

ROUGH DRAFT

THE BLENDED FAMILY: INFLUENCING A PARADIGM SHIFT AS THE MAIN FAMILY
COMPONENT TO THE FAMILY STRUCTURE, FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING IN
THE 21ST CENTURY

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence the blended family has had on the family structure and to determine what types of influences were responsible for the paradigm shift caused by the blended family phenomenon in today's family structure. My objective for this study is to investigate, analyze and critique how the blended family has become the main component to the family structure of the 21st century versus the family structure of the nuclear family of the 20th century, so that we will be able to view the blended family structure not only as a component that is just surviving but one that is also thriving as the main family structure.



Declaration Concerning Thesis Presented for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

I

Of

Solemnly and sincerely declare, in relation to the Ph.D. thesis

Entitled:

The Blended Family: Influencing A Paradigm Shift as the main component to the family structure, from surviving to thriving in the 21st Century.

- (a) That the work was done by me; personally
- (b) The material has not previously been accepted in whole, or in part, for any other degree or diploma

Signature: _____

Date: May 10, 2013

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Chapter One: Introduction

There are challenges and changes that has helped to shape how the structure of the quintessential American traditional family, which experts say became the significant family structure in the 20th century. However, from that time the 20th century models have witnessed an enormous transformation of this structure which has been engulfed by the “Blended family” structure that is dominating the 21st century family model. “Blended families are families formed, by divorce, death, or through remarriage, at least one parent and one child (children) are not biologically connected. This phenomenon is commonplace in today’s world. The dynamics of blended families are definitely more complicated than in more traditional configurations.

“What role can or should the stepparent (blended parent) take? What loyalty is there between the stepparent and stepchild or between the stepchild and blended siblings? Can/should a stepparent discipline a stepchild? If exchanges between traditional family members are often potentially charged, exchanges between members of a blended family are magnified. Frequently, people clamor for status, attention, and/or power. Feelings are easily hurt, actions are misread and misinterpreted, and individuals ascribe meaning to deeds that may not necessarily have been intended. Once a person enters into a relationship with another, any decisions made by either have consequences felt by both parties. This is true of any partnership or marriage.

Adding a child (children) makes this more complicated. To a certain degree, all decisions necessarily impact everyone, whether or not the person intended this to happen. Blended families do not come with a set of instructions on how to negotiate through troubled waters.

This study has touched my life in so many ways, as I was born into a nuclear family and was a part of that structure until I was five years old when my mother and father divorced after 17 years of marriage. I asked myself what is the reason I decided to write about the blended family, and then I'm reminded that I married into a blended family at the age of 22 years old.

My first wife was the mother of an eight-year-old son and a six-year-old daughter. At that point in my life I really didn't understand the enormous responsibility that I inherited by saying yes. At first, I felt it was a grand opportunity for me to make a positive impact on these children because I was educated and one of the eldest of five brothers of whom I helped rise. My mother had enlisted me into being one of the one's that would be responsible for ensuring that my younger brothers were cared for until she got home from work. In this new responsibility, I would give guidance and leadership to my younger siblings.

Therefore, I assumed that with this experience, I would be capable of handling some of the challenges I would encounter as a stepfather. After two years into the marriage, reality kicked in and I realized that I wasn't capable of integrating these two human beings into my design of being successful people who could overcome the barrier of allowing a stranger into their life as an adult who they would have to now, respect, listen to, live with, and accept as being a replacement for their biological father who had never married their mother or been a creditable example of a parent who cared. This was evident by his absenteeism and lack of support financially, emotionally or psychologically in their lives.

As a stepfather, I also struggled in trying to accept my role as the outsider, accompanied by the fact that my ex-wife and I weren't on the same page in raising her children. It became evident that our inability to become a complete family unit varied, due to differences in our

parenting styles. Those differences led to an erosion of the marriage that ended in divorce, which actually felt like death. This was a loss that would take me more than five years to recover from through seeking professional counseling, spiritual counseling and changing my geographical location.

I recently read an article, entitled "*How The Brady Bunch Influenced Society's View of Blended Families*", the author gives her candid perspective on how this popular late sixties to mid-seventies' television show influenced society's view of the blended family:

One of the greatest eras of change in our society took place during the late 1960s and the 1970s. The Civil Rights Movement was at its peak, and women everywhere were demanding equal pay and equal treatment. A new day has dawned, and with it had come change in the traditional American Family. The traditional families like those seen on popular shows like "Father Knows Best", "The Walton's", and "Leave It to Beaver" were almost non-existent. Single parent homes were on the rise. Whether as a result of divorce or death of a spouse, a new family unit emerged. These units were "blended families". Blended families result when two people with children from previous relationships marry and combine families. Despite the fact that the make-up of the traditional family and its values changed, television shows like "The Brady Bunch" helped influence how society viewed the new blended families.

<http://voices.yahoo.com/how-brady-bunch-influenced-societys-view-blended-11800170.html>

Accessed 01 Apr 13

Statement of the Problem

The blended family as the main family structure has actually revolutionized many thought patterns of couples who have remarried into families where biological children and step

children share similar challenges in their quest to understand the dynamics that are associated with being a part of this new family structure. This project will examine and determine what types of influences are responsible for the paradigm shift caused by the blended family phenomenon in today's family structure.

This thesis will propose to answer the following questions concerning the blended family: Influencing a paradigm shift as the main component to the family structure, from surviving to thriving in the twenty-first century. The first question, I will seek to answer is what type of influences were responsible for the paradigm shift caused by the blended family phenomenon in today's family structure? The second question, I will seek to answer is how the blended family has become the main component to the family structure in the 21st century versus the family structure of the nuclear family of the 20th century? And finally, the third question, I will seek to answer is how important it will be to view the blended family structure not only as a component that is just surviving but one that is also thriving as the main family structure? Many of the challenges facing the nuclear family have been magnified through the challenges encountered by the blended family of today and are based on several factors. In other words, the family structure, the blended family transformation has been galvanized by the following influences: death, divorce and children born out-of-wedlock.

Statement of Limitations

The topic of this research involving the paradigm shift influenced by the blended family phenomenon and the many influences that played a significant role in this shift are numerous.

Therefore, it would be an enormous challenge to adequately uncover the parameters of this project. There are some specific areas this project will not address but leave for another to pursue. The focus of this project will be on how the influences of death, divorce and children being born out-of-wedlock led to the transformation of the “Nuclear Family” which once served as the standard to the family structure of the 20th century to the “Blended Family” as the main component of the family structure in the 21st century. This thesis will not cover the following areas that have also been proven to be influential catalysts in the transformation of the family structure: Same-Sex Marriages, Co-habitation and Single Parenting, due to the limitations of time for this project.

I recently read an article “*The Advantages of the Traditional Nuclear Family*” that points out some key advantages often presented in a traditional nuclear family.

1. A Stable Environment: Children raised in a family with the same parents during their growing years have a higher likelihood of having stability in their relationships and emotional bonding. Children that grow up in a single-parent household have higher chances of feeling a sense of loss regarding the absent parent, and miss out on the advantages of the emotional support and dual insights that both a father and a mother can provide.”

2. Behavioral Stability: With both the father and mother, children get a better sense of what is acceptable and unacceptable, as far as behavior is concerned, especially when both parents look after their nurturing. When both parents agree on the kind of behavior they want from their children, it adds authority, and thus can be instilled in a better way.

3. A Sense of Consistency: When children grow up in a nuclear family, they get a sense of consistency, especially when it also includes closeness with other members of the family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. This enables them to feel as if they are a part of a

wider whole, particularly during traditional get-togethers. This provides a strong foundation to their roots, and can be a guiding principle all their lives.

4. Learning Skills: In a nuclear family, children usually get far more extensive training in life skills. For instance, mothers usually teach their children relationship skills, like emotional response skills and how to have smooth relations with others, while fathers, in general, teach their children handiwork skills and sports skills, like fixing things around the house or hitting a baseball, as well as how to deal with the outside world.

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/advantages-fo-the-traditional-nuclear-family.html>

Accessed 27 Mar 13

In an article, entitled, “Advantages of a Blended Family” Author, Kevin Hobbs offers his insights into some of the key advantages of the blended family:

1. Happier Parents: Happier parents mean happier children and this can be created by remarriage. Blended families can also mean a more loving environment, which could be an improvement from a pre-divorce home life of anger and hostility. Another positive benefit for children is an expanded, extended family network, where new aunts, uncles and even grandparents can help through the transition period as well as offer support and love.”

2. Higher Living Standard: Children of divorce often experience a family income reduction, sometimes a substantial one. In most cases, the children end up in a female-headed, single parent household and living with serious economic challenges.

With the new blended household, the family income is typically increased because the remarriage usually brings greater access to resources. When the standard of living increases; the family's stress because of the former financial instability decreases.

3. Increased Role Models: Positive role models are important in a child's life and blended marriages often provide greater access to people who fulfill this role. The increased diversity of role models improves the child's outlook on how family structures can vary. It can also expose the child to new experiences, such as a cousin's career in teaching or an uncle's love of fishing. http://www.ehow.com/info_7901833_advantages-blended-family.html Accessed 27 Mar 13

Theoretical Basis for This Study

There have been two theoretical perspectives that have dominated the study of the family structure as it relates to the rise and decline of the twentieth century Nuclear Family structure versus the rise of the twenty-first century Blended Family structure. In the nuclear family, which is comprised of two parents and children who are related by blood versus the blended family, which are comprised of a biological parent, stepparent, and stepchild?

The Nuclear Family of the 20th century became the standardized family structure for all Families during the 1950's:

53.7% of Canadians live in two parent, or nuclear families. A nuclear family consists of a mother a father, and their biological or adoptive descendants often called the traditional family. The nuclear family was most popular in the 1950's and 60's. In the 1950's for the first time in 100 years, the divorce rate fell while marriage and fertility rates soared, creating a boom in nuclear-family living.

<http://www.edu.pe.ca/southernkings/familynuclear.htm> Accessed 01 Apr 13

<http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/articles/article10.htm> Accessed 01 Apr 13

In the late 1950's there would be a paradigm shift in the family structure because of divorces, teenage pregnancies and economic difficulties the nuclear family structure would change drastically:

The past 25 years have seen an unprecedented burst of agonizing in western society about the collapse of the family. Escalating divorce rates, more births outside of wedlock (often to teenage mothers), the rise in one-parent families, have all become emblems of moral decline. Between 1970 and 1998, the ratio of divorces to marriages in the United States shot up by more than half; the rate of out-of-marriage births more than tripled, to about one in three. The trend has spread to Europe, first to the more socially liberal northern countries, later to older-fashioned places such as Italy and Greece. The decline of the traditional western family goes the lament, typifies the 20th-century paradox: material prosperity, social disintegration.

<http://www.economist.com/node/346995> Accessed 01 Apr 13

The Nuclear Families' decline was evident for the first time; the percentage of households headed by married couples has dropped below 50 percent, according to 2010 U.S. Census. The percentage of married households fell to 48.4 in 2010, down from 55.2 percent in 1990, and 51.7 percent in 2000. "The 48 percent of husband-wife households in 2010 was the first time since at least 1940 that this has fallen below 50 percent," said Daphne Lofquist, Statistician for the Fertility and Family Statistics Branch for the Census Bureau.

<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/less-50-us-households-now-led-married-couples-says-census-bureau>

Accessed 01 Apr 13

Many Theoretical experts proclaim that the integration of a Blended Family is complex and overwhelmingly difficult to create a family structure that will be successful because of the challenging dynamics associated with the meshing of biological parents and stepparents, biological children and stepchildren in becoming a united family unit. Historically the Blended Family is created out of loss versus gain; in other words, most blended families are connected because of divorce, death of spouse(s), children(s) born out-of-wedlock, which sets the stage for the inheritance of unresolved hurt, disappointment and often unrealistic expectations of all parties concerned.

The positive elevation of the Blended family as a successful family structure has taken shape within the culture of the American family is evident in the article written by Carissa Sherwood, entitled “*How Blended Can Blend with Success*” she offers some candid principles to assist the blended family to reach and maintain success:

What last advice would you like to leave for a blended family who wants to blend with success? Successful blending takes patience, understanding, and a nurturing heart. We all need to come from a place of non-threat, non-defense, and the parents need to come from a place of unconditional love for all the children. During the beginning phases children require a lot more attention, respect, and listening to. If we can take time to talk about the process, what is happening, how we are feeling, and really allow each person to share their experience in a loving environment without judgment or telling anyone that they shouldn't feel anything, we begin to allow a place for each person to come together and blend and really form a symphony of individuals where each person plays a part.

<http://voices.yahoo.com/how-blended-families-blend-success-6634806.html>

Accessed 28 Mar 13

The success stories of the blended family structure are growing in various ways and settings. Recently, I had the privilege of presenting a seminar on the “Blended Family” at a local university, where I shared some principles required to achieve success as a blended family. After my presentation, the dean who invited me to come and speak sent me an e-mail with a letter attached from a couple who attended the seminar, they shared with me that they have been married for thirty years as a blended family. The wife indicated that her first husband had died leaving her with two children who were four and six years old. She also stated that she had remarried and by the time of their first year anniversary they had their first child together, then finally after two years they had another child. They credit their faith in God as the main catalyst of their success but also their willingness to communicate, love, have patience and enjoy one another and their children are other keys to having a successful blended family. Finally, they shared that the relationship they both have with their adult children and spouses are amazing.

Statement of Methodology

The research conducted for this study was done in accordance with the objective of this project, which is to examine how the influence of the blended family has had on the family structure, as well as to determine what type of influences were responsible for the paradigm shift caused by the blended family phenomenon in today’s family structure. The process utilized in gathering significant data was done by reading and reviewing books, articles, newspapers, journals, thesis’s electronically or in hard copy form pertaining to the “Nuclear Family” and its rise and fall as the main component to the family structure of the 20th century verses the rise of the “Blended Family” as the main component to the family structure in the 21st century.

This process also involved reviewing different scholarly perspectives from books and articles related to their authorship, format, purpose, historical significance, used in their analyzing and critiquing of the factors that impacted the family structure.

Information gathered during this research was organized into a research document beginning with investigating, analyzing, and critiquing how the blended family has become the main component to the family structure of the 21st century versus the family structure of the nuclear family of the 20th century.

Each chapter explores the different aspects of the family structure transformation from Nuclear to Blended, specifically the factors that serve as conduits to enhance the perception of the blended family structure not only as a component that is just surviving but one that is also thriving as the main family structure.

Definitions of Terms

Throughout this thesis the following terms will be used; therefore, let's define them.

Acceptance: Willingness to receive (gift, payment or duty) or ability to tolerate.

Affection: Goodwill, (high) regard, liking, fondness, fond, or kindly feeling, (loving) attachment, tenderness, warmth, love.

Blended (step) family - People who dislike the unpleasant associations of "stepfamily" often use "blended family" instead. In a true blended ("complex") stepfamily, both mates have prior kids. Each mate has two roles: stepparent and bio-parent.

Communication- Occurs when any perceived behavior of one person or personality, sub self significantly affects another person or sub self spiritually, psychologically, mentally, or physically. "Significantly" is a subjective judgment. Because silence, withdrawal, or no contact may affect the receiver, there is no such thing as "no communication."

Commitment: The process or instance of committing oneself; a pledge or undertaking.

Death: An act of dying: the end of life, the total and permanent cessation of all vital functions of an organism.

Discipline: Training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement.

Divorce: Can mean a legal process, an emotional/spiritual process, a court event, a state of mind, and a societal event, statistic, and stressor. Mates can begin divorcing psychologically long before physical separation and/or legal dissolution occur.

Epidemic: A widespread occurrence of a disease in a community at a particular time.

Faith: Complete confidence and trust, firm belief without logical proof.

Family System: (Structure) All the emotionally, spiritually, and genetically-important people comprising a nuclear or extended (multi-generational) family, plus the needs and resulting relationship roles and rules that govern how these people behave together normally and in conflicts and crises; and the physical and invisible boundaries that separate this human system from other systems, like neighboring families, their city and church community, the nation, and the local and global ecosystems.

Homeostasis: Caused by the loss of efficiency in our control systems due to many reasons such as panic attacks, which reduces the stability of our internal environment.

Illegitimate: (of a child) Born of parents not married to each other.

Nuclear family: A nucleus is the core of something, like the yolk of an egg. Traditionally, the nucleus of a biological family is (both bio-parents + all dependent kids). More broadly, a nuclear bio-family refers to all people regularly living in a minor child's main home. Use "nuclear family" when you want to focus on co-parents and dependent kids, rather than the larger multi-

generational group of all biological and legal relatives in their extended family.

Out-of- Wedlock: The condition before the law, or the social status, of a child whose parents were not married to each other at the time of his or her birth.

Remarriage: Has been defined as a two-parent-two-generation unit that comes into being on the legal remarriage of a widowed or divorced person who has biological or adopted children from a prior union with whom he or she is regularly involved. Ten fundamental ways in which remarried families are different from the nuclear family have been identified. Cultural images of stepfamilies have been negative. The terms stepchild, stepparent, and especially stepmother, have conveyed negative connotations from the earliest times.

Stepfamily: Many lay people and human-service professionals are vague or unclear on what this term means. A stepfamily is any emotionally bonded family including at least one part-time or full-time (custodial) stepparent, and one resident or visiting, minor or grown stepchild. Most stepfamily roles, rules, and dynamics begin when co-parent couples begin to date seriously - well before exchanging vows.

Stepparent: Before reading further, try saying your definition out loud, and compare it to this: a stepparent is a man or woman who is emotionally committed to a divorcing or widowed bio-parent, and chooses to fill the role of part-time or full-time nurturer, guide, and supporter to one or more of their partner's children from a prior union; The stepparent may or may not have biological and/or adopted children of her/his own,' and probably has fewer legal parental rights and responsibilities than a biological parent in the same state or province, unless s/he legally adopts their stepchild/children.

Stepchild, stepson, and stepdaughter: These titles describe the family role filled by any minor or grown child of a bio-parent who is committed to a new mate (a stepparent). Serious co-

parental courtship creates paired stepchild-stepparent (and related) roles. The co-parents' commitment ceremony and marriage license creates legal responsibilities for these roles.

Pandemic: Prevalent over a whole country or the world.

Patience: Calm endurance of hardship, provocation, pain or delay, tolerant perseverance or forbearance.

Phenomenon: An unusual, significant, or unaccountable fact or occurrence; a marvel.

Rebirth: A new incarnation or spiritual enlightenment.

Related: An alliance by origin, nature, kinship or marriage.

Relationship: A particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other: has a close relationship with his siblings.

Respect: Deferential esteem felt or shown toward a person or quality.

Restoration: The act or instance of restoring or of being restored.

Survival: To remain alive or in existence and to carry on despite hardships or trauma to persevere.

Skewed: Distorted or biased in meaning or effect.

Thriving: To grow vigorously; flourish and to be successful or make steady progress; prosper.

Trust: A firm belief in the reliability or truth or strength of a person or thing, a confident expectation. <http://sfhelp.org/cx/tools/terms.htm> Accessed 14 Apr 13

<https://www.mypanicure.com/definition-of-homeostasis/> Accessed 14 Apr 13 (Oxford Reader's Digest Word Finder 1996)