). The knowledge and skills learned during preparation activities, which may seem helpful at the time, should not be expected to have long-term effects if not continuously applied. Participants in this study reported on dyadic adjustment in their first and second years of remarriage, when positive effects of their preparation may have already dissipated. Furthermore, differences due to remarriage preparation may be obscured by post-remarriage enhancement activities (e.g., couple retreats, Marriage Encounters), which were not measured.

Other possible explanations for nonsignificant group differences include (a) a restriction of range created by the high scores of dyadic adjustment for both those who did and did not prepare and (b) the focus on dyadic adjustment of the adults rather than the adjustment of the stepfamily (see Ganong & Coleman, 1989). Future research should extend the questions asked in this study by analyzing what information is actually contained in the preparation forms utilized by remarrying couples. Researching individual, couple, structural, and cultural characteristics that may influence usage would also be helpful in creating effective marketing, recruitment, and retention strategies.

As policy makers continue to reflect on the need, approach, and efficacy of remarriage education, the recommendation for more qualitative studies should be reiterated (see Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). Qualitative interviews can lead to a greater in-depth understanding of the issues remarrying couples face, what forms of preparation they desire, and how well existing forms of preparation address their unique issues. For instance, how do structural factors known to impact remarital quality and outcomes (i.e., children, finances, ex-spouses) affect preparation usage and effectiveness? Whether, and in what manner, these issues are addressed in the implementation of marriage education (i.e., is child care provided?) may have as much influence on usage and outcomes as the actual content that is taught. Additionally, understanding the needs and requisite adaptations to make remarriage education culturally appropriate for diverse populations is still in its infancy (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004).

Implications for Practice

Our findings underscore the ongoing challenge in the field to recruit couples for stepfamily education programs (see Robertson et al., 2006). There are relatively few empirically validated, remarriage-specific, relationship education programs (see Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004 and <http://www.smartmarriages.com> for a listing of available programs), which may explain why more individuals in this sample did not use educational classes or workshops. The low usage of educational classes could also be due to remarrying couples believing that their union will be similar to previous marriages and, therefore, additional preparation is not necessary (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Whatever the reason, to build the case for continued remarriage education funding, the field must address the lack of relevant resources and perceived need reported by remarrying couples.

An encouraging trend for family life educators is the perceived helpfulness of preparation. Remarriage preparation was reported as helpful by the overwhelming majority of respondents who engaged in it. However, some of the comparisons on dyadic adjustment between those who did and did not prepare call into the question the quality of the advice in printed media, on the internet, and by nonprofessionals. On the basis of the high reported usage of these informal preparation activities, it would be prudent for the field to improve, expand, and create more accessible resources for the public. Accurate and accessible printed material is important not only to educate those entering a remarriage, but to inform parents, religious leaders, and friends from whom remarrying couples commonly seek advice. The creation of a stepfamily typically brings about unique challenges to dyadic adjustment and stability (see Ganong & Coleman, 2004), many of which may go unrecognized by those attempting to help. Although couples, clergy, friends, parents, and helping professionals alike need to be aware of challenges in remarriage, it would also be helpful to disseminate information about stepfamily strengths (Visher et al., 2003). Remarriage myths and stigma abound in our culture (Ganong & Coleman, 2004) and people appear to be turning to books, pamphlets, or magazines for guidance. Because media can shape perceptions (Leon & Angst, 2005), scholarly information about stepfamily strengths

needs to be disseminated in such a way as to combat misleading or maladaptive messages that appear in nonjuried outlets.

Education and resources for clergy appear to be particularly important. Estimates suggest that 60–80% of first marriages and 30–40% of second marriages occur in churches (Giblin, 1994; Stanley, 2001). In light of these figures, it is not surprising that nearly half of our sample identified talking with clergy as a form of preparation. However, what and how much these clergy knew about remarriage topics remains an empirical question. In the case of Mormon clergy, who are lay members with no formal pastoral or counseling training, the odds are slim that the bishops were well versed in research literature on remarriage. Clergy of other faiths may likewise feel uninformed or ill equipped to fully prepare couples for remarriage. Yet, at the same time, clergy still feel that they “often alone, bear the enormous responsibility of preparing couples for what is both a psychological rite of passage and an ecclesial sacrament” (Giblin, p. 147). Consequently, family life educators may have the warmest welcome and the biggest impact, albeit indirect, if they focus energy and resources toward educating clergy who already have the trust and listening ear of marrying couples.

Although written materials were more frequently used than the formal forms of preparation (e.g., counseling, classes, workshops or lectures), the latter were reported as more helpful by larger percentages of respondents. Despite their lower usage, practitioners and policy makers in support of formal relationship education programs should note that attending a class or workshop was more frequently associated with higher dyadic adjustment than any other form of preparation. Both men and women who participated in sessions of marriage education had higher scores on the consensus subscale than those who did not. Participating women also reported more consensus and cohesion, and a one-session workshop was positively associated with men’s Time 2 consensus and cohesion in the multivariate analyses.

Collectively, these findings pose a twofold challenge to the field: continuing to encourage preparation, while also recognizing that many couples will never go to a class or workshop but may buy a book or talk to a parent or religious leader. To meet this challenge,

the recommendations of Ganong and Coleman (1989) still have a great degree of relevance. Inasmuch as people may not be aware of how or where to access quality remarriage related resources, professionals need to improve the “marketing” aspect of remarriage education opportunities. By partnering with Extension faculty who have outreach responsibilities (see Goddard & Olsen, 2004) or other professionals with links to media, religious, or community outlets, the ability of scholars and practitioners to extend research-based information to remarrying couples, of diverse characteristics and comfort levels, can be magnified.

CONCLUSION

Almost two decades have passed since Ganong and Coleman (1989) conducted their study of remarriage preparation. The results of the current study suggest that very little has changed, although the demographics of this contemporary sample and the 1989 study continue to limit generalizability to diverse stepfamilies (e.g., Mormons account for fewer than 2% of the adult U.S. population; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007). The most frequent forms of preparation in the Ganong and Coleman (1989) study were cohabitation and written materials. Current findings corroborate these trends. One difference between the two studies is the increase in individuals who identified talking with parents, religious leaders, or other couples as a form of preparation. Inasmuch as individuals are most likely to turn to known contacts and written material, marriage educators and policy makers should be careful to not put all their efforts or resources into promoting formal classroom educational experiences. Rather, for an initiative to have broad reach, there should be a multifaceted approach that recognizes the value and positive potential of formal and informal, face-to-face and written, as well as professional and nonprofessional types of preparation. For remarried couples in particular, community groups, mentor couples, books, and the web (i.e., chat rooms) are examples of nontraditional supports that hold promise and deserve exploration (cf. Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Ironically, informal modes of preparation are the most used but also the least researched. The literatures on formal clinical and educational premarital interventions continue to grow

disproportionately to the number of people who actually go to a marriage counselor or attend a marriage education program. Although there is evidence of their efficacy, few in our sample, as is the case with first-marriage samples (Doss et al., 2009), pursue a formal route for their preparation. Rather, the most common forms of preparation are those that can occur in private – not public settings. By one’s self, with a partner, or with trusted friends, family, or religious leaders, remarrying couples can prepare at their own pace, receive free advice, and never leave their comfort zones. If this is the modern reality, and as a field we seek to improve and enhance preparation, then much more attention needs to be directed to learning about – and infusing with research-based material – the counsel clergy give, the advice parents and friends share, and the information printed in the popular media.

Although the social climate regarding remarriage has changed and more men are participating in preparation activities, there are still many women and men who see remarriage preparation as unnecessary. Social scientists have recognized the need for distinct content in remarriage preparation and have cautioned family practitioners that couples entering remarriage may not be adequately prepared if they only participate in educational experiences geared toward general couple relationship skills and issues (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Halford et al., 2003). There is ample empirical research on remarriage to create and provide useful resources geared specifically to the needs of remarrying couples (see Ganong & Coleman, 2004, for a review of extant literature). Now the challenge for scholars and practitioners alike is to find ways to make quality, research-based resources widely accessible and attractive to remarrying couples and the sources they look to for advice.

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