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## **Navigating Blended Family Dynamics: Lived Experiences of Newly - Married Black American Couples with Children**

Nichole King-Price  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Nichole King-Price

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Abstract

Navigating Blended Family Dynamics: Lived Experiences of Newly-Married Black

American Couples with Children

by

Nichole King-Price

MA, Walden University, 2024

MA, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2019

MA, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2015

BS, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2013

AS, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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## Abstract

Remarriage offers the opportunity to create new family structures, giving individuals second chances to forge meaningful connections and develop new family dynamics. This study involved investigating the experiences of newly-married Black American couples with children as they faced challenges inherent to blended family dynamics. The objective was to understand how these families' navigated the complexities of integrating different family systems during their formative years. Using a basic qualitative research design, the study was guided by Bowen's family systems theory, which emphasizes how individuals construct knowledge within their socioemotional contexts. A convenience sample of nine spouses from blended families was purposefully selected to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. Data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews during which participants reflected on their daily interactions, communication patterns, and relational dynamics within their families. Thematic analysis was used to interpret data, revealing recurring patterns and themes that highlighted emotional, relational, and cultural complexities these families encountered. By examining sociocultural and emotional contexts of blended families, this study contributes to the literature on family studies, offering actionable insights and strategies to foster healthier relationships and greater resilience within these families. Findings include evidence-based recommendations for counseling, social work, and family therapy practitioners that are aimed at better supporting newly-remarried couples during their critical early years as blended families.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my mother, the late Frances Bedena Rance-Thornton, and my daughter, Chloe Frances-Bedena Price.

To my mother, thank you for being my first teacher, my source of strength, and my eternal guiding light. You instilled in me the importance of education, perseverance, and self-worth. You taught me that “self-preservation is the law of all nations,” and those words became my compass through life’s most challenging moments. You carried yourself with grace, faith, and determination, and through your example, I learned that no obstacle is too great when rooted in purpose. Every degree, every achievement, and every success I’ve earned reflects the foundation you built within me. Though you are no longer physically here, your spirit continues to walk beside me in every step, every prayer, and every victory. This accomplishment belongs to you as much as it does to me. I miss you, Mommi!

To my daughter, Chloe Frances, my heartbeat and greatest motivation, you have been my light through the darkest days and my laughter through the hardest nights. Watching you grow has reminded me of the power of faith, curiosity, and unconditional love. You have stood beside me with patience, understanding, and joy as I pursued this dream. I want you to know that this journey was not just about earning a degree; it was about showing you what is possible when you never give up on yourself. You are destined for greatness, and I pray that my journey shows you that no goal is too high, no dream too far, and no circumstance too difficult when you walk with faith and

perseverance. Always remember, you come from a legacy of strength, love, and resilience. The world is yours to conquer! This work is also lovingly dedicated to Black families, especially those navigating the beauty and complexity of blended family life. Our stories matter. Our experiences deserve to be studied, celebrated, and understood. May this research serve as both a mirror and a message reflecting the resilience, love, and unity that define who we are and reminding us that, even though transitions and changes, Black families remain a source of strength, healing, and hope. I love you.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to Study

Blended families, also known as stepfamilies, are formed when one or both partners in a new marriage brings children from previous relationships into new familial units. These families are increasingly common due to rising rates of divorce, remarriage, and nonmarital partnerships involving children (Ganong et al., 2022). Blended families typically consist of biological parents, stepparents, biological children, and stepchildren, creating a unique family structure that differs significantly from traditional nuclear families. Forming a blended family requires integration of diverse family cultures, parenting practices, and relational histories, making the adjustment process both challenging and dynamic (Brimhall, 2020).

Newly married Black American couples entering blended family dynamics with children face a distinct set of challenges shaped by cultural expectations, identity management, and relational complexities. These families navigate integration of new parental roles while nurturing cohesion among children from previous relationships. This dynamic often involves balancing parental authority with building trust, particularly for stepparents who need to form meaningful connections while respecting preexisting bonds between biological parents and their children (Dyer, 2021). Additionally, cultural values within Black American communities involving the emphasis on family cohesion, collective identity, and respect for elders leads to complex issues in terms of how these couples manage their blended family dynamics (Weiser et al., 2022).

Understanding emotional dynamics within these newly married Black Americans in blended families requires acknowledging the complex interplay of relational patterns and identity management processes that shape family interactions. One critical aspect involves negotiating roles and responsibilities within newly formed family structures. Stepparents balance asserting authority with nurturing bonds, while biological parents work to maintain established relationships with their children amid new marital dynamics (Ganong et al., 2022). This balancing act is more complicated when children express loyalty conflicts and struggle to accept stepparent roles while maintaining connections with their biological parents (Arat et al., 2023). These relational tensions often manifest as sibling rivalries, strained spousal communication, and difficulty establishing consistent parenting practices (Bean et al., 2021).

Relational patterns within newly remarried couples often reflect past family dynamics, especially when children from previous relationships carry emotional baggage from prior conflicts or disruptions (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024). Additionally, extended family members influence family dynamics by reinforcing traditional roles or expressing concerns about new family structures. Involvement of extended family members sometimes leads to triangulation, complicating development of cohesive family relationships (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019).

Identity management within newly married Black American remarried couples is a dynamic and ongoing process as family members navigate their identities within the broader context of new family units. This process is shaped by cultural narratives

involving resilience and community solidarity, which influence how individuals perceived their roles and responsibilities (Anderson, 2019). Stepparents often grapple with maintaining their sense of self while integrating into families, balancing their identities as caregivers with personal and cultural identities (Brimhall, 2020). Similarly, children work to reconcile their loyalty to their biological parents with their growing relationships with stepparents, all while navigating societal expectations that might conflict with their evolving family identities (Ganong et al., 2022).

Successful identity management within blended families often involves establishing clear boundaries, engaging in open communication, and encouraging family members to express their perspectives and concerns (Willis et al., 2021). For newly married Black American couples, blending their lives is further complicated by the importance of maintaining their cultural identity while navigating new family dynamics. Balancing individual identity with collective family identity is crucial, enabling family members to feel secure and valued while fostering mutual respect and cohesion (Dyer, 2021).

Challenges faced by newly remarried Black American couples include role conflicts between stepparents and biological parents, difficulties involving sibling adjustment, and relational strains with extended family members (Bean et al., 2021; Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024). studies specifically addressing lived experiences of newly-married Black American couples in blended families are sparse. Notably, the few studies that focus on Black families often emphasized adverse outcomes, such as

heightened conflict or instability rather than exploring resilience, adaptive strategies, and culturally-grounded coping mechanisms. Furthermore, there had been limited exploration of how newly-married Black American couples navigate integration of cultural heritage and familial roles during the critical early years of blending.

This gap was particularly concerning given Black American families historically face additional stressors related to systemic inequities, socioeconomic challenges, and cultural stigmas associated with remarriage and blended family structures (Cross et al., 2022). Addressing this gap was essential to better understand unique dynamics within these couples and develop more culturally-responsive support practices involving counseling, social work, and family therapy. By examining lived experiences of spouses in families, practitioners could gain a deeper understanding of how resilience is cultivated and maintained despite structural challenges.

This study was necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of blended family dynamics by centering voices and experiences of newly-married Black American couples as they navigated these transitions. By examining how these families maintained communication, managed role expectations, and integrated cultural heritage, I aimed to offer practical insights for promoting family cohesion and stability. Findings contributed to family studies literature and supported development of culturally-relevant interventions that enhance wellbeing of newly-blended Black American families.

Findings include insights regarding self-awareness and emotional regulation for this population. For families, the study informed strategies for improved communication

and role negotiation. The research includes implications for counselors, educators, and policymakers to create programs and interventions that promote family resilience, cultural understanding, and unity within blended families.

In this chapter, I present the background of the study, summarize relevant literature, and identify the research problem and purpose. I also include the research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. The chapter concludes with a discussion of potential implications for positive social change and summary of main points of the chapter.

### **Background**

Blended families, also known as stepfamilies, are formed when one or both partners in a new marriage bring children from previous relationships into a new familial unit. These families are becoming increasingly common due to rising rates of divorce, remarriage, and non-marital partnerships involving children (Ganong et al., 2022). Blended families typically consist of biological parents, stepparents, biological children, and stepchildren, creating a unique family structure that differs significantly from traditional nuclear families. Forming a blended family requires the integration of diverse family cultures, parenting practices, and relational histories, making the adjustment process both challenging and dynamic (Brimhall, 2020).

Newly married Black American couples entering blended family dynamics with children face a distinct set of challenges shaped by cultural expectations, identity

management, and relational complexities. These families must navigate integrating new parental roles while encouraging cohesion among children from previous relationships. This dynamic often involves balancing authority with building trust, particularly for stepparents who need to form meaningful connections while respecting the pre-existing bonds between biological parents and their children (Dyer, 2021). Additionally, cultural values within Black American communities, such as the emphasis on family cohesion, collective identity, and respect for elders, add complexity to how these couples manage their blended family dynamics (Lopez & Bailey, 2022).

Understanding the emotional dynamics within these newly married Black American blended families requires acknowledging the complex interplay of relational patterns and identity management processes that shape family interactions. One critical aspect involved negotiating roles and responsibilities within the newly formed family structure. Stepparents must balance asserting authority with nurturing bonds, while biological parents work to maintain their established relationships with their children amid new marital dynamics (Ganong et al., 2022). This balancing act can become complicated when children express loyalty conflicts, struggling to accept a stepparent's role while maintaining a connection with their biological parent (Arat et al., 2023). These relational tensions can manifest as sibling rivalries, strained spousal communication, and difficulty establishing consistent parenting practices (Bean et al., 2021).

Relational patterns in these newly blended families often reflect past family dynamics, especially when children from previous relationships carry emotional baggage

from past conflicts or disruptions (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024). Additionally, extended family members may influence the family dynamic by reinforcing traditional roles or expressing concerns about the new family structure. The influence of extended family members can lead to triangulation and complicate the development of cohesive family relationships (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019).

Identity management within newly married Black American blended families is a dynamic and ongoing process as family members navigate their identities within the broader context of the new family unit. The process is shaped by cultural narratives of resilience and community solidarity, which significantly influence how individuals perceive their roles and responsibilities (Anderson, 2019). Wood and Wiggins (2021) emphasized the impact of racial and cultural identity on stepfamily integration and success, noting that an acknowledgment of cultural values enhances role clarity and relational expectations. Houston and Buzzanell (2020) highlighted the importance of communication in fostering family resilience, particularly in communities grappling with systemic challenges.

Furthermore, Lee et al. (2023) explored how trauma-informed, sociocultural sensitive therapy recognizes intergenerational resilience as a protective factor in Black families, influencing both relational roles and coping strategies. Stepparents often grapple with maintaining their sense of self while integrating into the family, balancing their identity as caregivers with their existing personal and cultural identities (Brimhall, 2020). Similarly, children must reconcile their loyalty to their biological parent with their

growing relationship with the stepparent, all while navigating societal expectations that may conflict with their evolving family identity (Ganong et al., 2022).

Research indicates that successful identity management within blended families often involves establishing clear boundaries, having open communication, and encouraging each family member to express their perspectives and concerns (Willis et al., 2021). For newly married Black American couples, this process is further complicated by the necessity of preserving cultural identity while adapting to new family structures. Balancing individual identities with the collective family identity is essential, as it allows family members to feel secure and valued while promoting mutual respect and cohesion (Dyer, 2021).

Existing literature frequently emphasizes the challenges encountered by blended families, including role conflicts between stepparents and biological parents, difficulties in sibling adjustment, and relational strains with extended family members. Bean et al. (2021) highlights how the complexity of remarried families characterized by stepparent dynamics, former partners, and multi-household living arrangements can strain marital stability and complicate family cohesion. Similarly, Ganong et al. (2019) discuss how discrepancies in expectations between stepparents and biological parents often lead to unclear boundaries and inconsistent parenting practices, which contribute to tension and instability within the family.

The challenges related to sibling adjustment are also well-documented. Landon et al. (2022) further explain how boundary issues and perceived interferences among

stepsiblings can create persistent conflict that undermines family unity. Additionally, Fiori et al. (2020) emphasize that strained relationships with extended family members, particularly in-laws, can exacerbate marital discord due to differing perceptions of closeness and involvement. (Lopez & Bailey, 2022; Dyer, 2021) support this assertion by demonstrating that extended family members can either facilitate or complicate the integration process in African American blended families, depending on their level of acceptance and engagement. These studies reveal the multifaceted relational challenges that remarried families must navigate.

However, studies specifically addressing the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples in blended families are sparse. Notably, the few studies that do focus on Black families often emphasize adverse outcomes, such as heightened conflict or instability, rather than exploring resilience, adaptive strategies, and culturally grounded coping mechanisms (Lopez & Bailey, 2022). Additionally, there is a limited exploration of how newly married Black American couples navigate the integration of cultural heritage and familial roles during the critical early years of blending.

This gap is particularly concerning given that Black American families historically face additional stressors related to systemic inequities, socioeconomic challenges, and cultural stigmas associated with remarriage and blended family structures (Cross et al., 2022). Addressing this gap is crucial because understanding the unique dynamics within newly married Black American blended families can lead to more culturally responsive support practices in counseling, social work, and family therapy.

Additionally, examining the lived experiences of individuals in newly blended families provides practitioners with insights into how resilience is cultivated and maintained despite structural challenges.

This study provided a more inclusive understanding of blended family dynamics by centering the voices and experiences of newly married Black American couples navigating these transitions. Examining how these families maintain communication, manage role expectations, and integrate cultural heritage, this research offered practical insights for promoting family cohesion and stability. The findings will contribute to family studies literature and support the development of culturally relevant interventions that enhance the well-being of newly blended Black American families.

### **Problem Statement**

Newly blended Black American families with children often faced significant challenges in the early years after remarriage. These included managing complex dynamics such as navigating spousal relationships, co-parenting children from prior relationships, handling sibling conflicts, and maintaining positive ties with extended family. Although blended families were becoming more common, researchers had not thoroughly examined these challenges specifically within newly blended Black American families during the first six years of remarriage. Gaining insight into individuals' experiences in these families provided a clearer understanding of how these issues showed up and impacted family dynamics, adaptability, and overall harmony (Ganong et al., 2022; Turner et al., 2021). Despite the growing number of blended families, a notable

gap existed in research focused on the experiences of newly married Black American couples as they integrated children from previous relationships. Most existing work addressed the challenges of blended families broadly, often missing the unique cultural, social, and relational factors affecting

Black American families (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023; Wood & Wiggins, 2021). As a result, the complex ways these families adjusted to new roles, managed relationships, and maintained cohesion were still underexplored. Turner (2021) pointed out the challenges during the first year of blending, like integrating different family dynamics, establishing routines, and nurturing relationships within the new family. However, Turner's study didn't specifically focus on Black American families, leaving a gap in understanding how race and culture influenced these experiences. Recent studies, such as Schrodtt (2021), highlighted the importance of examining how perceptions of stepfamily functioning affected adjustment, especially among diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Jensen et al. (2021) also suggested more research into how stepfamily quality linked to child adjustment across various family structures. While these studies highlighted the importance of understanding family dynamics, they didn't fully explore the lived experiences of Black American families during those early remarriage years. Addressing this was crucial since the initial years of blending shape relationship patterns and long-term family cohesion (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024).

Other research indicated that family stressors like role conflicts between stepparents and biological parents, sibling rivalries, and inconsistent parenting could

destabilize blended families if not managed well (Bean et al., 2021). Yet, most literature focused on challenges faced mainly by White or racially mixed families without addressing the specific cultural context of Black American couples. Dyer (2021) emphasized differentiation and triangulation in understanding family dynamics but didn't explicitly explore how these played out within the cultural framework of Black American families. The conceptual model was supported by Cross et al. (2022), who noted that Black American families often face additional stressors due to systemic inequalities, economic hardships, and cultural stigma surrounding remarriage and blended families. Without understanding how these factors intersected with family dynamics during those early years, practitioners couldn't create culturally responsive interventions. This gap highlighted a lack of studies and underscored the need for practical guidance based on the real experiences of Black American blended families. Addressing this was vital for advancing family studies, especially within psychology, where understanding family dynamics helps shape therapeutic approaches and support systems.

This study supported filling that gap by exploring the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples as they managed blending family life during the first six years of marriage. By focusing on communication, sibling relationships, and connections with in-laws, the research offered valuable academic and practical insights. The results helped develop culturally sensitive approaches in counseling, social work, and family therapy, giving practitioners better tools to support Black American blended families. The study's emphasis on the real experiences of these couples helped deepen

understanding of how such families build resilience, foster harmony, and develop cultural identity in remarriage. By providing a detailed look at their challenges and coping strategies, the research bridged existing gaps and offered practical suggestions to promote positive family outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples as they navigated the complexities of blended family dynamics with children from previous relationships. The purpose of the research was to understand how these couples experienced and managed the challenges associated with forming new familial connections and adjusting to their new roles within the blended family structure. The primary focus of this study examined the relational dynamics, communication patterns, and role negotiations that occurred during the early years of remarriage, which are often marked by heightened complexity and the need for adaptation (Turner et al., 2021; Bean et al., 2021).

Exploring the personal narratives of these couples, the study captured the essence of their experiences and how they perceived, interpreted, and navigated their blended family journeys. This focus was particularly relevant given that newly remarried couples, especially within Black American communities, encountered unique cultural and social challenges that impact family cohesion and stability (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023; Wood & Wiggins, 2021). The phenomenon of interest was understanding how these families developed relational harmony, managed parental and spousal roles, and

established supportive relationships with children and extended family members during the formative first six years of blending.

### **Research Question**

The research question guiding this study is: What are the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics with children?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The conceptual framework that grounds this study was Bowen's family systems theory. This theory was well-suited for examining the lived experiences of newly married Black American remarried couples with children. It aligned with the research objectives and provided an understanding of the emotional dynamics, relational patterns, and identity management processes characteristic of blended families. Bowen's theory emphasized the preservation of individual identities within a family system while navigating complex relational interactions. This focus is particularly relevant for families integrating new parental figures and children from diverse prior relationships (Willis et al., 2021).

Bowen's family systems theory suggested that families operated as emotional units, wherein the behavior of one member can significantly affect the entire system. Understanding family dynamics from this perspective requires examining how members respond to stress, conflict, and changes in relational roles (Bowen, 1978). Within this theoretical framework, two key concepts were central to this study: differentiation of self

and triangulation. These concepts were selected because they directly addressed the challenges that newly blended Black American families often encounter as they form new relational bonds and adjust to complex family structures.

Differentiation of self, a core concept in Bowen's theory, refers to maintaining one's identity while remaining emotionally connected to the family unit. It is crucial for individuals within blended families, as the integration process often brings conflicting loyalties and role expectations. In blended families, members demonstrating higher levels of differentiation are better equipped to manage relational tensions and establish stable connections, even when faced with familial conflicts (Dyer, 2021). For newly married Black American couples, achieving differentiation is essential as they build marital cohesion while nurturing their roles as parents and stepparents. As Willis et al. (2021) note, maintaining a distinct sense of self amidst relational stress helps promote healthier family interactions and mitigates the risk of dependency or emotional enmeshment.

Triangulation, another fundamental concept in Bowen's theory, involved a three-person relationship that can alleviate stress but may also perpetuate conflict. Bowen suggested that triangles are the most stable relational configuration within families because they can manage stress more effectively than dyadic relationships. However, excessive reliance on triangulation as a coping mechanism can exacerbate familial discord rather than resolve it (Willis et al., 2021). In the context of newly blended Black American families, triangulation often manifests when children, parents, and stepparents become entangled in relational conflicts, potentially leading to divided loyalties and

heightened family tension (Ganong et al., 2022). Understanding how triangulation functions within these family structures is critical to identifying strategies for promoting family stability and cohesion.

Bowen's family systems theory provided a relevant contextual lens for this qualitative study because it framed family behavior as interconnected and systemically influenced. This perspective was essential for examining how newly married Black American couples integrate new familial roles and relationships. The study's research questions and data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, were designed to capture the lived experiences of these families, focusing on how they navigate emotional stressors and relational challenges.

The emphasis on differentiation and triangulation guided the development of interview questions aimed at uncovering how couples balanced personal identity with relational integration and addressed conflict within the blended family context. Additionally, data analysis focused on identifying themes related to role negotiation, spousal communication, and managing extended family influences, all of which are critical to understanding the dynamics of newly blended Black American families (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024).

This study applied Bowen's family systems theory to explore how newly married Black American couples handled the challenges of blended family life. It emphasized the roles of differentiation and triangulation in understanding how spouses navigated changing roles, parenting duties, and extended family relationships during the early years of

remarriage. These concepts helped explain how couples cope with emotional stress, establish boundaries, and work towards building stable relationships within their new family structure.

The findings contributed to family studies by highlighting how these processes supported the development and stability of blended families. By focusing on the lived experiences of Black American remarried couples, this study helped fill a gap in existing research. The results also offered practical insights that informed family therapy and counseling, identifying strategies that enhanced relationship development, communication, and family adjustment. Additional details about the theoretical framework were included in Chapter Two.

### **Nature of the Study**

The study used a generic qualitative design grounded in qualitative research methods to explore the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics with children from previous relationships. This design was selected for its flexibility, allowing for the exploration of complex human experiences without the constraints of more traditional qualitative methods, such as phenomenology or grounded theory (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The method enabled the collection of descriptive data and allowed the researcher to capture individuals' experiences within blended family contexts.

The phenomenon that was investigated was the lived experience of newly married Black American couples who had formed blended families. The focus was on

understanding how these couples integrated into family life, adjusted to parenting roles, managed relationships, and built cohesion during the early years of remarriage. Blended families faced challenges integrating family cultures, negotiating parenting roles, and developing relationships between biological and stepchildren (Bean et al., 2021). For Black American couples, these challenges were influenced by cultural expectations, societal perceptions, and systemic issues affecting family stability (Anderson, 2019). Exploring these experiences provided insights into the strategies and dynamics that shaped their family relationships.

Data were collected through purposeful sampling to select one spouse from newly married Black American couples who had formed blended families and had been married for six years or less. The data collection process involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the chosen spouse to gain insights into their experiences regarding family integration, communication, and relational challenges. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility during the interviews, enabling the exploration of emerging themes as the spouse shared their narrative.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with systematic coding of the interview transcripts to identify recurring codes and patterns. These codes were grouped into broader categories, leading to emerging themes that developed an interpretive framework reflecting the relational dynamics within the blended family context. Thematic analysis was suitable for this study, as it helped identify and interpret key themes based on participants' narratives (Willis et al., 2021).

By employing these methods, the study aimed to provide insights into the experiences of newly married Black American couples in blended families. The findings contributed to a better understanding of how these couples managed family integration, handled relational challenges, and developed resilient family systems during the early years of remarriage. This knowledge was helpful for family studies scholars, social workers, and practitioners who supported blended families in developing effective strategies.

### **Definitions**

*Blended families:* Blended families, a term frequently used as a synonym for stepfamilies, are families that are formed when a biological parent cohabits with or marries a partner who is not the biological parent of his/her child (Nixon & Hadfield, 2016).

*Biological Children:* Children genetically related to one or both parents, born through natural conception or assisted reproductive technologies (Ganong & Coleman, 2019).

*Biological Parents:* The mother and/or father are genetically related to their child through natural conception or assisted reproductive technologies (Ganong & Coleman, 2019).

*Stepchild:* A child born to or legally adopted by one spouse or partner who becomes part of a blended family through remarriage or union (Bean et al., 2021).

*Stepmother:* A woman who becomes a parental figure to her spouse's or partner's children from a previous relationship (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023).

*Stepfather:* A man who becomes a parental figure to his spouse's or partner's children from a previous relationship (Ganong et al., 2022).

*Step Siblings:* Children from previous relationships of one or both partners in a blended family who are not biologically related to each other but become siblings through the marriage or union of their parents (Landon et al., 2022).

*Step grandparents:* The parents of a stepparent who take on a grandparental role in the lives of their stepchildren's offspring (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019).

*In-laws:* Are family members acquired through marriage (Ganong et al., 2022).

### **Assumptions**

Qualitative research was guided by philosophical assumptions that shaped how data were interpreted and presented. In studying blended Black American families, these assumptions were crucial as they provided a framework for understanding the lived experiences of family members who navigated the complexities of blended family dynamics (Durdella, 2020; Anderson, 2019; Bates & Bates, 2022). As a Black American who had been a stepchild, a stepparent, a stepsibling, and a step-grandchild, I brought a unique insider perspective to this study, enriching the interpretation of experiences with personal insights. This positionality allowed me to deeply understand how relationships were perceived and managed within blended families, especially when cultural factors and social expectations intersected (Anderson, 2019; Bates & Bates, 2022).

The ontological assumption in qualitative research posited that reality was socially constructed and subjective (Durdella, 2020). This was particularly relevant when examining blended families, as family members' perceptions of roles, relationships, and identities were inherently shaped by their unique experiences (Arat et al., 2023). In my journey through various blended family roles, I had witnessed how perspectives on family cohesion and parental authority varied significantly, depending on the context and relational history (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024).

Epistemologically, qualitative research was based on the belief that knowledge emerged through interactions between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I assumed that the insights into blended family dynamics were co-constructed through the shared narratives of participants (Brimhall, 2020). Having navigated relationships as a stepchild, stepparent, stepsibling, and step-grandchild, I understood how perspectives were shaped through dialogue and lived experience (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019). This epistemological foundation was essential because it allowed for a focus on the importance of context-specific, in-depth discussions to capture the authentic voices of blended Black American families (Ganong et al., 2019).

The axiological assumption acknowledged that the researcher's values and biases inevitably influenced the research process (Anderson, 2019). Given my personal experiences within blended families, I recognized that my interpretations were influenced by my history of navigating multiple familial roles (Bean et al., 2020). This awareness

was critical to maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process. Acknowledging these biases ensured that I remained mindful of how my background as a stepchild, stepparent, stepsibling, and step-grandchild could have shaped my interpretation of the selected spouses' narratives (Bean et al., 2021). By actively engaging in self-reflection, I strived to balance my insider perspective with an objective analysis of the data (Anderson, 2019).

Methodologically, qualitative research assumed that the process was flexible and iterative, allowing for adaptation as new insights emerged (Patton, 2015). The use of semi-structured interviews in this study aligned with this principle by providing the spouse with the space to share their stories in their own words (Brimhall, 2020). My experiences with blended families highlighted the need for patience, understanding, and open communication to build strong relationships.

These assumptions were necessary because they aligned with the study's goal of exploring the complex, multifaceted experiences of blended Black American families (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024). Embracing these perspectives ensured that the research accurately reflected the spouse's voice while acknowledging the cultural and social contexts that influenced their family dynamics (Arat et al., 2023). Without these assumptions, the study risked oversimplifying the complex realities of blended family life, particularly within the Black American community (Anderson, 2019). Incorporating my blended family experiences enriched the analysis, providing a deeper understanding

of how individuals perceived and navigated their roles within these dynamic family structures (Bates & Bates, 2022).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The research problem addressed in this study centered on understanding the lived experiences of newly blended Black American families during the critical first six years of formation. These families often faced unique challenges related to spousal communication, sibling conflict, in-law involvement, and the broader sociocultural context that shaped family dynamics (Ganong et al., 2022; Anderson, 2019). The focus on newly blended Black American families was chosen because this demographic had historically been underrepresented in family studies, particularly in research examining the intersections of race, culture, and family blending (Arat et al., 2023). By exploring the complexities these families faced, the study aimed to address a critical gap in the literature, providing insights that informed practitioners in counseling, social work, and family therapy to better support these families during their early years of integration (Bates & Bates, 2022).

The study specifically included newly married Black American couples with children from previous relationships, focusing on families who had been blended for no more than six years. The qualified married person was selected to ensure diversity regarding socio-economic background and family structure. This focus allowed for an in-depth examination of the varied experiences within this demographic (Ganong et al., 2019). Excluded from the study were couples from other racial or ethnic groups, as the

focus was on the unique sociocultural dynamics present within Black American families. Additionally, blended families that had been established for more than six years were omitted, as their experiences may have differed significantly from those in the early stages of family blending. The study also excluded single-parent households and families without a remarriage context, as the dynamics in such families differed substantially from those of newly blended families.

While this study utilized Bowen's family systems theory to explore family dynamics, other theoretical frameworks, such as Attachment Theory and Social Exchange Theory, were not explored in depth. While relevant to family studies, these theories did not directly align with the focus on how sociocultural factors influenced family blending in Black American families (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024). The study did not investigate long-term outcomes beyond the first six years of blending, as the emphasis was on the formative phase of relationship building and family cohesion.

The findings of this study were transferable to other contexts involving blended families, especially those within similar urban, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds. However, caution had to be exercised when generalizing to blended families from other racial or cultural groups, as the unique experiences of Black American families were deeply rooted in specific sociocultural and historical contexts (Anderson, 2019). Practitioners working with blended families from different backgrounds could draw parallels in family dynamics but were encouraged to consider cultural tones when applying the study's findings.

### **Limitations**

This study acknowledged limitations related to its design and methodology. As a purposive qualitative study, the findings reflected the lived experiences of a specific group of newly married Black American spouses with children from previous relationships. While this approach enabled a rich, in-depth understanding, it limited transferability. The unique family dynamics and cultural contexts of participants might not have represented the experiences of all remarried couples or blended families in different settings (Durdella, 2020; Ganong et al., 2019). Dependability was also affected by the interpretive nature of qualitative research, where maintaining consistency in the research process could be challenging, even with a structured interview guide (Cropley, 2019). Biases could have influenced the outcomes.

Researcher bias was a concern, as the researcher's cultural background, values, or prior experiences may have shaped question framing and response interpretation (Raley & Sweeney, 2020). Social desirability bias was another issue, as participants might have presented their families in a positive light, especially when discussing challenges related to parenting, communication, or remarriage (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023). To address these limitations, thick description was used to provide detailed context around participant experiences, helping readers evaluate whether the findings applied to other families or situations (Durdella, 2020). An audit trail was kept to document research decisions, procedures, and coding steps, promoting transparency and dependability (Cropley, 2019). Member checking was utilized to verify the accuracy of

participants' responses and ensure that their experiences were accurately interpreted. These strategies enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings and helped minimize the influence of bias on the study's results.

### **Significance**

The significance of this study lay in its contribution to addressing the gap in the family studies literature by focusing on the lived experiences of newly blended Black American families during their first six years of integration. Despite a growing body of research on blended families, there remained a notable lack of studies specifically examining the unique dynamics within Black American blended families, particularly during the early formative years when family roles, relationships, and cohesion were actively being established (Ganong et al., 2022; Anderson, 2019). This study sought to expand scholarly understanding by exploring how these families' navigated challenges related to spousal communication, sibling dynamics, in-law relationships, and the intersection of cultural factors that shaped family interactions. By employing a qualitative research approach grounded in Bowen's family systems theory, the study provided an interpretive and context-rich analysis of family experiences, thereby enriching the discourse on family integration and adaptation within diverse family structures (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024).

One of the primary contributions of this study was its potential to advance theoretical knowledge within the discipline by highlighting how blended Black American families developed adaptive strategies during their formative years. Existing studies had

predominantly focused on blended families from a generalized or predominantly White perspective, overlooking the unique cultural and social contexts faced by Black American families (Brimhall, 2020). By centering the voices and experiences of Black American family members, this study aimed to challenge prevailing assumptions and broaden the theoretical scope of family studies. The insights gained from this research deepened the understanding of how cultural identity is intersected with family blending, offering a more inclusive framework for analyzing diverse family structures (Arat et al., 2023).

In addition to its theoretical contributions, the study had practical implications for counseling, social work, and family therapy. The research offered practitioners valuable insights into the challenges and strengths inherent in these family systems by documenting the lived realities of newly blended Black American families. Practitioners could use these findings to develop culturally responsive interventions that enhanced communication, addressed sibling conflict, and supported stepparent-stepchild relationships. This evidence-based approach helped practitioners tailor interventions to meet the specific needs of Black American families, providing more effective and supportive therapeutic outcomes (Landon et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the study's findings could have influenced policy by advocating for family support programs within community mental health services that recognized the cultural dimensions of family blending. Such programs could have included workshops on communication skills, culturally sensitive parenting practices, and conflict resolution

strategies tailored to the experiences of newly blended Black American families (Bean et al., 2021).

The implications for positive social change were grounded in the study's potential to challenge negative stereotypes and deficit-based narratives surrounding Black American blended families. By highlighting stories of resilience, adaptation, and successful integration, the study promoted a strengths-based perspective that empowered families to embrace their unique dynamics. This research not only validated the experiences of blended families but also encouraged awareness within communities about the diversity of family structures and the importance of cultural context in understanding family resilience. The dissemination of the study's findings through academic publications, community workshops, and practitioner seminars bridged the gap between research and practice, promoting culturally competent support and advocacy for blended families within Black American communities (Bates & Bates, 2022).

The study's significance lay in its potential to influence academic and practical domains by advancing knowledge, guiding practice, and promoting positive social change. By focusing on the lived experiences of newly blended Black American families, the study contributed to an understanding of family dynamics and supported efforts to develop more inclusive and culturally responsive family support systems.

### **Summary**

Based on reviews of the prior literature, it was evident that newly blended Black American families faced unique challenges during the initial years of family integration.

The complexities associated with spousal communication, sibling conflict, in-law involvement, and the intersection of socio-cultural factors significantly influenced the dynamics within these families (Ganong et al., 2022; Anderson, 2019). This study addressed the family studies gap by focusing on Black American families' lived experiences blending within the first six years, providing insights that informed both academic discourse and practical applications (Bates & Bates, 2022).

By adopting a qualitative approach grounded in Bowen's family systems theory, the study aimed to co-construct an understanding of how family members navigated these challenges. The theoretical foundation highlighted the importance of differentiation of self, triangulation, and multigenerational transmission of behaviors, emphasizing how families maintained cohesion while honoring individual identities (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024). Through in-depth interviews, this research captured the diverse perspectives of family members and offered a richer comprehension of the adaptive strategies and resilience displayed by these families during their formative years (Brimhall, 2020).

The study's contributions extended beyond theoretical advancements, as the findings helped guide practitioners in developing culturally responsive interventions tailored to blended Black American families. By addressing these families' specific challenges, practitioners were able to enhance communication strategies, reduce sibling conflicts, and help create better relationships between stepparents and stepchildren (Arat et al., 2023). Policy implications included advocating for family support programs that

addressed the needs of Black blended families, promoting stronger family bonds and community cohesion (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023).

The study also promoted positive social change by challenging stereotypes about Black American blended families, highlighting their resilience and adaptability. The study empowered families by sharing real-life narratives and contextualizing them within cultural frameworks, validating their experiences and providing practical strategies for overcoming challenges. These insights informed family therapy practices and encouraged social initiatives that supported blended families within the Black community (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019).

This chapter outlined the research problem and its significance, presented the theoretical framework guiding the study, and discussed the methodological approach for examining the experiences of newly blended Black American families. The chapter also addressed the practical and social implications of the research, emphasizing the potential for strengthening positive social change through better understanding and support of blended families. Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive literature review, examining existing studies and theoretical perspectives related to family blending, cultural identity, and adaptation processes within Black American families.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The issue in this study was lack of understanding regarding how Black American couples in newly-blended families experienced the first 6 years of remarriage. The purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences of these couples as they navigated dynamics of blended families, which included communication, coparenting, sibling relationships, and involvement from extended family.

Common challenges involve role ambiguity, communication breakdowns, sibling rivalry, and relational strains with extended family members (Bean et al., 2021; Ganong et al., 2022). This left a limited understanding of how Black American families experienced these dynamics during the critical early years of remarriage. Cultural values, systemic factors, and community expectations significantly shape family interactions, making culturally-specific research essential for advancing family studies and informing effective practice.

This chapter includes a comprehensive review of literature related to the topic. I begin with an explanation of the literature search strategy, followed by a discussion of Bowen's family systems theory. Next, I synthesize research related to key topics such as spousal communication, sibling dynamics, in-law relationships, coparenting practices, and cultural influences on blended family functioning. The chapter concludes with a summary of gaps in literature and purpose and significance of this study.

Blended families, particularly within Black American communities, navigate a complex array of challenges shaped by racial identity, systemic inequities, and cultural

expectations. Integration of diverse households into a cohesive unit necessitates careful consideration of emotional complexities associated with stepparenting and coparenting. In this context, it is crucial to acknowledge unique emotional histories and lived experiences of children transitioning between different family structures as they adjust to new dynamics within blended families .

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To examine dynamics of blended families, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken using the following databases: Google Scholar, Walden University Library, SAGE Journals, and JSTOR. Key terms were *blended families, spousal communication, in-laws, sibling conflict, conflict among children, parents, remarried families, stepmothers, stepfathers, stepchildren, Black American stepfamilies, Black American family dynamics, roles of Black American stepparents, parenting in Black stepfamilies, intergenerational relationships in Black American blended families, and Black marriage*. These terms were carefully selected to ensure a comprehensive exploration of challenges and experiences encountered by blended families particularly concerning communication dynamics, conflict resolution, and familial roles.

I focused on both qualitative and quantitative research with a special emphasis on studies that explored family adjustment, sibling relationships, and the influence of in-laws within blended family settings. My search strategy was crafted to address a wide range of perspectives, thereby cultivating a holistic understanding of intricate family dynamics in blended households, especially during the crucial first 6 years of adjustment.

This approach enabled identification of diverse literary sources, enriching breadth and depth of the study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework guiding this study was Bowen's family systems theory, which involves the family as an emotional unit where individual behaviors are best understood within family interactions. Bowen's family systems theory includes eight core concepts, and I focused on triangulation and differentiation. I selected these two concepts because they were most relevant to experiences of newly-married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics. Triangulation was used to explain how emotional tensions between spouses could be diverted or complicated by interactions with children, former partners, or extended family members. Differentiation was necessary to understanding how individuals maintained their sense of self while staying emotionally connected to others within family systems. By focusing on these two concepts, I closely examined how couples managed conflicts, set boundaries, and responded to family stress during early years of remarriage. This was central to formation and stability of blended families and supported my goal of understanding how spouses adapted to complex relational roles. I addressed emotional processes that affected family functioning.

. Keller and Noone (2020) stated triangulation disrupts communication and contributes to ongoing emotional strain within families. Willis et al. (2021) found unresolved triangulation impacts marital stability, while higher levels of differentiation

support more constructive relationship patterns. I used triangulation and differentiation to interpret how newly married Black American spouses experienced the early years of remarriage, offering insights regarding how emotional dynamics influenced family relationships and long-term stability.

Bowen introduced eight core concepts that explained how family members relate to each other within a system. These concepts were differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, emotional cutoff, sibling position theory, and societal emotional process.

Differentiation of self refers to the ability to maintain one's identity while being emotionally connected to families. Family members with poor differentiation of self-rely on approval of specific others. Those with good differentiation of self can navigate among family members and stay calm in the face of family conflicts.

Triangles refer to three-person dynamics within family systems, and Bowen considered triangles to be the most stable of relationships. Families function as emotional units, and understanding these dynamics requires examining how members respond to stress, conflict, and relational changes (Bowen, 1978).

The nuclear family emotional system includes emotional patterns within families involving marital conflict or dysfunction which influence overall family stability. It involves how unresolved emotional issues between partners can impact entire family units.

The family projection process describes how parents pass on their emotional challenges to their children, leading to intergenerational behavior patterns. This process often involves the transmission of anxiety and unresolved emotional issues. A drawback is that children may develop similar emotional or relational challenges (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024).

Multigenerational transmission process examines how patterns of behavior and emotional functioning are transmitted across generations. These patterns often reflect long-standing family dynamics that persist through parental influence. Understanding this process helps identify long-term relational patterns affecting current family dynamics (Arat et al., 2023).

Emotional cutoff refers to the way family members emotionally distance themselves from managing unresolved conflicts or anxiety. This distancing is often a coping mechanism to reduce relational stress. However, it can result in isolation and weaken family cohesion (Brimhall, 2020).

Sibling position theory suggests that an individual's birth order can influence personality traits and relational behaviors. Sibling roles within the family structure shape how they interact and build relationships. This concept helps explain the dynamics between siblings and their impact on family functioning (Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017).

Societal emotional process acknowledges the influence of societal factors, such as cultural expectations and social pressures, on family dynamics. These external influences

can shape how family's function and cope with stress. Recognizing this process provides a broader context for understanding family challenges (Keller & Noone, 2020).

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples as they navigated the complexities of blended family dynamics with children from previous relationships. The purpose of the research was to understand how these couples experienced and managed the challenges associated with forming new familial connections and adjusting to their new roles within the blended family structure. The primary focus of this study was to examine the relational dynamics, communication patterns, and role negotiations that occurred during the early years of remarriage, which were often marked by heightened complexity and the need for adaptation (Turner et al., 2021; Bean et al., 2021).

In this chapter, I presented the research method employed to investigate the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples as they navigated the complexities of blended family dynamics that involved children from prior relationships. Utilizing a qualitative methodology with a generic qualitative design, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these couples interpreted and described their blended family experiences, particularly related to communication, role negotiation, emotional adjustment, and the integration of children from previous relationships. Guided by Bowen's family systems theory, this study focused on the core concepts of differentiation and triangulation to explore how spouses managed emotional boundaries,

navigated relational tensions, and maintained individual identity while remaining connected within the family system.

The study utilized purposeful sampling to assemble a diverse group of remarried Black American couples with children, purposefully including one participant from each couple. This approach ensured a variety of experiences and perspectives while highlighting each individual's unique insights within the family dynamic. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, enabling participants to share detailed narratives about their experiences. By utilizing this data source, the study aimed to capture personal insights and the evolving dynamics of family relationships, ultimately enhancing understanding of how individuals within blended families navigated changes over time.

Kostere and Kostere's (2022) thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes within the collected data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how participants experienced, interpreted, and responded to the challenges and successes in their blended families. Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed, focusing on informed consent, confidentiality, and the emotional well-being of participants. Throughout the research process, the study maintained a reflexive stance to ensure that participants' voices were authentically represented while being sensitive to the complexities inherent in family relationships. Lastly, I presented the summary of the main points of this chapter.

Understanding these concepts was vital as blended families often faced challenges related to relationship dynamics, especially in newly formed marriages where

establishing stable patterns of communication and relational boundaries was crucial (Čepukienė & Neophytou, 2024). This study aimed to explore how newly blended Black American families developed resilience and navigated relational complexities, thus addressing a gap in the existing literature on the intersection of race, family dynamics, and remarriage (Anderson, 2019).

The Bowen Family Systems Theory served as a comprehensive framework for analyzing the intricate dynamics present in newly blended Black American families with children. This theoretical approach acknowledged the unique challenges these families encountered, which stemmed from factors such as racial identity, systemic inequities, and cultural expectations operating within a complex societal context. As noted by Brimhall (2020), Bowen's theory was particularly apt for examining how individual and family identities were upheld while navigating the relational dynamics typical of blended families.

The process of combining two distinct households into one cohesive family unit demanded careful attention to the emotional complexities associated with roles like stepparenting and co-parenting. Moreover, it required relationships among children from different family backgrounds, each bringing their emotional histories and experiences into the newly formed family dynamic (Arat et al., 2023).

Additionally, the framework underlined the importance of situating emotional interactions within their historical and cultural contexts. For Black families, this entailed acknowledging generational resilience and adaptability, noting the profound strength that

had historically enabled them to overcome challenges (Anderson, 2019). Incorporating an understanding of resilience and cultural heritage allowed blended families to have a sense of pride and belonging, equipping them to thrive in the face of external pressures and societal hurdles (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023).

The theory's emphasis on intergenerational transmission of behaviors was also relevant for understanding how blended Black American families managed relational challenges. As indicated by Čepukienė and Neophytou (2024), familial patterns, both positive and negative, were often transmitted across generations. In the context of blended families, this manifested as inherited coping mechanisms or communication styles that affected the formation and maintenance of new relationships. Recognizing these patterns enabled families to consciously disrupt cycles of dysfunction while promoting healthier relational practices.

The culturally in-tuned application of Bowen Family Systems Theory transcended the resolution of family-specific issues, extending to a broader sociocultural perspective that influenced Black families. By prioritizing resilience, emotional well-being, and cultural identity, this framework provided newly blended families with practical tools to fortify familial bonds, enhance quality of life, and navigate the complexities unique to their family dynamics (Lee et al., 2023). Through this holistic lens, the theory nurtured an environment where family members could support each other while recognizing and valuing their unique experiences and cultural identities as integral components of the blended family narrative (Jabbari et al., 2023).

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

Research on the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics with children has grown significantly. Central to these studies is the exploration of communication patterns, sibling dynamics, role negotiation, and cultural identity within blended families. Bowen's family systems theory is a widely adopted framework due to its focus on relational and emotional processes within family systems (Keller & Noone, 2020). This theory is particularly relevant when examining how family members manage emotional connections while maintaining individual identities. Differentiation of self, one of the core concepts, is crucial for maintaining personal autonomy while forming new family bonds (Dyer, 2021).

#### **Spousal Communication in Blended Families**

In blended families, effective communication between spouses was crucial for navigating the complexities of family dynamics. Cultural and socio-economic pressures often added layers of difficulty to this communication in Black American households, particularly regarding issues such as parenting. Parenting within Black American blended families necessitated a significant level of collaboration between biological parents and stepparents to create a cohesive and supportive environment for children. Various factors complicated this process, including racial disparities, financial strain, and differing parenting philosophies. Racial discrimination, a longstanding issue for Black American families, had a profound impact on family dynamics, often leading to increased stress, depressive symptoms, and relational conflicts. This environment hindered effective

parenting and diminished emotional closeness between parents and stepparents, making collaboration more challenging (Su et al., 2018).

Financial stress constituted another critical factor, frequently resulting in marital conflict and harsher parenting practices. Economic hardships overwhelmed Black families, reducing parents' emotional availability, which negatively affected the parent-child bond and overall family cohesion (Su et al., 2018). Additionally, differing parenting philosophies between biological parents and stepparents were commonplace in blended families. This was particularly challenging within Black American families, where cultural values emphasized respect for elders and the importance of familial unity. Such differences created tension among partners, stepparents, and extended family members as they navigated their new roles (Su et al., 2018).

Cross et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of considering structural racism and heteropatriarchy in understanding family dynamics and their influence on child outcomes. These societal structures hindered the ability of parents and stepparents to collaborate effectively, adding another layer of complexity to parenting in Black American blended families. For these families to flourish, biological parents and stepparents needed to engage in open communication, respect one another's roles, and share parenting responsibilities, all while addressing the broader systemic pressures stemming from racism and financial hardship (Cross et al., 2022).

According to Jensen and Ganong (2020), open and transparent communication was essential for nurturing mutual understanding of family roles and responsibilities.

When communication was lacking, it led to mismatched expectations, resulting in increased tension in both spousal and parent-child relationships. Jensen and Ganong (2020) further argued that communication within these families had to strike a balance between individual needs and overarching family values, significantly influencing daily interactions and long-term family decisions.

### **In-Law/Extended Family Challenges**

The role of in-laws and extended family members was pivotal in influencing the dynamics of Black American blended families. These relationships often provided essential emotional and practical support, encompassing financial assistance, childcare, and cultural guidance, which significantly enhanced family life. For example, grandparents stepped in to assist with childcare during parents' work hours, offering not only practical support but also beneficial intergenerational bonding and cultural transmission (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023). The support from extended family was instrumental in establishing stability within blended families, particularly during the initial phases of forming new family units (Fiori et al., 2020).

Conversely, these relationships were also a source of tension, especially when differing views on parenting styles, disciplinary methods, and family responsibilities arose. Such conflicts often stemmed from divergent cultural backgrounds or generational values, leading to misunderstandings that strained relationships. Research conducted by Ganong et al. (2020) indicated that when extended family members maintained

traditional perspectives that clashed with new family dynamics, discord and resistance ensued, especially when stepparents introduced new parenting practices.

The integration of a stepparent into an established family unit further complicated these dynamics, as pre-existing family roles were often disrupted. Studies showed that when in-laws were deeply involved, they sometimes unintentionally undermined the authority of the stepparent, resulting in conflicts that challenged both the couple's relationship and their broader familial connections (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019). Tensions often escalated when extended family members expressed loyalty to the biological parent, which marginalized the stepparent. In-law relationships within blended Black American families were thus characterized by a duality, functioning as both sources of support and potential stress. The nature of these relationships, whether primarily positive or fraught with conflict, often hinged on how the couple navigated these connections. Fiori et al. (2020) suggested that couples who aligned in their views regarding in-law relationships tended to experience greater marital stability, while discrepancies in perceptions led to heightened stress and dissatisfaction.

To mitigate conflicts and sustain healthy in-law relationships within blended families, open communication, mutual understanding, and clear boundary-setting were essential strategies. By promoting collaborative decision-making and recognizing the role of extended family members, blended families alleviated tension and cultivated relational stability. Acknowledging the dual role of in-laws as both supportive and potentially disruptive forces was vital for cultivating resilient blended families capable of navigating

the complexities associated with integrating multiple family structures (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023).

### **Sibling Conflict in Blended Families**

Furthermore, Landon et al. (2022) found that conflicts among stepsiblings transcended mere physical space issues; they frequently involved emotional boundaries and an inherent desire for individual acknowledgment and validation. As newcomers within the family dynamic, stepsiblings often experienced feelings of displacement and rivalry, leading to jealousy that erupted in seemingly trivial squabbles. The authors emphasized the multifaceted nature of these conflicts, which were not only byproducts of the blending process but also influenced by the unique personalities and histories of the children involved.

This research underlined the critical role of proactive parental involvement in cultivating healthy communication and understanding among stepsiblings. By facilitating open dialogue and providing opportunities for shared experiences, parents helped mitigate conflicts and created supportive environments that smoothed the often tumultuous adjustment process. Such efforts were essential in creating a sense of belonging and acceptance that strengthened sibling bonds.

Sibling conflict and aggression were common occurrences in many families. There was a pressing need for programmatic interventions targeting sibling conflict and aggression, as most parents sought guidance on managing these issues. Research indicated that sibling aggression was not only prevalent but also had significant negative

implications for the well-being of children and adolescents (Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017). It was the most common form of family violence, yet it was frequently minimized or dismissed as harmless rivalry and a normative aspect of childhood development. However, sibling aggression was distinct from rivalry, as rivalry did not necessarily involve conflict or aggression. In some cases, rivalry even fostered positive interactions and development (Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017).

Parents often applied different standards regarding acceptable conflict resolution and aggression in sibling relationships compared to peer or other social interactions. This discrepancy resulted in inconsistent approaches to discipline and conflict management, potentially exacerbating sibling aggression. Given its pervasiveness and the adverse effects on children's psychological and emotional well-being, parents frequently sought effective strategies to manage sibling conflicts (Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017). Therefore, developing targeted interventions to address sibling aggression was crucial for promoting healthier family dynamics and safeguarding children's well-being.

### **Parenting in Black American Stepfamilies**

Conflicts among siblings in blended families often arose from a tapestry of differing backgrounds, varied parenting styles, and distinct expectations. This challenge was especially pronounced within Black American families, where the values of loyalty and unity were deeply ingrained. Research highlighted that children from diverse biological backgrounds struggled with feelings of jealousy or a sense of dislocation as they navigated the complexities of a new family dynamic (Song et al., 2022). This

emotional struggle often emerged from fierce competition for parental attention or from the challenges associated with assuming the role of a stepparent.

Landon et al. (2022) emphasized that children often found themselves caught in an emotional tug-of-war between their biological parent and their stepparent, which complicated sibling relationships and disrupted the delicate harmony of the family unit. Therefore, it was essential for stepparents to actively cultivate trust and encourage respectful, nurturing relationships among siblings. Sibling conflict, particularly within blended families, manifested in a variety of ways, often including disputes over personal space, possessions, or perceived discrepancies in how parents treated their children.

A significant study conducted by Landon et al. (2022) utilized grounded theory to explore the intricate dynamics of conflict among stepsiblings, providing valuable insights into these relationships within blended family structures. The researchers highlighted how certain issues, such as the feeling of personal space being encroached upon, often articulated through the common plea, “Stop going in my room!” served as critical triggers for conflict. These disputes usually arose during the adjustment phase when stepsiblings were learning to establish new boundaries and redefine their roles within the increasingly complex family unit.

Parenting within Black American stepfamilies was characterized by the necessity for robust collaboration between biological parents and stepparents, aiming to create a nurturing and cohesive environment for children. Research indicated that the quality of the coparenting relationship significantly influenced the parenting dynamics in these

families. For example, Ganong et al. (2022) asserted that successful coparenting necessitated open communication, emotional support, and mutual respect. When biological parents and stepparents adopted aligned parenting strategies, children often reaped the benefits in terms of emotional stability and relational satisfaction.

A crucial element impacting effective parenting within Black American stepfamilies was parental mindfulness, defined as the ability to engage with children and partners in a present, attentive, and nonjudgmental manner. Bates and Bates (2022) discussed how mindfulness facilitated positive relational dynamics in blended families, aiding parents and stepparents in navigating conflicts with calmness and constructiveness. This mindful engagement promoted an environment that encouraged healthy communication and conflict resolution, essential components for developing trust and security within the family system.

Recent studies, such as those conducted by Ganong et al. (2022), explained that maintaining high-quality dyadic relationships characterized by empathy, cooperation, and shared parenting goals greatly enhanced adolescent parenting experiences. This observation aligned with additional findings indicating that consistent and respectful coparenting not only bolstered children's emotional health but also mitigated stress within the stepfamily context (Landon et al., 2022). Stepparents often encountered the challenge of balancing their caregiving duties with maintaining a sense of personal identity. According to Landon et al. (2022), stepfathers struggled to integrate authoritative and supportive roles, particularly when biological parents remained actively

involved. This situation led to role confusion, where stepparents felt the dual pressures of asserting authority while also providing emotional support. Addressing these dual roles called for deliberate strategies aimed at establishing clear boundaries and shared parenting responsibilities between partners.

Furthermore, Ivanova and Balbo (2019) found that the birth of a common child enhanced cooperation and satisfaction within stepfamilies. In Black American stepfamilies, the arrival of a shared child often served as a cohesive element, encouraging biological parents and stepparents to collaborate more effectively. This collaborative approach enhanced their partnership and fostered communication about the child's development.

Beyond immediate parental roles, the broader family system, including relationships with extended family and in-laws, also critically influenced the stepfamily experience. Turner et al. (2021) and Bailey and Carter (2023) highlighted that extended family involvement could both support and complicate parenting dynamics, especially when traditional cultural values clashed with contemporary parenting practices. Navigating these influences necessitated open communication and collaborative decision-making to ensure stability within the blended family structure. Despite inherent challenges, Black American stepfamilies exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability, frequently leveraging cultural strengths such as kinship networks and community support to promote stability (Anderson, 2019). By prioritizing open communication, shared responsibilities, and culturally responsive parenting practices,

these families successfully navigated their unique dynamics, ultimately leading to positive outcomes for both children and parents (Waldron et al., 2022).

In summary, effective parenting in Black American stepfamilies relied significantly on the cooperative endeavors of biological parents and stepparents. By promoting a mindful and collaborative approach to parenting, these families cultivated strong, resilient relationships that supported a nurturing environment for children. Establishing defined roles, ensuring consistent communication, and utilizing cultural strengths were pivotal strategies for developing a positive family dynamic amidst the intricacies of blended family life.

### **Parent-Child Relationships and Their Evolution in Stepfamilies**

The development of parent-child and stepparent-child relationships plays a vital role in the long-term adjustment and stability of blended families, with particular emphasis on remarried Black American families. As these families navigate the complexities of merging household dynamics, the relationships between biological parents and their children often undergo substantial transformations. Research by Bates and Bates (2022) emphasizes that maintaining strong parent-child bonds during this transitional period is essential, as these relationships serve as a source of emotional stability and continuity for children. Additionally, findings from Favez et al. (2019) reinforce the notion that the quality of parent-child interactions significantly affects children's psychological adjustment, especially during the transition into blended family

structures. The success of long-term adjustment is largely contingent upon parents' ability to nurture existing bonds while effectively integrating new family members.

Equally critical are the stepparent-child relationships, which contribute to overall family stability. However, establishing these connections can prove challenging, as children may resist attachment due to loyalty conflicts or feelings of loss arising from shifts in family dynamics (Ganong et al., 2019). A study by Landon et al. (2022) highlights that stepparents who build trust through consistent support and positive communication are generally more readily accepted by their stepchildren. In contrast, those who attempt to assert authority too quickly may face resistance, which can lead to strained relationships. This finding aligns with Favez et al. (2019), which points out the importance of empathetic and gradual relationship-building practices for achieving family cohesion.

Further research by Bean et al. (2021) indicates that the integration of stepparents into the family system often relies on the quality of co-parenting relationships between biological parents and stepparents. Positive co-parenting practices can create a supportive environment that minimizes conflict, thereby facilitating smoother adjustment processes for children. Studies indicate that when biological parents actively endorse the involvement of stepparents, children are more inclined to develop positive views of their stepparents and form meaningful relationships with them (Ivanova & Balbo, 2019). Parent-child relationships can suffer when biological parents do not maintain consistent, open communication amid the changes brought by remarriage. Favez et al. (2019) noted

that dedicating one-on-one time between biological parents and children can help reinforce these bonds, even as new familial relationships emerge. Such strategies help children feel valued and secure, which in turn reduces resistance to the blended family structure.

For stepparents, the challenge lies in balancing authority with emotional support. Research by Brimhall (2020) indicates that stepparents who prioritize rapport-building over immediate disciplinary measures tend to achieve more favorable relationship outcomes with their stepchildren. This gradual approach enables children to adapt to the new family dynamic without feeling undue pressure, creating trust and relational stability over time. Studies also stress the significance of managing expectations and promoting communication among biological parents and stepparents. Bates and Bates (2022) argue that when stepparents feel supported by their partners in their parenting roles, they exhibit greater confidence and effectiveness in connecting with stepchildren. Additionally, when biological parents encourage positive engagement between children and stepparents, the entire family system benefits from increased cohesion and decreased tension (Ganong et al., 2022).

In summary, the dynamics of parent-child and stepparent-child relationships are pivotal to the adjustment process within blended families. Families that prioritize open communication, respect individual roles, and facilitate gradual integration of new relationships are more likely to forge healthy, enduring bonds. Addressing the complexities inherent in blended families necessitates intentional strategies that support

both parent-child and stepparent-child interactions, ultimately aiding in stability and resilience within the family unit (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023).

### **Managing Sibling Rivalry and Adjusting to New Family Roles**

Sibling rivalry was a prominent challenge faced by blended families, particularly as children maneuvered through the complexities of sharing living environments, parental attention, and finite resources. Within Black American families, cultural values that prioritized loyalty, respect, and familial unity significantly shaped sibling dynamics (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023). In the context of blended families, these cultural norms helped with developing strong sibling bonds but also heightened competition, especially when differences between biological siblings and stepsiblings became evident. This competition worsened if parents unintentionally exhibited favoritism or overlooked underlying tensions, resulting in prolonged strains on sibling relationships that often endured over time (Bates & Bates, 2022).

The adjustment of familial roles was critical in defining the dynamics within blended families. The introduction of a stepparent often required a reallocation of parental authority and responsibilities, which led to resistance from children accustomed to previous roles (Ganong et al., 2022). Within Black American families, additional hurdles arose due to cultural expectations and the involvement of extended family in child-rearing practices. Research by Anderson (2019) indicated that while collectivist cultural norms promoted shared responsibilities, they also complicated the integration of roles within blended households. Effective communication and the establishment of

consistent family rules were essential in alleviating these challenges, allowing family members to transition more smoothly into new roles and responsibilities (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023).

The dynamics of stepsibling relationships were crucial in determining the overall success of blended families. Studies revealed that the cultural significance of kinship in Black American communities influenced how stepsiblings related to and interacted with each other (Landon et al., 2022). Generally, younger children exhibited a greater willingness to bond with newly introduced siblings, while adolescents often regarded the inclusion of stepsiblings as a challenge to their autonomy and established family identity (Ganong et al., 2022). Bates and Bates (2022) noted that younger children typically adapted more readily and were keen to cultivate relationships, whereas adolescents often showed resistance, especially if they perceived the new familial structure as a threat to their independence.

Factors such as age, gender, and personality significantly influenced stepsibling dynamics. Landon et al. (2022) emphasized that when parents actively promoted shared activities and inclusivity, stepsiblings were more likely to develop meaningful relationships. Conversely, the neglect of these familial bonds led to persistent strains, affecting overall family cohesion. To nurture positive stepsibling connections, parents created structured opportunities for collaborative experiences and family traditions, promoting trust and camaraderie over time (Bates & Bates, 2022).

Cultural context played a complex role in shaping the experiences of blended families within the Black American community. Historical narratives of resilience, adaptability, and collective support were deeply rooted in Black family traditions (Anderson, 2019). These cultural strengths acted as protective factors, aiding families in navigating the challenges of merging diverse backgrounds. However, systemic inequalities associated with historical racial discrimination posed significant obstacles for Black blended families, particularly concerning economic stability and access to quality education and healthcare (Habibi et al., 2024).

Economic disparities, a remnant of systemic marginalization, heightened stress within blended families, subsequently affecting parental roles and sibling interactions (Clark et al., 2022). Limited financial resources often restricted the opportunities available for stepsiblings to bond, while socioeconomic stressors led to increased parental conflict, which indirectly influenced sibling relationships (Landon et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges necessitated culturally sensitive interventions that recognized systemic barriers while actively supporting families in leveraging their cultural strengths to maintain stability and cohesion (Anderson, 2019).

By partaking in open communication, encouraging collaborative decision-making, and implementing culturally responsive parenting practices, blended Black American families effectively navigated the distinctive challenges of sibling rivalry and role adjustment. Promoting positive sibling interactions and providing structured

opportunities for bonding were vital for nurturing a sense of belonging and unity within the blended family unit (Ganong et al., 2022).

### **Communication Patterns and Family Cohesion**

Coping mechanisms were crucial for developing resilience and maintaining stability within Black American stepfamilies. Engaging in open communication allowed family members to express their feelings and perspectives, thereby minimizing misunderstandings and promoting emotional stability (Taylor et al., 2013). External support systems also played a significant role in enhancing resilience within blended families. Community-based support networks, such as family counseling and peer support groups, were vital for helping families adjust to new situations (Taylor et al., 2013). These services not only provided practical guidance but also created a communal space for family members to share and process their experiences, which often led to mutual understanding and empathy. A combination of these external support systems and internal coping strategies helped families manage the complexities associated with remarriage and stepfamily integration (Taylor et al., 2013).

Cultural resilience served as a fundamental component in maintaining stability within Black American blended families. Research showed that Black families often relied on their rich cultural traditions and values as sources of strength and continuity during transitional periods (Balachandran & Yeung, 2020). Cultural practices, such as shared meals, holiday celebrations, and storytelling, helped create a sense of belonging and reinforced familial bonds (Lang et al., 2022). These traditions created a framework

for preserving family identity while embracing new relationships within the blended structure. Additionally, culturally grounded practices alleviated feelings of loss that children experienced when adjusting to a new family configuration.

The involvement of extended family networks was critical in providing both emotional and practical support. Research by Lopez and Bailey (2022) revealed that grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives played pivotal roles in maintaining stability, particularly during the initial blending phase. These networks offered guidance, childcare, and financial assistance, establishing a safety net that reduced the pressures faced by newly formed stepfamilies. Including extended family members in rituals and decision-making processes also facilitated a smoother integration of new family members (Turner, 2021; Davis, 2023).

By combining adaptive coping strategies, meaningful cultural practices, and robust support systems, Black American blended families enhanced their resilience. This holistic approach not only aided in cohesion and stability across generations but also empowered families to thrive despite the challenges associated with blending diverse backgrounds. Strengthening resilience within these families not only promoted immediate well-being but also ensured the preservation and celebration of cultural heritage, guaranteeing that traditions and values were passed down to future generations (Lopez & Bailey, 2022).

### **Managing Conflict and Role Ambiguity**

Conflict and role ambiguity were prevalent issues in blended families, particularly among Black American couples with children. One significant obstacle was the establishment of clear boundaries and the facilitation of explicit discussions regarding role expectations. Research by Arat et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of defining parental roles early in the blending process to minimize confusion and mitigate conflict. Clarity around the distinct roles of biological and stepparents lessened ambiguity and contributed to a more stable family environment. Furthermore, Turner et al. (2021) found that unresolved role ambiguity often generated increased tension, as children grappled with divided loyalties to their biological parents and acceptance of their stepparents. Thus, enhanced communication and collaboratively defined parental roles greatly alleviated these conflicts and led to healthier family dynamics.

The role of cultural sensitivity in managing conflict within blended Black American families was equally critical. Lee et al. (2023) argued that culturally informed strategies, including the incorporation of shared family traditions, were essential for addressing boundary ambiguity. Engaging in rituals such as communal meals, holiday celebrations, or religious practices created structured opportunities to integrate new roles while simultaneously reinforcing family unity. According to Turner et al. (2021) and Bailey and Carter (2023), families that actively engaged with cultural norms and traditions tended to experience fewer conflicts related to parenting and discipline. This

proactive, culturally sensitive approach aligned family members' expectations and nurtured a cohesive household environment.

Children's ability to adapt within blended families was significantly impacted by the clarity of roles and boundaries. Research by Durdella (2020) suggested that children derived benefits from consistent guidance regarding their position within the new family structure, which alleviated feelings of displacement. Additionally, Cao et al. (2022) found that when stepparents were perceived as supportive allies rather than authoritative figures, children were more likely to exhibit positive emotional and behavioral adjustments. These findings emphasized the necessity of addressing role ambiguity through structured family practices that prioritized open communication and inclusivity.

Effective conflict management also necessitated an awareness of intergenerational dynamics that influenced family roles. Anderson (2019) noted that Black American families commonly emphasized collective responsibility and familial loyalty, which complicated the integration of new family roles. Addressing these intergenerational dynamics through open dialogues about cultural expectations and parental roles helped mitigate misunderstandings and encouraged cooperation among family members.

Successfully navigating conflict and role ambiguity within blended families required the establishment of clear, mutually agreed-upon roles alongside the incorporation of culturally relevant practices. Key strategies for promoting harmony and stability included maintaining open communication, honoring cultural values, and ensuring consistency in parenting approaches. By proactively addressing potential

sources of ambiguity and actively involving all family members in discussions, blended Black American families strengthened their relational bonds and cultivated a more unified family structure (Ganong et al., 2022).

### **Resilience and Coping Strategies in Blended Families**

Coping mechanisms played a crucial role in fostering resilience and stability within Black American stepfamilies. Brown (2013) noted that families employing adaptive strategies, such as open communication and collaborative problem-solving, were more adept at navigating the inherent challenges of blending households. Jensen and Ganong (2020) stressed the importance of mutual emotional support among family members, highlighting that shared responsibilities and encouragement enhanced cohesion and alleviated stress. Likewise, Yoo et al. (2016) emphasized the effectiveness of structured conflict resolution strategies, including family meetings, in reducing tensions and creating a stable family environment.

External resources were instrumental in bolstering resilience. According to Phillips (2019), community support networks such as counseling programs and peer groups designed for stepfamilies played a significant role in alleviating stress and helping families navigate transitions. Jensen and Ganong (2020) emphasized that these resources were particularly effective when integrated with internal coping strategies, creating a comprehensive approach to fostering family stability. These findings highlighted the critical connection between coping strategies and external support in building resilience among Black American stepfamilies.

Cultural resilience was crucial in supporting Black American remarried families as they faced their unique challenges. According to Coates et al. (2024), integrating cultural traditions and values into family dynamics significantly strengthened familial connections and provided a solid foundation for addressing the complexities of stepfamily relationships. This perspective was supported by Weiser et al. (2022), who conducted a qualitative study showing that shared cultural rituals such as communal meals, holiday celebrations, and cultural festivals fostered a strong sense of belonging among family members. These rituals enhanced intimate relationships and helped alleviate feelings of displacement that both children and parents experienced during transitions in family structure.

Culturally informed parenting strategies were vital in fostering resilience among families, particularly in the context of diverse cultural identities. Fiori et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of addressing and embracing racial and cultural identity within family units. By nurturing these identities, family members navigated external stressors, including societal biases and systemic discrimination, with greater confidence and resources. This empowerment was manifested through open discussions about cultural heritage, fostering pride and a sense of identity among children.

Browning and van Eeden-Moorefield (2019) emphasized the vital role of extended family networks, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close family friends, in providing emotional and practical support. These extended networks were

essential for helping families adapt to changes and challenges. They offered advice, financial assistance, and emotional stability during difficult times.

By integrating adaptive coping strategies, meaningful cultural practices, and strong support systems, Black American blended families enhanced their resilience. This holistic approach nurtured cohesion and stability across generations, allowing families to flourish despite challenges. These strategies not only promoted immediate well-being but also played a crucial role in preserving and celebrating cultural heritage, ensuring that traditions and values were transmitted to future generations.

### **Social Support and Community Networks in Blended Families**

The dynamics of blended families significantly hinged on role adjustments, particularly following the introduction of a stepparent into the family structure. As noted by Brimhall (2020), the successful integration of stepfamilies necessitated clear communication and negotiation of roles, which were vital for establishing a sense of stability for the children involved. This transition often required a reallocation of parental authority and responsibilities, a process that encountered resistance from children accustomed to established familial roles. Within Black American families, the interplay between societal expectations and the involvement of extended family in child-rearing practices further complicated these adjustments. Fox (2022) emphasized the need for maintaining open communication and implementing consistent family rules as effective strategies to navigate these complexities. Such practices facilitated a smoother adaptation

process for all family members as they adjusted to their evolving roles within the blended family framework.

The significance of role adjustments was identified as a critical factor in understanding blended family dynamics. The integration of a stepparent often prompted a redistribution of authority and responsibilities, eliciting resistance from children who struggled with these new dynamics. In the context of Black American families, cultural expectations and the active participation of extended family members introduced additional layers of complexity. Brimhall (2020) recommended the promotion of structured communication and the establishment of family rituals as strategies to support stability and provide reassurance to children during these transitions.

The role of extended family and community support was crucial in helping children navigate the emotional complexities of living in a blended family. According to Balachandran and Yeung (2020), children benefited greatly from relationships that extended beyond their immediate nuclear family, especially during times of family restructuring. The dynamics of stepfamily relationships often became intricate with the introduction of new siblings or stepparents, making extended family and community involvement essential for providing the necessary emotional support for adjustment. Such relationships offered continuity and reassurance, aiding children in adapting to their evolving family environments. Furthermore, Balachandran and Yeung (2020) argued that strong social support played a vital role in protecting children from the stress associated with changes in family structure, thereby enhancing emotional resilience.

Community networks were equally significant in supporting blended families. Fox (2022) emphasized the importance of external social structures, including faith-based organizations and educational settings, in fostering a sense of belonging and stability for both children and parents. These community networks provided opportunities for children to cultivate social skills and emotional resilience, which were essential for navigating transitions within the family. Additionally, Fox (2022) posited that robust community ties could buffer families against external stressors, enhancing their capability to address internal challenges within the stepfamily framework.

Brimhall (2020) further corroborated the idea that children in blended families experienced improved well-being when they had access to strong family and community support systems. The emotional and social development of children was significantly shaped by their interactions with extended family and community figures. These relationships provided a sense of continuity and stability, which was particularly advantageous in blended family settings marked by frequent changes in structure.

In addition, community support programs played a pivotal role in aiding parents as they integrated families. These programs offered counseling, parenting education, and conflict resolution strategies, thereby promoting healthier family dynamics and alleviating the emotional burden on children. Research conducted by Balachandran and Yeung (2020) explained the necessity of structured social support in cultivating resilience within blended families. Children who were connected to a network of supportive adults,

including extended family and educators, were more likely to exhibit emotional stability, especially when facing the challenges associated with stepfamily transitions.

Extended family support and community networks provided vital resources that enhanced resilience within blended families. By rendering emotional, financial, and practical assistance, these networks facilitated parents and children in managing the complexities of blended family dynamics, thereby reducing stress and improving communication. Such relationships were essential for the overall well-being and emotional stability of children, aiding their adjustment to new family circumstances and promoting stronger, more resilient family units.

### **Parenting Roles and Expectations**

The role of stepparents in Black American families was influenced by a combination of cultural, historical, and socio-economic factors. These demographic experiences posed unique challenges in establishing familial relationships compared to those of other racial and ethnic groups, primarily due to distinct cultural values and societal expectations. Within Black American families, structures often reflected resilience and adaptability, characterized by strong familial ties that were crucial for navigating the complexities of blended family dynamics. Stepparents worked to integrate into these established networks, building meaningful relationships with their stepchildren while honoring cultural norms concerning loyalty, respect, and kinship. Research highlighted that these values significantly affected the relationships between stepparents and children, as well as the overall family cohesion (Wiborg & Yahirun, 2024).

Cultural expectations around family loyalty were particularly salient in this community. Children in blended family scenarios frequently grappled with loyalty dilemmas when a stepparent entered the family unit. Such conflicts arose because the presence of a stepparent was perceived as a challenge to the traditional nuclear family model, which held historic importance for social stability and individual identity. Consequently, children often resisted the acceptance of a new stepparent, fearing that doing so would betray their biological parent. This transitional phase was often emotionally charged, as children balanced their feelings toward a stepparent while maintaining loyalty to their biological family (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023).

The involvement of the extended family network in Black American family dynamics introduced additional challenges for stepparents. Traditionally, extended kinship systems, including aunts, uncles, and grandparents, served as vital sources of support. Within these intricate social structures, stepparents sometimes felt marginalized when their roles were not well-defined or when extended family members were resistant to their inclusion. Such resistance occasionally manifested subtly through exclusion from family gatherings or indirect challenges to authority, which led to feelings of isolation for stepparents and hindered the development of healthy relationships with stepchildren (Wiborg & Yahirun, 2024).

The emotional and psychological well-being of children in blended families was closely tied to the involvement of stepparents. Favorable family outcomes occurred when stepparents displayed traits such as patience, empathy, and reliable emotional support.

Children exposed to nurturing environments were more adept at managing the complications inherent in blended family scenarios. Research highlighted that effective communication and mutual respect between stepparents and stepchildren were crucial for building positive connections. A stepparent's effort to understand the cultural backgrounds and emotional needs of their stepchildren significantly strengthened these bonds, promoting family cohesion and emotional well-being (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023).

Socio-economic factors also played a critical role in shaping the experiences of stepparents in Black American families. Challenges such as higher rates of single-parent households, economic disparities, and systemic barriers further strained family resources. Stepparents often were expected to provide both emotional support and financial assistance, necessitating a careful balance between these roles. Research indicated that stepparents who successfully navigated the intersection of emotional and financial expectations contributed to enhanced family stability (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023).

In summary, the role of stepparents within Black American families was complex and multifaceted, shaped by cultural, relational, and socio-economic elements. Successful integration of stepparents into these family contexts required awareness of and sensitivity to these factors, along with a commitment to trust, open communication, and respect. Addressing these challenges through a culturally informed lens was vital for enhancing family dynamics and ensuring the emotional and social well-being of all family members (Wiborg & Yahirun, 2024).

### **Co-Parenting and Collaborative Parenting Strategies in Blended Families**

The dynamics of co-parenting and collaborative parenting strategies played a crucial role in nurturing positive child development within blended families, particularly when stepparents were included. Empirical evidence indicated that the active involvement of both biological parents and stepparents in shared parenting responsibilities significantly enhanced children's emotional adjustment. A collaborative approach among parents created a stable and nurturing environment that was vital for children's well-being. This stability became particularly beneficial when both parents prioritized cooperation and mutual respect, contributing to a sense of security and support for the children involved. Research conducted by Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2023) highlighted that effective communication and management of differences between parents led to fewer emotional challenges for children during their adjustment periods.

In scenarios where blended families navigated co-parenting, the emphasis on cooperative strategies helped mitigate conflict and confusion. The harmonization of parenting styles among biological parents and stepparents was essential for providing children with consistent guidance and support, which was imperative for their emotional growth. Conversely, in high-conflict situations, co-parenting presented significant challenges. Disagreements, whether between biological parents or stepparents, often intensified into conflicts that adversely affected children's emotional health. Managing these conflicts necessitated effective communication and negotiation skills, alongside a shared dedication to prioritizing the child's best interests. Research suggested that

strategies such as mediation or structured family meetings were instrumental in preventing or resolving disputes that arose within co-parenting contexts (Wiborg & Yahirun, 2024).

The adjustment process for children in blended families was significantly shaped by the quality of the co-parenting relationship. Research indicated that children whose biological and stepparent figures engaged in positive collaboration were more adept at navigating the complexities of new family dynamics. A supportive co-parenting environment was crucial for providing the emotional stability necessary for children to address the challenges associated with blended family life. This environment was fundamental in creating a sense of security, love, and value in children, consequently enhancing their social-emotional development (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023).

Co-parenting strategies had to consider the broader socio-cultural context, particularly within Black American families. The cultural emphasis on loyalty, respect for family, and kinship bonds necessitated tailored co-parenting strategies that resonated with these values. Effectively managing these cultural dynamics required an understanding of how cultural expectations influenced parent-child relationships and overall family cohesion. Additionally, socio-economic challenges, including financial instability and the prevalence of single-parent households, further complicated the co-parenting experience. Thus, it was critical for co-parenting strategies to remain flexible and adaptable, addressing the unique challenges faced by Black American families in navigating blended family dynamics (Wiborg & Yahirun, 2024).

To enhance the emotional well-being and social development of children in blended families, prioritizing open communication, mutual respect, and a commitment to shared responsibilities within co-parenting strategies was essential. For Black American families, these strategies had to be implemented with a keen awareness of the cultural and socio-economic factors that influenced family dynamics, ensuring they promoted resilience and positive emotional outcomes (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2023).

### **Shared Parenting Responsibilities and Child Adjustment**

The effective division of parenting responsibilities was a crucial element that significantly influenced positive child adjustment in blended families. Studies suggested that when biological parents and stepparents collaborated in child-rearing, children tended to demonstrate better emotional and psychological outcomes. Clear delineation of roles and mutual support between parents and stepparents enhanced children's sense of security, which diminished anxiety and emotional distress (Ganong et al., 2022; Favez et al., 2019). Furthermore, a cooperative parenting model fostered a balanced disciplinary approach, ensuring that children received consistent messages, which promoted healthy attachment (Bates & Bates, 2022; Brimhall, 2020).

This division of responsibilities was particularly beneficial in reducing the emotional turmoil often associated with parental separation and remarriage. When biological parents worked together in overseeing educational and extracurricular activities, children faced less confusion and were not caught in loyalty conflicts, factors that often led to behavioral problems (Jensen & Ganong, 2020; Berg et al., 2021). This

collaborative approach also allowed stepparents to build meaningful relationships with children, improving the overall family dynamic (Fox, 2022; Arat et al., 2023).

Engaging both biological parents and stepparents in parenting roles not only alleviated stress for children but also strengthened family bonds. Stepparents who took an active part in caregiving and household responsibilities were viewed as reliable and supportive figures, which provided trust and stability (Brimhall, 2020). Open communication among all parental figures was essential, as it helped children feel heard and understood, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and promoting resilience (Cannon & Murray, 2019). Consistent parenting practices within blended families were vital, as inconsistencies led to confusion and behavioral issues (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019). By establishing clear boundaries and shared responsibilities, blended families created an integrated and nurturing environment that benefited all members, particularly children (Ganong et al., 2022).

### **Co-Parenting in High Conflict Environments**

High-conflict co-parenting environments posed distinct challenges for both children and adults in blended families. In these situations, unresolved disputes, emotional tension, and differing parenting styles adversely affected children's emotional well-being and overall adjustment. Favez et al. (2019) noted that high-conflict circumstances often resulted in emotional and behavioral issues for children, such as anxiety, depression, and acting out. These problems were intensified when parents

struggled to communicate effectively or failed to establish clear parenting boundaries, leading to increased instability within the household.

Effective conflict management was crucial in these contexts. Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2023) emphasized the significance of mediation services and counseling in assisting parents and stepparents to resolve conflicts productively. Mediation provided a neutral environment where parents could share their concerns, reduce hostility, and concentrate on developing parenting plans that prioritized the child's best interests. Additionally, Pires and Martins (2021) advocated for training parents in conflict resolution techniques such as active listening, emotional regulation, and structured problem-solving approaches to help prevent escalation and encourage positive communication. These techniques helped parents manage disagreements constructively while modeling effective conflict resolution skills for their children.

Furthermore, Ganong et al. (2022) recommended the creation of a co-parenting agreement that delineated parental responsibilities, visitation schedules, and disciplinary guidelines. Such a written agreement helped minimize misunderstandings, ensured consistency in parenting approaches, and reduced the likelihood of conflicts arising from differing expectations.

### **Strategies for Managing Co-Parenting Conflict**

In high-conflict co-parenting environments, effectively managing parental conflict was crucial for maintaining a positive family atmosphere. One effective strategy for conflict resolution was the adoption of a child-centered approach to parenting. Research

indicated that prioritizing the needs of the child, rather than focusing on personal grievances between parents, helped prevent children from feeling caught in the middle of adult disputes (Lavner et al., 2019). This approach required that parents set aside their differences for the child's welfare, collaborating on decisions related to the child's upbringing, including educational choices, disciplinary measures, and emotional support strategies (Bean et al., 2021).

A fundamental strategy involved cultivating open and respectful communication among all parties involved. Studies suggested that clear and honest communication empowered parents and stepparents to articulate their concerns and negotiate compromises without resorting to hostility (Jensen & Ganong, 2020). Establishing realistic expectations for both parents and children was also vital, as the transition to a blended family posed challenges for everyone involved. By recognizing the complexities of blended family dynamics, parents approached conflict resolution with empathy and understanding, thereby developing an environment where children felt supported and valued (Fox, 2022).

Promoting positive interactions between children and stepparents was essential for minimizing conflict within the family. Encouraging stepparents to engage actively in the child's life, while maintaining appropriate boundaries and avoiding any semblance of replacing the biological parent, cultivated a sense of partnership rather than competition (Ganong et al., 2022). Structured family bonding activities, such as shared meals, family outings, and collaborative decision-making, played a role in strengthening these

relationships over time (Bates & Bates, 2022). Creating structured environments and consistent routines was shown to mitigate stress and conflict in blended families.

Implementing predictable schedules and shared responsibilities alleviated the ambiguity often associated with blended family life, allowing children to feel more secure and confident in their new family structure (Sanner et al., 2020).

### **Impact of Collaborative Parenting on Child Adjustment**

Collaborative parenting, in which both biological parents and stepparents worked together to support a child's development, was shown to enhance children's adjustment in blended families. According to Favez et al. (2019), effective collaboration between biological parents and stepparents resulted in fewer behavioral issues and improved academic outcomes for children. This was largely attributed to the consistency provided by their combined efforts, which reinforced positive behaviors, created emotional security, and ensured that children received comprehensive support in both households.

Ganong et al. (2022) further emphasized that a unified parenting approach offered children a sense of stability and predictability, both of which were crucial for emotional growth. Children in blended families often thrived when both biological and stepparents were involved in decision-making processes, ensuring that their diverse needs, from education to social interactions, were met. Additionally, structured routines, such as consistent bedtime schedules and coordinated disciplinary measures, contributed to a child's sense of security and adjustment.

Turner et al. (2021) also highlighted that stepparents who took on supportive and non-authoritarian roles tended to develop stronger bonds with children. These positive relationships were essential for healthy adjustment, as they reduced feelings of rejection or resistance to the stepparent's involvement. By cultivating a collaborative and inclusive parenting atmosphere, Black American couples in blended family dynamics significantly improved their children's ability to adapt to new family structures, enhance resilience, and foster emotional well-being.

In conclusion, co-parenting and collaborative parenting strategies were vital for ensuring the healthy development and adjustment of children in blended families, particularly in high-conflict situations. Shared responsibilities between biological parents and stepparents fostered emotional stability, while conflict management strategies such as mediation and clear communication helped resolve tensions and encouraged cooperation. By embracing child-centered approaches, implementing structured conflict resolution techniques, and nurturing positive relationships, newly remarried Black American couples created supportive environments that catered to their children's emotional and psychological well-being.

### **Financial and Emotional Adjustment in Remarried Families**

Financial stress had a profound impact on remarried couples, significantly influenced relationship dynamics, and affected the overall well-being of children in blended families. The management of financial responsibilities, particularly in

households with multiple children and co-parenting arrangements, often led to emotional strain and instability among family members. Studies indicated that remarried parents often experienced heightened stress levels due to the financial burdens of maintaining separate households while attending to their children's needs (Crapo et al., 2021). This stress detrimentally affected relationship quality within blended families, as financial concerns often intruded upon marital interactions, resulting in conflict and dissatisfaction.

The pressures associated with budgeting, child-related expenses, and the distribution of financial responsibilities exacerbated emotional strain. Economic instability stemming from these financial demands often complicated parent-child relationships in remarried families. Children in blended households often experienced emotional distress or insecurity, which hindered their overall well-being and relationships with their parents (Bean et al., 2021). As remarried couples confronted these challenges, the strategies they implemented to manage financial stress, such as maintaining open communication regarding finances and engaging in collaborative decision-making, helped mitigate negative consequences. By addressing economic difficulties in a supportive and unified manner, couples enhanced family stability and reduced the emotional burden on both their relationship and their children (Santos et al., 2024).

Economic instability significantly affected children in remarried families. Research showed that children living in financially challenged households often faced increased stress levels, which adversely impacted their academic performance, behavior, and emotional health (Neppl et al., 2016). Financial stress disrupted family life, limiting

access to vital resources such as educational materials and extracurricular activities, which led to feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction among children (Laxman et al., 2019). The necessity of maintaining financial stability also led to heightened parental conflict, further intensifying children's stress (Ganong et al., 2022).

In remarried families, financial insecurity undermined children's sense of stability. When households struggled with financial difficulties, children often found it challenging to adjust to new family dynamics amid uncertainty regarding their family's future. This instability manifested as emotional withdrawal, behavioral issues, or increased anxiety as children navigated ongoing challenges within their home environment (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019). Therefore, the ability of remarried couples to cultivate trust was vital for managing both emotional and financial stress. Financial strain often resulted in tension within the couple's relationship, subsequently affecting their interactions with each other and their children. Engaging in open financial discussions, joint budgeting, and transparent financial planning helped alleviate these tensions and bolstered family bonds (Cannon & Murray, 2019).

### **Practical Strategies for Managing Financial Stress in Remarried Families**

The financial stress experienced by remarried couples and their children deeply affected family dynamics, necessitating the implementation of practical strategies to sustain family stability and address emotional needs. Research by Habibi et al. (2024) indicated that financial strain was profound among Black American couples with children, where economic disparities coincided with cultural expectations regarding

financial responsibilities. To alleviate this strain, integrating financial education and budgeting strategies emerged as essential. Ganong et al. (2022) emphasized that by equipping families with the necessary knowledge and tools for effective financial management, couples regained control over their financial situations, minimizing the emotional turbulence associated with economic challenges.

Enhancing financial literacy created an environment where children could engage in their family's financial realities, thereby reducing stress. Seeking professional advice was highlighted by Santos et al. (2024) as a crucial step for couples grappling with financial challenges. Financial advisors aided in developing manageable budgets, addressing debt, and establishing realistic financial goals, mitigating the pressures brought on by financial hardship and creating a more stable environment for children.

Adopting a systems perspective in financial management, as proposed by Dyer (2021), encouraged parental recognition of the interconnections between financial stress and its implications for individual family members. This holistic approach stressed the importance of collaborative financial planning, which was integral to promoting overall family stability. Engaging in low-cost family activities also served to alleviate visible financial strain while reinforcing familial bonds. Landon et al. (2022) advocated activities such as game nights and outdoor excursions, which enhanced emotional security among children without exacerbating financial stress. Such positive interactions contributed to familial resilience in the face of economic challenges.

Financial stress often led to triangulation, where children became entangled in parental financial disputes, as noted by Song et al. (2022). To mitigate this, prioritizing financial transparency and inclusive decision-making was crucial in fostering a cohesive family environment.

### **Role of Emotional Support in Family Stability**

The provision of emotional support was equally vital for maintaining family stability amidst financial stress. Priest (2021) noted that financial strains often spilled over into parental relationships, subsequently impacting children's emotional well-being. Without adequate emotional support, children often resorted to maladaptive coping strategies. The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family (2023) explained the importance of emotional support in sustaining familial stability, helping to reduce the likelihood of relational breakdowns driven by economic pressures. Willis et al. (2021) asserted that consistent emotional availability from parents during financial hardships was crucial, as a stable emotional foundation buffered children from the adverse effects of financial strain. Offering reassurance about the family's capability to navigate difficulties helped develop a sense of security.

D'Onofrio and Emery (2019) further stressed that when children perceived emotional neglect resulting from their parents' financial concerns, they experienced increased anxiety and behavioral issues. Therefore, consistent engagement and validation from parents remained essential for fostering resilience in children. In times of economic distress, the importance of remarried parents presenting a unified front could not be

overstated. Jensen and Ganong (2019) argued that collaboration between stepparents and biological parents in managing both financial and emotional stress created a secure environment for children. A united parental approach enhanced family structure and reassured children of their well-being amidst external challenges. Dainton (2019) reinforced that balanced emotional and financial contributions within remarriages were crucial for minimizing potential discord stemming from financial stress.

### **Impact on Child-Parent Relationships**

Financial stress profoundly impacted the emotional intimacy typically shared between parents and their children. According to Bean et al. (2021), an overwhelming focus on financial concerns often rendered parents emotionally unavailable, thereby weakening the parent-child bond. This emotional withdrawal led children to feel neglected, which potentially resulted in behavioral issues and diminished attachment to their parents. Additionally, Brimhall (2020) noted that children from remarried families often faced additional stressors due to changing household dynamics, which were further complicated by financial strain. Landon et al. (2022) observed that during financial crises, parents might have unintentionally adopted more critical or distant behaviors, exacerbating their children's emotional distress.

To mitigate these detrimental effects, parents needed to make a conscious effort to remain emotionally present despite economic challenges. Establishing consistent routines and providing reassurance significantly helped alleviate the emotional fallout associated with financial stress. Ganong et al. (2022) argued that children in blended families

particularly needed intentional parental involvement to navigate the complexities of family dynamics alongside financial difficulties.

### **Co-Parenting Strategies to Alleviate Financial Strain**

The implementation of effective co-parenting strategies had the potential to significantly reduce the burden that financial stress imposed on remarried families. According to Ganong et al. (2022), a collaborative approach to parenting, in which biological and stepparents engaged in mutual support and shared responsibilities, greatly enhanced family dynamics. This teamwork not only alleviated financial pressures but also strengthened the emotional foundation of the family, creating a more secure environment for children. In alignment with this perspective, Fox (2022) emphasized the importance of equitable sharing of parenting responsibilities in alleviating overall family stress. By distributing childcare and financial decision-making responsibilities fairly, parents collectively lessened their burdens, leading to reduced conflict and improved emotional stability for their children. Supporting this viewpoint, Crapo et al. (2021) argued that robust co-parenting strategies facilitated better adaptation to the complexities of stepfamily structures, thereby diminishing financial strain and emotional discord.

Financial stress significantly impacted the multifaceted dynamics of remarried families, adversely affecting marital satisfaction and the emotional well-being of children. Studies indicated that the pressures associated with financial strain often led to dissatisfaction and instability within marriages. This tension created a ripple effect, influencing family interactions and harming children's mental health and emotional

development. Specifically, research showed that financial stress altered both the frequency and quality of positive and negative exchanges between couples. This dynamic exacerbated not only individual emotional distress but also acted as a critical mediator in the relationship between financial strain and marital instability (Bean et al., 2021).

Incorporating effective financial management strategies within remarried families significantly enhanced marital quality and fostered greater family stability. For example, decisions regarding financial management, such as whether to maintain joint accounts or keep finances separate, were directly linked to varying levels of satisfaction and overall happiness in family life (Santos et al., 2024). Families that prioritized thoughtful financial practices, including budgeting, transparent communication about financial goals, and collaborative decision-making, were better positioned to cultivate a harmonious atmosphere. This proactive approach enhanced relational connections and contributed to emotional resilience, enabling family members to navigate the challenges of financial obligations more effectively. By promoting a culture of shared financial responsibility and open dialogue, remarried families mitigated the detrimental effects of financial stress, paving the way for healthier familial relationships.

### **Key Findings and Implications for Family Therapy and Counseling**

Blended Black American families, particularly those navigating the complexities of remarriage, encountered a variety of emotional, financial, and relational challenges that significantly impacted both adults and children. One of the most pressing issues for children in these families was emotional adjustment. The introduction of a stepparent and

stepsiblings often elicited feelings of insecurity, jealousy, and confusion, especially when children perceived these new relationships as threats to their bond with their biological parents (Ganong et al., 2019). Additionally, children in blended families frequently grappled with divided loyalties, feeling torn between their biological parents and the new family structure. Research indicated that unresolved tensions between children and stepparents adversely affected a child's psychological well-being, school performance, and social development (Jensen & Weller, 2019). Moreover, the degree of family stability was crucial in shaping a child's overall adjustment. Elevated levels of familial conflict and inconsistent parenting styles intensified emotional distress, leading to increased behavioral issues and diminished academic performance (Kim-Spoon et al., 2019).

Economic stress further exacerbated the challenges faced by blended families. Many Black American families confronted financial disparities due to systemic inequalities, and the blending of households introduced additional financial burdens. Conflicts over financial responsibilities, child support, and household budgeting created tension between partners, affecting relationship satisfaction and family cohesion (Dyer, 2021). Economic instability was correlated with heightened parental stress, which often resulted in emotional unavailability and inconsistent parenting practices (Ganong et al., 2019). To address these financial stressors effectively, family therapists needed to incorporate financial counseling and resource navigation into their therapeutic

approaches to help families secure the economic stability required for healthy relationships.

Culturally responsive interventions tailored to the specific needs of Black American blended families were vital in addressing these challenges. Unlike Eurocentric models of family therapy that primarily focused on nuclear family structures, interventions for Black blended families needed to recognize the critical involvement of extended family members, including grandparents, aunts, and uncles, who often provided significant emotional and financial support (Rious et al., 2019). Incorporating cultural values such as collectivism, resilience, and communal caregiving into therapeutic practices was essential for nurturing a sense of unity within the family system. Additionally, the historical context of Black family structures, including the impact of systemic oppression and racial discrimination, needed to be acknowledged to develop effective therapeutic interventions that resonated with Black families' lived experiences (Kim-Spoon et al., 2019).

A key component of successful intervention was establishing trust and intimacy between stepparents and stepchildren. Children entering blended families often brought unresolved trauma from parental separation or divorce; therefore, therapists prioritized attachment-based interventions that aimed to strengthen emotional bonds (Jensen & Weller, 2019). Family therapy sessions focused on open communication, validation of children's emotions, and structured activities that encouraged bonding between stepparents and children. Furthermore, strategies for strengthening stepfamily

relationships, such as creating new family traditions and engaging in shared activities, proved effective in nurturing stronger familial ties and enhancing children's sense of belonging (Ganong et al., 2019).

In addition, implementing structured co-parenting strategies was crucial for fostering a harmonious family environment. When biological parents and stepparents held differing parenting styles, it often created confusion and conflict that impacted the children and the overall household dynamic. For instance, when a biological parent prioritized permissiveness while the stepparent leaned toward discipline, children often felt uncertain about expectations and boundaries. To mitigate these issues, establishing clear communication channels and collaboratively developing consistent rules and routines helped ensure that all caregivers remained aligned. This unified approach not only reduced misunderstandings but also promoted a sense of stability and security for the children involved.

Research emphasized the importance of collaborative parenting approaches in which both biological and stepparents established shared household rules, discipline strategies, and parenting expectations (Dyer, 2021). Family therapists played a critical role in facilitating discussions that helped parents navigate their differences, ensuring that children experienced a consistent and supportive environment across both biological and blended family households.

Trauma-informed care was a critical aspect of working with Black American blended families. Children in these families often experienced significant disruptions in

their family structure, which contributed to feelings of abandonment, rejection, or mistrust toward authority figures (Jensen & Weller, 2019). A trauma-informed approach required therapists to establish a safe environment where children could explore their emotions, cultivate coping strategies, and reframe their understanding of their new family dynamics. It was also essential to address past trauma within parental relationships to foster a healthy familial atmosphere. By focusing on these vital areas, family therapists were better able to support Black American blended families, promoting emotional healing and stability that benefited all family members (Lee et al., 2023).

The growing awareness of the prevalence and impact of traumatic experiences underscored the necessity for trauma-informed care in the mental health field. Black communities encountered traumatic events at disproportionately higher rates than other racial groups, influenced by factors such as historical trauma, race-based trauma, and intergenerational trauma. By integrating socioculturally attuned family therapy with trauma-informed care, practitioners created a comprehensive approach to addressing intergenerational trauma in Black families (Lee et al., 2023).

### **Black Marriage, Colorism, and Physical Attributes**

The historical legacy of social hierarchies in the United States engendered a context that prioritized certain racial groups while simultaneously establishing an intra-racial hierarchy within Black communities, predominantly informed by skin tone (Landor & Halpern, 2016). This form of social stratification, referred to as colorism, emphasized specific physical attributes, including skin tone, hair texture, and facial features, rather

than solely addressing racial identity (Landor & Halpern, 2016). Colorism, in conjunction with featurism characterized by a preference for specific facial features, significantly influenced social perceptions and had broader implications for economic opportunities, educational attainment, and romantic relationships, particularly regarding attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation.

Within the context of Black marriage, both colorism and featurism informed individual expectations as well as broader societal perceptions. Empirical research indicated that individuals with lighter skin or features that conformed to conventional beauty norms often encountered fewer hindrances in the formation and sustenance of romantic relationships (Landor & Halpern, 2016). As a result, societal attitudes toward marriage were influenced by prevailing notions of attractiveness and desirability. In contrast, individuals with darker skin faced unique challenges in cultivating long-term relationships, which affected perceived marital prospects (Landor & Halpern, 2016).

The effects of colorism and featurism in the context of romantic selection yielded notable emotional and psychological consequences. Individuals often experienced feelings of being overlooked or devalued within the dating landscape, leading to detrimental effects on self-perception and confidence. Societal narratives frequently aligned lighter skin with conventional standards of beauty and desirability while simultaneously perpetuating adverse perceptions of individuals with darker skin. Such disparities shaped social interactions and romantic expectations in intricate and multifaceted ways. Moreover, media representations played a central role in shaping

societal beauty standards by often displaying a limited spectrum of skin tones and features within entertainment, advertising, and popular culture. These portrayals significantly influenced societal ideals of attractiveness and desirability in romantic relationships. The persistent impact of these beauty standards underscored the pressing need for diverse representations of Black love in media and cultural discourses.

A relevant effect of colorism and featurism manifested in the dynamics of relationships and partner selection. Historically entrenched beauty standards favored lighter-skinned individuals and those possessing features regarded as conventionally attractive, thereby conferring social advantages to this demographic over individuals with darker skin and Afrocentric features (Landor & Halpern, 2016). The preferential treatment of lighter-skinned Black individuals in education and economic domains perpetuated a cycle in which associations between attractiveness and social status became ingrained within social norms, subsequently shaping perceptions of desirability and altering relationship dynamics.

The connection between colorism, featurism, and Black marriage highlighted the imperative of promoting inclusivity and expanding prevailing beauty ideals. Addressing these complex issues required the encouragement of diverse representations of relationships, fostering open dialogues about societal standards, and challenging limiting perceptions. By recognizing and acknowledging these dynamics, communities worked toward cultivating a more inclusive and affirming environment wherein all individuals,

regardless of skin tone or physical features, could aspire to and attain equitable opportunities for love, commitment, and marital success.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The discourse surrounding newly married Black American remarried couples with children revealed several critical themes that elucidated the intricacies of remarriage and family integration. A primary focus within this literature was the indispensable role of spousal communication in delineating boundaries, managing family roles, and nurturing a supportive family environment. Effective communication was fundamental to promoting family cohesion; however, it often faced obstacles from socioeconomic pressures and cultural expectations, particularly prevalent within Black American communities (Ganong et al., 2022). Another significant theme was the impact of in-laws and extended family structures. In many Black American households, extended family members contributed to emotional support and child-rearing dynamics, but their involvement occasionally led to conflicts that challenged the authority of stepparents (Turner et al., 2021; Bailey & Carter, 2023).

Additionally, sibling rivalry emerged as a notable concern, as blending children from previous relationships often resulted in competition for attention and emotional validation. Such conflicts were intensified by racial and cultural identity issues, which exacerbated feelings of jealousy or competition among step-siblings (Landon et al., 2022). The roles of stepparents, particularly Black American stepmothers and stepfathers, were similarly explored. Findings indicated that establishing authority and defining roles

often provoked resistance from both biological parents and stepchildren (Bean et al., 2021). Parenting within Black American blended families also presented unique challenges, especially when reconciling differing parenting strategies held by biological parents and stepparents. Diverging philosophies on parenting often created significant friction, particularly in a cultural context where respect for authority was paramount (Anderson, 2019).

The existing literature emphasized that effective spousal communication was crucial for sustaining family harmony amidst the complexities of blended family dynamics (Ganong et al., 2022). Simultaneously, it highlighted that extended family involvement could both facilitate and complicate the integration of new family members, depending on how boundaries and roles were managed (Weiser et al., 2022). The effects of sibling rivalry on family cohesion were well documented, indicating that competition among step-siblings often led to emotional challenges if not effectively mitigated (Landon et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies acknowledged the significant hurdles stepparents faced in asserting authority and cultivating relationships with stepchildren, particularly when cultural expectations clashed with new family dynamics (Bean et al., 2021).

However, a distinct gap persisted in understanding the cultural specificity of these dynamics within Black American families. The prevailing literature either generalized across racial groups or lacked an in-depth examination of how race, culture, and socioeconomic factors influenced family integration. Specifically, the intersection of race

with communication strategies and the cultural adaptation of parenting roles remained underexplored. Additional research was warranted to investigate how cultural identity and societal perceptions shaped the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples in a blended family dynamic.

The present study employed a qualitative research approach grounded in a phenomenological framework to address this gap. This design was appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of individuals navigating complex family structures and culturally specific expectations. The study sought in-depth insight into how newly married Black American spouses in blended families interpreted and managed family integration, communication patterns, sibling dynamics, and extended family relationships. A phenomenological methodology enabled the researcher to explore meaning-making processes through rich, descriptive data drawn from participants' perspectives.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology used to conduct this inquiry. It described the rationale for using purposeful sampling to select one spouse from couples who had been married for six years or less and were raising children from previous relationships. The chapter further detailed the data collection process using semi-structured interviews and explained the thematic analysis procedures that guided the interpretation of findings. By centering the voices of Black American spouses within blended family contexts, this study offered a culturally grounded understanding of remarriage and stepfamily dynamics, an area that remained underrepresented in existing scholarship.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

Chapter 3 includes research methods that were employed to investigate lived experiences of newl- married Black American couples as they navigated complexities of blended family dynamics involving children from prior relationships. I explored personal perspectives of these couples as they adjusted to new family structures, highlighting how their experiences influenced family relationships. A generic qualitative design was used.

This approach facilitates exploration of diverse perspectives while ensuring methodological rigor and rich descriptive data that captures intricacies of human interactions and relational meaning-making. In this study, the design enabled an in-depth examination of the topic.

I used purposive sampling to select a diverse cohort of participants, intentionally incorporating individuals from various socioeconomic, cultural, and demographic backgrounds. This strategy ensured a comprehensive representation of experiences that were relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Data collection consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews that were designed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' lived experiences. These interviews included both immediate insights and reflections on evolving dynamics of family relationships over time.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes within collected data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the topic. Ethical considerations were thoroughly addressed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and emotional wellbeing of participants. I maintained reflexivity throughout the process to ensure

participants' voices were authentically represented while remaining sensitive to complexities inherent in family relationships.

The methodological framework was designed to generate insights that inform support strategies for blended families as they navigate their formative years together. Findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of relational dynamics within these families and offer practical implications for counseling, social work, and family support services.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The study was guided by the research question: What are the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics with children? A qualitative research design was selected for this investigation, as it was the most suitable approach to identify and examine intricate experiences of participants.

Qualitative research was favored in order to prioritize richness and complexity inherent in human experiences rather than reducing them to numerical representations. In contrast to quantitative research, which involves understanding social phenomena using measurable variables, qualitative research emphasizes exploration of personal perspectives, emotions, and contextual factors that shape individuals' experiences.

Limitations of quantitative methods include inability to capture dynamic and context-dependent elements of blended family life.

This underscored a commitment to authentically representing participants' voices, thereby fostering a comprehensive understanding of their challenges, successes, and adaptive strategies.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, my primary purpose in this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples who navigated blended family dynamics involving children. I sought to understand the challenges and dynamics these couples encountered as they formed new familial connections and adjusted to their evolving roles within the blended family structure. By integrating insights from the data collected, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how these families managed the complexities of blending family units, particularly during the early years of marriage.

The primary objective of this study was to examine the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples as they navigated blended family life with children. Through in-depth interviews and participant journaling, I captured the emotional, social, and relational factors that shaped the process of family integration. The goal was to identify common themes related to communication, conflict resolution, and identity negotiation, ultimately providing actionable recommendations for support services tailored to blended families.

Throughout the study, I recognized the importance of maintaining neutrality and objectivity in the research process. My role as a researcher required a reflexive approach, ensuring that my interactions and interpretations remained free from personal bias. To

achieve this, I practiced reflexivity by continuously reflecting on my own assumptions, experiences, and potential influence on the research. I also implemented strategies to minimize bias during data collection and analysis, such as using open-ended questions, allowing participants to lead their narratives, and employing consistent interview protocols.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, I incorporated multiple strategies to strengthen methodological rigor. These included triangulation and member checking. Triangulation involved comparing data from different sources, interviews, and participant journals, to verify the consistency and validity of emerging themes. Member checking allowed participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and my interpretations, ensuring that the findings accurately represented their lived experiences.

I was intentional about maintaining the authenticity of participants' voices by clearly distinguishing between their perspectives and my interpretations. During analysis, I presented the findings transparently and grounded my conclusions in the evidence gathered from participants rather than any preconceived notions.

My overall goal was to provide a comprehensive and credible understanding of the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics with children. I sought to contribute valuable insights to the fields of family studies, psychology, and social work by identifying recurring themes related to communication, conflict resolution, and family cohesion. These findings were intended to

inform practitioners and researchers in developing culturally responsive strategies that address the unique challenges faced by blended families.

### **Methodology**

A generic qualitative research design was utilized to explore the lived experiences of blended families during the initial five years of their formation. As noted by Kostere and Kostere (2022), generic qualitative research is a methodological approach that seeks to understand human experiences through a qualitative lens using systematic qualitative procedures. This design was particularly suited to the present study, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the meanings individuals credited to their experiences without being restricted by the parameters of a specific qualitative tradition. The study specifically focused on capturing the diverse viewpoints of newly married Black American couples, examining how they navigated communication, relationships, and family dynamics within blended family contexts.

To ensure a representative sample, purposive sampling was employed to select a diverse group of participants from varying socioeconomic, cultural, and demographic backgrounds. This strategy facilitated the inclusion of families with differing structures and experiences, thereby enriching the overall understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria, which required that couples be newly married (six years or less) and raising children from previous relationships. This criterion ensured that the study reflected the early stages of family blending, a critical period marked by adjustment and relationship formation.

Data collection involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed personal narratives and reflections on participants' experiences as blended families. The interviews provided participants with opportunities to share their perspectives openly, allowing for rich and descriptive data to emerge. In addition to the interviews, participants engaged in a week-long journaling exercise in which they documented their daily interactions, challenges, and reflections on their family life. This dual-method approach enhanced the credibility and depth of the data by capturing both immediate responses and ongoing reflections over time. Together, the interviews and reflective journals offered a comprehensive and authentic portrayal of participants' lived experiences.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns within both the interview transcripts and journaling entries. This analytic process involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting participants' statements to uncover shared meanings and distinct experiences across cases. Thematic analysis provided a systematic yet flexible framework for exploring the complexity of blended family life while preserving the authenticity and depth of participants' voices.

By adopting this methodological framework, the study generated valuable insights that contributed to a deeper understanding of how newly married Black American couples navigated the challenges and successes associated with blended family formation. The findings offered practical implications for family counseling, social work,

and community support initiatives, particularly in developing culturally responsive strategies to assist blended families in their early years of adjustment and growth.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The population for this study consisted of newly married Black American families with children who lived within blended family dynamics. One spouse from each remarried couple was selected to participate in the study to provide insight into how these families navigated challenges and adapted during the early years of marriage. Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria. Eligibility was confirmed through direct communication during the initial contact to ensure that at least one participant identified as Black American.

Additionally, participants were required to have children under the age of 18 and to belong to a blended family, having been remarried for fewer than six years while currently parenting children from previous relationships. During the initial discussion, potential participants were asked to describe their family structure, the duration of their remarriage, and their parenting responsibilities to verify compliance with the study's inclusion criteria. This criterion-based selection ensured that each participant had experienced the formative stages of family blending, which was essential for understanding how couples adapted, communicated, and navigated relational dynamics during this critical period.

When both spouses expressed interest in participating, only one was chosen based on their availability, willingness, and ability to engage in detailed reflection on the key

topics of the study. This approach maintained consistency in the data collection process and minimized potential overlap or influence between the narratives of each partner. The recruitment process also emphasized respectful and accurate eligibility assessment, which helped establish rapport and trust with participants.

Confirming these criteria was vital to ensure that the study accurately reflected the targeted population and generated meaningful insights into the experiences of newly married Black American individuals navigating the complexities of blended family life. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached. Saturation in qualitative research occurs when additional data collection no longer produces new insights or themes, indicating that the core aspects of the research topic have been sufficiently captured.

In this study, saturation was anticipated to occur with 8 to 10 participants, as this sample size is typically sufficient to achieve both thematic depth and breadth in qualitative family research. This range provided adequate depth to capture the complexity of participants' experiences while remaining manageable for thorough analysis. According to Kostere and Kostere (2022), this sample size ensures that inclusion criteria are adequately represented, enabling rich data collection and meaningful interpretation of themes.

By focusing on a clearly defined population and carefully selecting participants who met the established criteria, this study generated insights that were both comprehensive and aligned with the research question, contributing to a nuanced

understanding of the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples in blended families.

### **Instrumentation**

The primary data collection tool for this study was a semi-structured interview protocol developed by the researcher. The questions were open-ended and informed by an extensive review of existing research on Black American families, remarriage, and blended family dynamics. Literature focused on spousal communication, parenting, and relational adjustment within stepfamilies guided the construction of the interview questions to ensure alignment with the study's purpose and conceptual framework. The interview protocol was researcher-developed and not adapted from any previously published instrument. Its purpose was to elicit first-person narratives from participants who had been remarried for six years or less and were raising children from previous relationships.

The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in the interview process, enabling participants to reflect deeply on their experiences while allowing the researcher to pose follow-up questions to clarify or expand upon emerging topics. This flexibility ensured that the interviews remained participant-centered while maintaining consistency across interviews in addressing the main research question and subtopics of interest.

In addition to the interview protocol, audio recordings were used to ensure the accurate capture of each participant's responses. Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person, depending on each participant's preference and availability. When interviews

occurred virtually, Zoom's built-in encrypted recording feature was utilized to ensure data security. In cases of in-person interviews, a secure digital audio recorder was employed to capture the sessions. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to prepare the data for thematic analysis.

No additional instruments, such as observation sheets, video recordings, surveys, focus groups, or archival documents, were used in this study. The research did not involve the use of historical or legal documents. The focus remained exclusively on collecting first-hand, present-day accounts of participants' lived experiences, ensuring that the data reflected authentic narratives of remarriage and blended parenting.

The interview protocol was designed to explore topics directly aligned with the study's central purpose and research question. The questions were phrased to explore relationship adjustment, parenting roles, communication challenges, emotional dynamics, and strategies for family integration within blended households. Each question encouraged participants to describe their experiences in their own words, fostering authenticity and depth.

The sufficiency of the data collection instruments was grounded in their alignment with the qualitative design and research objectives. The open-ended format allowed participants to reflect freely and share rich, detailed accounts of their experiences, while the structured elements ensured that core topics were consistently addressed across interviews. The use of audio recordings and verbatim transcription supported accuracy and fidelity to participants' voices, facilitating a rigorous and

trustworthy thematic analysis. Collectively, these tools were adequate to generate the comprehensive, nuanced data necessary to answer the central research question and to provide meaningful insight into the lived experiences of newly remarried Black American individuals navigating blended family life.

### **Researcher-Developed Instruments**

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a researcher-developed, semi-structured interview protocol. This instrument was created specifically for this research and was not adapted from any previously published source. Its development was guided by Bowen Family Systems Theory and informed by a comprehensive review of literature on blended families, spousal communication, and relational dynamics within Black American households. Incorporating Bowen's concepts of differentiation of self and triangulation provided a conceptual framework for constructing questions that explored how newly married couples navigated emotional boundaries, role adjustments, and communication within blended family systems (Erdem & Safi, 2018).

To enhance the validity and cultural appropriateness of the instrument, feedback was solicited from content experts in family studies and qualitative research. Their recommendations helped refine the interview questions to ensure they were clear, relevant, and culturally aligned with the lived experiences of Black American families. This process strengthened the credibility of the instrument and ensured alignment with the study's objectives and conceptual framework.

Data were collected through individual, in-depth interviews with newly married Black American spouses who were members of blended families. The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to capture first-person narratives that reflected participants' lived experiences as they navigated remarriage and family integration. Each interview session was audio- and video-recorded with participants' informed consent. These recordings served as the primary source of data and were securely stored in password-protected digital files for transcription and subsequent thematic analysis.

No additional instruments, such as observation sheets, focus group guides, archival data, or artifacts, were utilized in this study. Historical or legal documents were excluded, as the research focus remained on capturing participants' present-day lived experiences through direct narrative interaction.

The sufficiency of the data collection instrument was established through its direct alignment with the study's research question, which explored communication patterns, coping strategies, and relational dynamics among newly married Black American couples navigating blended family life. The semi-structured format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for deeper probing and the emergence of unanticipated themes. This approach was well-suited for generating the rich, descriptive data necessary to answer the research question and to provide a nuanced understanding of family life in newly formed Black American blended families.

## **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

### **Recruitment**

The target population for this study consisted of newly married Black American individuals who were part of blended families that included children from previous relationships. A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to identify participants most likely to provide rich, relevant data aligned with the research question. This approach was appropriate for the qualitative nature of the study, as it allowed for the deliberate selection of information-rich cases offering deep insight into the lived experiences of individuals navigating newly formed stepfamily dynamics (Durdella, 2020).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The research process commenced with data collection through interviews with one individual from each newly married Black American couple in blended families. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather narratives focusing on family dynamics, daily interactions, coping strategies, emotional experiences, and relational challenges. Following the completion of each interview, the audio was transcribed verbatim, with a pseudonym assigned to preserve confidentiality. Once the transcription was finalized, I reviewed the transcripts and listened to the audio recordings multiple times to familiarize myself with the content (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). During this phase, I developed initial codes by highlighting significant words, phrases, and statements.

The 12-step thematic analysis process described by Kostere and Kostere (2022) was used to analyze the qualitative data collected in this study. This method provided a rigorous and structured approach to identifying themes and capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences. This approach ensured that the analysis remained true to the participants' voices while producing rich, meaningful interpretations of their experiences as newly remarried Black Americans with children.

I began by reading and re-reading each interview transcript to fully immerse myself in the data and gain a comprehensive understanding of each participant's narrative.

I recorded the initial impressions and reflections in a reflexive journal to capture early thoughts, reactions, and emerging ideas.

I conducted a second close reading of each transcript, identifying and highlighting significant statements directly related to the research focus.

I extracted all significant statements from each transcript and compiled them into a single document for systematic analysis.

I assigned meaning units, concise descriptive phrases, to each significant statement to represent its essential meaning.

I grouped related meaning units by identifying patterns, commonalities, and relationships to form preliminary themes.

I reviewed and refined the emerging themes to ensure they are clearly defined, distinct, and supported by the data.

I validated themes by comparing them against the original transcripts to confirm accuracy, consistency, and alignment with participant intent.

I created individual textural descriptions that reflect what each participant experienced regarding blending families.

SI developed individual structural descriptions explaining each experience, including relevant context and influencing factors.

I synthesized the individual textural and structural descriptions across participants to produce composite thematic summaries.

I concluded by crafting an essential description of the phenomenon that captures the essence of the lived experience across all participants. These codes will then be organized into potential-categories based on recurring ideas and concepts. The categories will be grouped and analyzed for emerging themes. The themes will be reviewed about the original codes and the overall data to ensure they accurately reflect the lived experiences of each individual. Revisions may include refining, merging, or separating themes as necessary. Each final theme will be coded manually with clear definitions and appropriate labels.

Discrepant cases in which a participant's experience or viewpoint diverged from the prevailing themes were not disregarded. Instead, these cases were analyzed and presented separately to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. By examining divergent experiences, the study's depth and reliability were enhanced, acknowledging the variation and complexity inherent in the data.

A comprehensive written report followed, presenting the themes alongside selected quotes and aligning the findings with the research question and existing literature. An audit trail was maintained throughout the process to ensure the study's credibility. This approach facilitated an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

To establish credibility, the study implemented several strategies, including prolonged engagement, member checks, saturation, and reflexivity. Prolonged engagement focused on building rapport and trust with the selected participant throughout the research process. As the researcher, I dedicated ample time during interviews and follow-up communications to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participant's perspective. Consistent communication facilitated a comfortable environment for openly sharing personal experiences without reservation. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of lived experiences and nurtured a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participant, contributing to the overall credibility of the study (Anderson, 2019).

A criterion-based, purposeful selection strategy was used to choose one spouse from each newly married Black American blended family. When both spouses expressed interest, the selection was based on availability, willingness, and ability to provide rich,

relevant insights. This approach ensured consistency in data collection and minimized potential bias from dual participation.

Member checks were conducted by providing the selected spouse with transcribed interviews and preliminary analyses to verify the accuracy of the recorded data and interpretations. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy and to provide any clarifications or additional details they felt were significant. This process enhanced the validity of the data and promoted active engagement in the research process.

### **Transferability**

Transferability was established through thick description and purposeful variation in the selection of one spouse from each newly married Black American blended family. A thick description involved providing detailed accounts of the selected individual's experiences, including the cultural, social, and familial contexts in which they lived. By clearly describing the settings, relationships, and events shared by each spouse, readers were able to assess the relevance and applicability of the findings to similar family structures and contexts (Bates & Bates, 2022).

### **Dependability**

Dependability was addressed by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail and employing triangulation. The audit trail consisted of detailed documentation of every stage of the research process, including data collection procedures, coding strategies, thematic development, and analytical decisions. This transparent record allowed other

researchers to trace the study's methodology and verify the consistency of the findings (Durdella, 2020).

To enhance the dependability of the study, member checking was employed to verify the accuracy of the data and its interpretations. A thick description was used to provide detailed and contextual accounts from one spouse in each newly married Black American blended family. By incorporating rich descriptions of the interview content along with relevant cultural, social, and relational contexts, the study enabled readers to evaluate the potential applicability of the findings to other settings or populations. This approach ensured that the conclusions were rooted in the experiences shared by the chosen spouse, thereby enhancing the reliability and trustworthiness of the research (Bean et al., 2021).

### **Confirmability**

I maintained confirmability through reflexivity. Reflexivity involved reflecting on my assumptions, potential biases, and their influence on data interpretation throughout the interview process. By acknowledging and documenting these reflections, I minimized subjective influences on data analysis, ensuring a more objective approach to understanding the participants' experiences (Anderson, 2019).

To enhance confirmability, I ensured that the findings were derived directly from the data rather than influenced by preconceived notions. This practice helped ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the perspectives of the chosen spouse and that the

research findings remained grounded in the data. Adopting this approach minimized researcher bias and bolstered the credibility and reliability of the study (Brimhall, 2020).

### **Intra and Intercoder Reliability**

To ensure consistency, I established intra-coder reliability by coding the data multiple times at different intervals. This process involved revisiting previously coded data to verify that the themes identified remained consistent over time. I also documented any changes in my coding decisions and explained the rationale for these adjustments to maintain transparency. There was no intercoder check due to my personal involvement and direct engagement with the topic.

By using these strategies to address credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and coding reliability, I maintained high standards of trustworthiness throughout the study. These practices ensured that the findings were robust, dependable, and accurately reflected the lived experiences of newly blended Black American families.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Before collecting data, I secured the necessary institutional permissions, including approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University. This process ensured that the study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. The IRB application included detailed descriptions of the study's purpose, methodology, participant recruitment strategies, and data collection procedures. Once the IRB reviewed and approved the research protocol, I received official approval number 10-13-25-1036448, which was documented and referenced throughout the study.

Securing IRB approval was a critical step in maintaining ethical rigor and safeguarding the rights and well-being of participants (Durdella, 2020).

One of the primary ethical considerations during recruitment was ensuring that each selected spouse understood the study's purpose and their role within it. Recruitment materials, including flyers and email invitations, clearly outlined the study's objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation. During the initial contact, I provided a verbal explanation of the study to each prospective spouse, emphasizing their right to decline or withdraw at any time without consequence. This transparent approach mitigated any sense of coercion, particularly when engaging families who might have been in vulnerable situations (Browning & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2019). As Cannon and Murray (2019) noted, offering clear and comprehensive information during the recruitment phase is essential for upholding ethical standards and informed participation.

Informed consent was obtained from one spouse in each newly married Black American blended family before participation. The consent form outlined the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and confidentiality measures. Consent was gathered electronically: participants received the informed consent form via email and were given sufficient time to review and sign it electronically. This process ensured that participants comprehended the study's purpose, their role, and their rights while providing a convenient and secure method of consent. Each participant had ample opportunity to read the form, ask questions, and address any concerns. This approach

adhered to ethical qualitative research practices by honoring autonomy and encouraging open communication (Bean et al., 2021).

Ethical considerations during data collection focused on safeguarding participants' privacy and minimizing potential risks. Because interviews addressed sensitive family dynamics, I used Zoom as a secure and confidential setting for participants to share their experiences. Participants were reminded that they could decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time, thereby retaining full control over their participation. This approach upheld individual autonomy and aligned with ethical standards for conducting research on sensitive topics (Brimhall, 2020).

All collected information was treated with the utmost confidentiality. Personal identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of each participant. Data were stored on a password-protected computer accessible only to the primary researcher. Digital audio recordings and transcriptions were encrypted, and all data will be retained for five years following the study's completion. After this period, all digital files will be permanently deleted.

The study adhered to confidentiality protocols when handling any data that were anonymous, such as responses without identifiable information. Anonymizing the data reduced the risk of privacy breaches, particularly when findings were shared in publications or presentations. Each transcript and report was reviewed to ensure that no identifying information was disclosed, maintaining strict compliance with ethical research standards (Anderson, 2019).

Conducting research within one's community or professional context can present unique ethical challenges, including potential conflicts of interest and perceived power imbalances. I did not have any prior personal or professional relationships with the individuals interviewed. Participants were informed that their involvement was completely voluntary and that choosing not to participate or to withdraw at any time would not affect any existing relationships or access to services.

Ethical considerations were embedded at every stage of the research process, including recruitment, data collection, storage, and dissemination. By adopting comprehensive ethical practices, this study minimized risks, respected autonomy, and protected the confidentiality of all participants. These procedures ensured that the study was conducted responsibly and in full consideration of participants' rights and well-being (Durdella, 2020).

### **Summary**

Chapter Three outlined the research methodology used to explore the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples with children as they navigated the complexities of blended family dynamics. This chapter presented a detailed and structured approach to understanding how these couples adapted to their new family structures, emphasizing the influence of these experiences on familial relationships. The use of a qualitative methodology with a generic qualitative design allowed for the collection of rich, descriptive data that reflected the diverse perspectives of blended families with children (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). These methodological choices were

intentionally selected to capture the depth and complexity of human experiences within blended family contexts.

Selecting a qualitative research design was essential for examining complex social phenomena such as blended family dynamics involving children. Qualitative inquiry enabled an in-depth exploration of personal perspectives, emotions, and relational contexts, which was critical for understanding how newly blended families navigated the early years of marriage. Unlike quantitative methods, which may overlook the contextual and emotional nuances of family interactions, qualitative methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the fluid and multifaceted nature of family relationships (Lim, 2024).

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants with children from various socio-economic, cultural, and demographic backgrounds. This approach ensured that the data collected represented diverse experiences within the target population. Purposeful sampling effectively identified participants who could provide detailed and relevant insights into the research questions (Durdella, 2020). By selecting one spouse from families with differing backgrounds, the study incorporated a broad spectrum of perspectives on the challenges and adjustments inherent in newly blended family structures. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University was obtained to ensure that all research activities adhered to ethical standards and safeguarded the rights of participants.

Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews that captured personal reflections and narratives. These interviews provided in-depth insights into the challenges and experiences of individuals who were newly remarried with children, revealing how they managed their family relationships. This approach facilitated open-ended, reflective responses that illuminated the emotional and relational dimensions of family life. The use of spoken and recorded reflections enriched the depth and authenticity of the findings, as noted by Brimhall (2020).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data. The analysis followed a structured process of systematically coding and categorizing information to reveal significant themes. I manually managed and organized the data to ensure rigor and consistency throughout the analysis. Thematic analysis enabled the identification and verification of key patterns, resulting in strong, credible findings that deepened the understanding of participants' lived experiences.

Ethical considerations were central to the research process. Institutional Review Board approval ensured that all research procedures complied with ethical standards for studies involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from one spouse in each blended family, and participants were provided with clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and confidentiality protections. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained through secure data storage and the use of pseudonyms to protect participants' identities (Anderson, 2019). Ethical practices were upheld

throughout recruitment, data collection, and dissemination to protect the well-being of all participants.

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, member checking, and reflexivity. Reflexivity allowed me to remain aware of potential biases and to approach the data objectively. Reflecting on my assumptions and how they may have influenced interpretation helped ensure that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' lived experiences. Transferability was enhanced through thick description and purposeful variation in participant selection, enabling others to evaluate the applicability of the findings in different contexts. Dependability was maintained through a detailed audit trail and consistent data management procedures. Confirmability was achieved through reflexive documentation, ensuring that conclusions were based on data rather than researcher bias (Brimhall, 2020; Bean et al., 2021).

This chapter presented a clear and methodologically sound framework for exploring the lived experiences of newly blended Black American families with children. The integration of qualitative methods, rigorous analysis, and ethical integrity ensured that the study's findings were credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. These practices supported the generation of meaningful insights that contribute to the fields of family studies, counseling, and social work. Chapter Four will present the results and emergent themes derived from this study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore lived experiences of newly-married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics with children during the first 6 years of remarriage. Blended families, which form when one or both partners bring children from previous relationships into new marriages, represent an increasingly common family structure in the United States (Ganong et al., 2022). These families encounter unique challenges such as negotiating parenting roles, building trust between stepparents and stepchildren, and managing sibling and extended family relationships (Bean et al., 2021). For Black American couples, these challenges are further shaped by cultural values, community expectations, and systemic influences that affect family stability and cohesion (Anderson, 2019; Weiser et al., 2022).

This study was guided by one central research question: What are the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics with their children? This question directed exploration of how these couples perceived, interpreted, and managed processes of blending their families during early years of marriage.

This chapter includes results of the study regarding participants' experiences with forming and maintaining blended family relationships. It begins with an overview of the research setting and participant demographics, followed by a description of the data collection process and data analysis steps. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness of findings

are then outlined. I present emergent themes involving participants' lived experiences related to family integration, communication, parenting, and resilience.

### **Setting**

Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom to ensure participants could engage in the most private, comfortable, and safe environment possible. I completed interviews with a total of nine participants. The virtual format provided convenience and confidentiality, allowing participants to share their experiences openly without external interference or constraint.

### **Demographics**

The study involved nine newly-married Black American spouses who were part of blended families with children from previous relationships. At the time of the study, all participants had been married for 6 years or less. Each participant identified as Black American and shared experiences related to family integration, communication, parenting, and cultural values within their households. All participants resided in the United States and came from different geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, but they all expressed strong cultural and community ties.

Each participant was part of a family system that included biological children and stepchildren, with household compositions ranging from one to several children from one or both partners. Although individual family structures and histories varied, all participants described shared values rooted in love, faith, cultural pride, and a commitment to creating stability for their children and marriages.

### **Data Collection**

Research instrumentation consisted of semi-structured interview protocols that included 25 open-ended questions. This protocol was designed to explore lived experiences of newly-married Black American couples navigating blended family dynamics within the first 6 years of remarriage. After receiving approval from the Walden University IRB (#10-13-1036448), flyers were distributed on social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, to recruit participants who met inclusion criteria.

A total of nine participants were selected for this study, and each completed individual interviews via Zoom. All interviews lasted less than 1 hour, and all data were collected over approximately 1.5 weeks. All interviews were audio-recorded and Zoom automatically transcribed recordings. I then carefully reviewed and verified transcripts to ensure accuracy and completeness.

All transcripts and recordings were securely stored on a password-protected device, with access restricted to myself and the dissertation committee chair. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier (P1 to P9) to maintain confidentiality throughout the analysis process. There were no major variations in procedures as described in Chapter 3, with the exception that interviews were conducted virtually rather than in person, promoting convenience and participant safety. No unusual circumstances were encountered during data collection; participants appeared comfortable and engaged,

providing rich and meaningful responses that contributed to development of the study's five major themes.

### **Data Analysis**

I adhered to steps outlined by Kostere and Kostere, providing a systematic framework for transforming data into codes, categories, and themes. Each participant was labeled as P1 through P9 to protect confidentiality and ensure consistency throughout analysis. After transcribing interviews, which totaled 382 pages of data, I began by thoroughly familiarizing myself with material through multiple readings of transcripts and listening to Zoom recordings to verify transcription accuracy. This repeated engagement with data allowed me to fully comprehend participants' experiences and start identifying patterns of meaning.

Initial coding was performed manually. I reviewed each transcript line by line, noting significant words, phrases, and expressions that reflected recurring experiences among participants. Codes were created to categorize communication practices, coparenting strategies, emotional challenges, and sources of resilience. I then grouped similar codes, forming categories that represented broader areas of experience such as relational communication, parenting collaboration, boundary management, and emotional coping. As categories became repetitive and patterns emerged, I refined them into themes that represented the collective essence of participants' lived experiences. This process reflected Kostere and Kostere's inductive approach involving moving systematically from coded units to categories and then from categories to comprehensive themes.

To organize and manage analysis, I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that served as the project's master codebook. The spreadsheet contained participant data, codes, meaning units, definitions, subthemes, and major themes. This tool helped identify overlaps and ensure analytic consistency while making it easier to trace how specific participant statements supported emerging themes. Through this process, five major themes were identified: communication dynamics, parenting and role negotiation, adjustment and resilience, family integration and sibling relationships, and external family systems and faith.

Theme 1 reflected how couples used open dialogue and emotional expression to foster connection and trust. P5 stated, "We learned to talk through our frustrations rather than hold them in." P8 explained, "We held Sunday check-ins to see how everyone was feeling." Similarly, Theme 2 emerged from coparenting and boundary management as well as discipline balance and coparenting boundaries. According to P2 statement, "We talk behind closed doors, then move forward together." P6 said, "We had to make sure discipline was fair for all the kids."

There were no discrepancies or conflicting cases identified in the data. All nine participants described similar patterns of communication, boundary management, and resilience, which supported the credibility and consistency of the findings. This rigorous and iterative process ensured that the themes accurately reflected participants' lived experiences while aligning with Bowen Family Systems Theory, demonstrating how

differentiation and triangulation shaped the ways newly married Black American couples navigated blended family dynamics.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

To establish credibility, I employed multiple verification strategies consistent with those described in Chapter 3. I recorded and transcribed all nine interviews to ensure accuracy, and I reviewed each Zoom-generated transcript alongside the audio recordings to confirm that the participants' words were accurately represented. By engaging in prolonged interaction with the data, reading, rereading, and listening to the recordings, I developed a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives. These combined strategies enhanced the credibility of the findings by confirming their accuracy and authenticity, and alignment with the participants' lived experiences.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability was enhanced through a detailed description of participants' lived experiences, settings, and family dynamics. Each participant's responses were presented using direct quotations that highlighted the depth and emotional richness of their stories. This method allows readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other populations or family contexts. The inclusion of comprehensive demographic and contextual information offered insight into participants' cultural identities as Black American couples and how these identities shaped their experiences in blending families.

**Dependability**

Dependability was achieved through consistent documentation and systematic organization of all research activities. A comprehensive audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, including interview schedules, transcripts, coding notes, and Excel spreadsheets that documented how codes, categories, and themes were developed. Consultation with my committee chair throughout the process ensured consistency and methodological rigor. While no major adjustments were required, additional notes were added to the audit trail to record emerging insights and methodological reflections. These strategies strengthened the dependability of the study by providing a transparent record of how findings were generated and verified.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability was supported through continuous reflexive journaling and the documentation of analytic decisions. I maintained a reflexive journal to recognize my assumptions, beliefs, and potential biases throughout the data collection and analysis process. This journal ensured that my interpretations remained grounded in the data rather than influenced by personal expectations. Additionally, all transcripts, codebooks, and Excel spreadsheets were securely stored, providing an auditable record of how findings were derived directly from participants' narratives.

## Results

A total of five emergent themes were identified from the data analysis, based on the participants' responses to the central research question (see Table 1). Nine participants took part in one-on-one semi-structured interviews, each consisting of 25 open-ended questions designed to gain insight into their experiences as newly married Black American spouses with children.

These interviews provided an in-depth understanding of how participants communicated, negotiated parental roles, and built resilience while navigating the emotional and relational complexities of blending families. The perspectives that emerged revealed that communication, patience, and faith were foundational to promoting family stability. Additionally, intentional boundary setting and shared parenting strengthened unity across households.

Collectively, the participants' narratives highlighted both the challenges and growth that occur when two family systems merge into one, demonstrating how love, structure, and

cultural identity shape the success of newly blended Black American families. **Table 1**

*Emergent Themes*

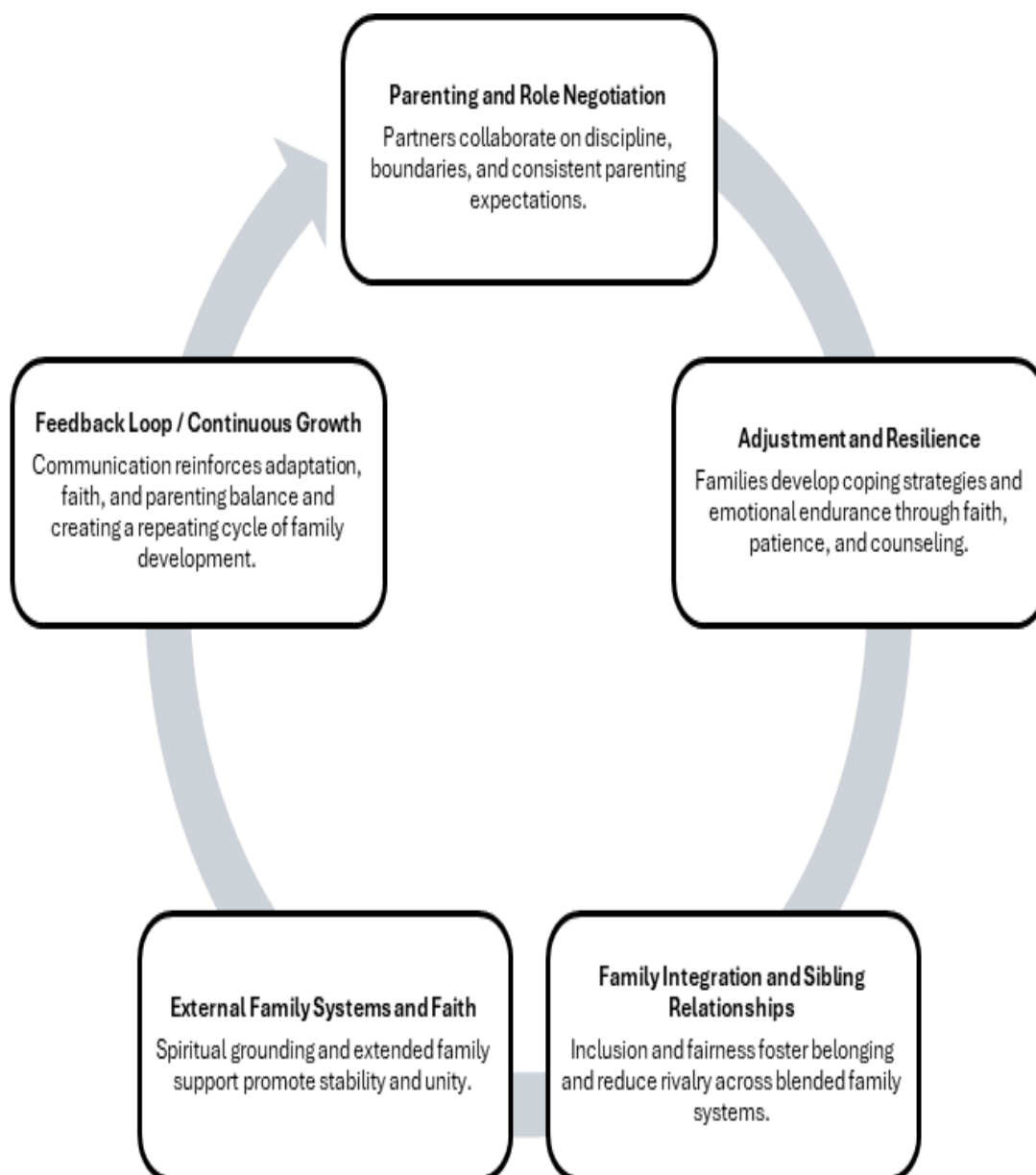
Theme	Core Meaning	Supporting Participant Evidence	Bowen's Theory Link
<i>Communication Dynamics</i>	Open and consistent communication fosters trust, understanding, and emotional balance.	"We learned to talk through our frustrations rather than hold them in." (P5); "We held family check-ins to see how everyone was feeling." (P8)	Differentiation (clarity and emotional regulation)
<i>Parenting and Role Negotiation</i>	Collaborative discipline and boundary setting strengthen family unity.	"We talk behind closed doors, then move forward together." (P2); "We had to make sure discipline was fair for all the kids." (P6)	Triangulation (boundary management within family subsystems)
<i>Adjustment and Resilience</i>	Families develop resilience through patience, faith, and counseling support.	"My child's grief resurfaced after the remarriage; counseling helped." (P6); "Prayer and patience helped us find our rhythm." (P3)	Differentiation (emotional stability during stress)
<i>Family Integration and Sibling Relationships</i>	Fairness and inclusion encourage belonging and emotional security among children.	"We teach them they're both loved the same, no his or hers." (P7); "We remind them we're all family now." (P8)	Differentiation (cohesion across subsystems)
<i>External Family Systems and Faith</i>	Faith, prayer, and extended family support provide grounding and stability.	"We pray together." (P5); "Prayer helped us handle tough moments together." (P9)	Triangulation (faith as a stabilizing force reducing emotional tension)

*Note.* The five emergent themes are substantial and align with the central research question, reflecting consistent patterns across participants.

Five key themes emerged from data analysis. Effective communication plays a crucial role in fostering adaptation, maintaining a balance in parenting, and nurturing faith. This interplay creates a continuous cycle of family development that consistently strengthens the blended family system (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Active Interaction of Themes and Patterns*



**Theme 1: Communication Dynamics**

Each participant was recently remarried in a blended family dynamic that included children. They identified communication as the foundation of stability, emotional balance, and unity among all nine participants. Communication was consistently described as the most important process to sustaining their relationships, minimizing misunderstandings, and fostering trust within the blended family. Through ongoing dialogue, empathy, and patience, couples learned to navigate conflicts while maintaining their emotional connection.

P1 spoke openly about how communication within the family evolved over time and how it became the tool that helped heal early tension in the family, especially with communicating with the minor who lived at home. In the beginning, conversations were difficult because everyone was learning new roles and boundaries. However, P1 explained that constant dialogue slowly brought clarity: “There’s a lot of conversation between the three of us here lately... we have to do this as a unit; we have to be on the same page.” This statement reflected a shift from isolated decision-making to collective communication. P1 added that communication required spiritual grounding: “By the grace of God, we’ve come to an understanding.” During the interview, the P1 elaborated that faith guided their ability to listen and forgive, which was critical in keeping emotional tension low. What stood out in P1’s discussion was how communication was not only about words but also about timing and tone, knowing when to speak and when to

allow space, a concept that directly aligns with Bowen's differentiation, emphasizing calm and clarity during emotionally charged moments.

P2 also reinforced this theme by describing communication as a bridge that connected their new family members emotionally. P2 reflected on how important patience and intentional effort were when building relationships with stepchildren: "It took a lot of time... a lot of grace, a lot of patience, and just work to let them know that I'm here for them, that I care about them." In their interview, P2 detailed that, early on, communication often felt one-sided because the children were guarded. However, consistent conversations, family meetings, and reassurance helped break those barriers. P2 shared that the turning point came when communication shifted from correction to connection and moving away from discipline and toward understanding. They described moments of sitting at the dinner table, talking through emotions and decisions, emphasizing that this mode of communication made the children "feel heard" and "more trusting."

Both P1 and P2 described communication as not merely exchanging information but as an emotional practice that built mutual respect and strengthened family cohesion. Communication became a strategy for expressing love, managing expectations, and modeling appropriate conflict resolution for children. These participants emphasized that effective communication required intentionality, vulnerability, and sometimes prayer, underscoring that it was a process of continual learning rather than a single act.

Participants agreed that proactive communication prevented conflict escalation and promoted emotional healing after disagreements. P1 mentioned, “Sometimes we have to stop and talk about things before they become bigger,” demonstrating awareness of the need to address issues early. Similarly, P2 shared that open dialogue reassured the children that problems could be solved together rather than ignored. This preventive approach mirrored Bowen’s belief that open emotional systems function more effectively than closed ones.

Overall, the findings from P1 and P2 illustrate that communication served as both a preventive measure and a healing process. Their interviews revealed that effective dialogue cultivated emotional safety, clarified expectations, and reinforced unity among family members. These patterns reflected differentiation, the capacity to stay calm, empathetic, and connected under stress, and highlighted communication as the recurring thread that supported every other dynamic in the blended family.

## **Theme 2: Parenting and Role Negotiation**

All nine participants emphasized that establishing parenting roles and boundaries was among the most complex yet necessary aspects of creating a stable blended family. The process required negotiation, mutual respect, and flexibility as partners learned to merge two distinct parenting approaches while ensuring that children from previous relationships felt equally valued. This theme emerged as participants discussed learning to collaborate, divide responsibilities, and create a sense of fairness across households.

P2 described the early stages of merging families as a “balancing act” that required time and grace:

“It took a lot of time ... a lot of grace, a lot of patience, and just work to let them know that I’m here for them, that I care about them.”

During the interview, P2 emphasized that the crucial aspect of her approach was not to replace the children's biological parent, although she was raising her stepson as her own after his mother passed away, and the daughter was dealing with a similar situation. P2 expressed her desire to supplement what was already present in their lives: “I didn’t want to come in telling them what to do. I wanted them to see that I was consistent and that I meant well.” Over time, this consistency transformed initial resistance into mutual respect. This highlights how parenting in a blended family requires emotional awareness and the ability to lead with understanding rather than domination.

P5 explained the difficulty of aligning two different parenting philosophies. They stated, “We learned that before we can discipline, we need to talk about it privately. We can’t let the kids see us disagree.” P5 elaborated that unity between spouses prevented confusion and minimized behavioral challenges among children: “We make sure the rules are the same for everyone, no his or hers.” Their experiences reflected intentional teamwork that reinforced fairness and balance, echoing the principle that both partners work together to prevent children from being caught in emotional alliances.

P7 also addressed the challenge of redefining parental authority within her new family structure: “It’s exciting and challenging because I still have to manage my

marriage and parenting. It's not always easy, but we figure it out together." P7 discussed learning when to lead and when to step back, noting that open discussion with her spouse about discipline helped avoid conflict: "We learned to take turns talking to the kids instead of overlapping each other." P7 reflection revealed the developmental nature of role negotiation, a gradual process requiring communication, observation, and adjustment.

P8 provided another perspective, emphasizing the importance of equal treatment: "We have check-ins to make sure everyone's okay, and no one feels left out." These meetings allowed both biological and stepchildren to express concerns, reinforcing a sense of belonging. P8 explained that these discussions helped redefine parental roles in ways that felt inclusive rather than authoritative: "We don't use the word 'step' in our home; everyone's just our kids."

Across participants, unity in parenting emerged as an important factor in maintaining stability. Couples found that alignment on discipline, communication, and expectations reduced behavioral issues and increased trust. P2 summarized this clearly: "We talk behind closed doors, then move forward together." Their unity modeled healthy conflict management and consistency for the children's traits central to emotional security and family functioning.

Collectively, the participants' narratives demonstrated that parenting in blended families is a negotiated, evolving process that intertwines communication, emotional intelligence, and teamwork. Role negotiation was not static but an ongoing dialogue on

balance and interdependence within relational systems. Through unity, fairness, and cooperative problem-solving, participants constructed new family systems that promoted respect, love, and stability across generational lines.

### **Theme 3: Adjustment and Resilience**

Participants consistently characterized the initial phases of blending families as a period of emotional adjustment that required patience, faith, and deliberate effort. Themes of adjustment and resilience emerged as participants navigated changes in routines, expectations, and relationships, all while developing strategies to preserve family unity. Each participant noted that this adjustment period necessitated flexibility and the ability to manage emotional triggers, all in the pursuit of establishing new family norms.

P5 reflected on the emotional journey of creating stability amid uncertainty: “At first, it was hard because we were learning about each other.” They realized that the children were also adjusting, not just the adults. P5 noted that this adjustment required understanding rather than perfection, emphasizing that “growth came from slowing down and discovering what worked for our family.” They described experiencing moments of tension but explained that prayer and time helped the family “find our rhythm.” This sense of resilience stemmed from persistence and the recognition that family harmony developed gradually, not instantly.

P2 described adjustment as “a process of grace,” highlighting how grief from spouse's previous relationships impacted their new marriage. They noted, “My biological

child never had siblings and showed remarkable grace toward our son from my husband, as his mother passed away.” Despite the emotional challenges, effective communication played a crucial role in their coping process. P2 reflected on how maintaining an open dialogue about emotions and establishing consistency helped build resilience for everyone involved. This adjustment journey involved redefining expectations, accepting imperfection, and prioritizing progress over perfection.

P8 articulated that family adjustment is “an ongoing journey” that involves balancing various emotional needs. They shared, “We’re all still learning how to be a family. Some days it feels natural, while other days it feels forced.” To navigate these challenges, they have established family check-ins and engaged in shared activities, such as vacations and holiday celebrations, which have helped them stay connected. These routines have evolved into resilience-building practices that anchor the family in shared experiences and values.

P9 emphasized the importance of faith and patience during the adjustment process: “Prayer and patience helped us find our rhythm. There were days I didn’t think we would make it, but then we’d pray and start over.” They explained that their family found strength through unity and consistency, learning the ability to forgive quickly and avoiding holding onto frustration.

Collectively, participants’ stories revealed that resilience was cultivated through acceptance, emotional awareness, and spiritual grounding. Adjustment was not a linear process; rather, it involved setbacks, reflection, and recommitment. Participants found

that maintaining open communication, seeking counseling, and prioritizing faith helped sustain the family's emotional well-being.

Participants emphasized that patience is crucial when navigating the adjustments of blended family life. P6 observed, "I had to learn not to expect the same reactions I would have. Everyone processes differently." This perspective highlights how participants transitioned from emotional reactions to thoughtful responses. A common theme among participants was that achieving success in blended families necessitates grace for oneself, one's partner, and the children as they all adapt to new dynamics of living and loving.

#### **Theme 4: Family Integration and Sibling Relationships**

Participants described integration as a daily, guided process shaped by fairness, clear rules, and steady teamwork among adults. Two contrasting contexts emerged from their experiences.

P7 reported a generally cohesive home where spouses operate as a united front, treat children "pretty much as equals," and actively foster an environment for those relationships to thrive through family activities and consistent standards. This cohesive approach remains strong even when outside influences, such as the other parent, introduce conflicting rules. P7 mentioned, "We have her every other weekend...the rules are different." When disagreements arise, P7 and their spouse first discuss the issue privately, then present a united front to the children. At times, they mediate on both sides during conflicts; other times, they defuse the situation and follow up with the other parent

later. They eventually sought counseling (though later than they would have preferred) to help the children process their feelings and maintain the sibling bond.

P4 on the other hand, described a more strained path to integration, marked by unequal acceptance and extended family issues with the spouse's family. P4 shared that her husband's family has been "very welcoming" to her biological son, whom they have known since infancy, but has been less open to her son from her marriage. This perceived imbalance creates ongoing friction between the stepfather and the adult son, while P4 finds herself "in the middle," trying to communicate separately with each other and hoping they will understand each other's perspectives. P4 also noted how these dynamics make sibling and household integration a "never-ending battle," particularly when differential treatment is felt or observed.

Together, P7 and P4 illustrate two common patterns of integration: (a) structured inclusion involving uniform language ("brother/sister"), unified parental messaging, mediated problem-solving, and the use of counseling (P7); and (b) contested inclusion characterized by perceived favoritism, extended-family influence, stalled conjoint help-seeking, and P4 acting as a continual go-between. In both cases, the adult system sets the tone: consistent rules, coordinated responses, and timely support (including counseling) help siblings transition from tension to cooperative belonging, while inconsistent support and perceived inequities hinder that process.

### **Theme 5: Cultural Values, Faith, and External Family Systems**

Faith, culture, and extended family networks played significant roles in shaping how participants maintained stability and a sense of belonging within their blended families. Each participant's experience demonstrated how cultural values and spiritual practices provided guidance, structure, and resilience.

P7 described her approach to family life as rooted in a Black cultural care ethic, the belief that community responsibility extends to all children. She stated, "It doesn't matter who the parent is; you're going to take care of whatever kid is in your presence... we as Black Americans take care of the kids within our community." P7 intentionally applies this value in her household by creating "forced family time" to ensure closeness despite busy schedules. These gatherings, including family dinners, vacations, and phone-free movie nights, help everyone stay connected. She noted that her extended family was very welcoming to her stepdaughter, treating her "just like she was any other part of the family," which reinforced a sense of equality among siblings. However, challenges arose when the stepchild's other parents established conflicting household rules. To navigate this, P7 and her spouse first discuss issues privately, present a united front to the children, and involve counseling when necessary. She identified the most fulfilling outcome as seeing her stepdaughter call her "Mom" in front of friends, small affirmations that confirmed their family unity.

P8 offered a view of extended family involvement. She reported that her relatives were highly supportive, "I receive considerable support from my side of the family..."

even from my cousins. They're helpful." In contrast, her husband's parents were deceased, and one aunt served as the main emotional anchor: "She's very good with my son and encourages him, but that's really it." Despite this imbalance, P8 maintained that her family's faith practices, prayer, church attendance, and gratitude filled the gaps left by the less-involved in-laws. These rituals fostered inclusion for both her son and stepchild, demonstrating how chosen family and community networks can substitute for biological connections.

P9 described faith as her daily guide and emotional stabilizer, stating, "Prayer, I recommend it consistently." She explained that consistent prayer "keeps the peace when things get hard." P9 also connected spirituality to accountability, stating, "You can't blame your parents forever, you have to grow and show your children better." For her, faith intertwined with cultural pride, encouraging perseverance and self-reflection that modeled strength for her children.

In summary, Participants 7, 8, and 9 portrayed faith and cultural identity as interconnected sources of moral grounding, emotional resilience, and continuity across generations. Whether through prayer, family rituals, or community support, these practices nurtured a sense of belonging and maintained balance amid the complexities of blended family life. Even when extended family participation was uneven, participants turned to spirituality and cultural values to sustain unity, compassion, and shared purpose.

## Summary

The findings of this study revealed that newly married Black American couples with children experience blended family life as a deeply emotional, spiritual, and adaptive process. Participants consistently described how communication, patience, and faith shaped their ability to create unity and balance in their homes. The results demonstrated that each couple's experience followed a recognizable pattern of adjustment, beginning with initial challenges and uncertainty, followed by intentional communication, emotional regulation, and the gradual development of trust and shared identity.

In the early stages of remarriage, participants expressed feelings of tension, competing loyalties, and shifting roles as they adjusted to blending children from previous relationships. Participants P1, P2, and P4 described moments of confusion and misunderstanding that required them to learn new communication habits and parenting approaches. Through consistent dialogue and teamwork, they transitioned from reactionary conflict to collaborative problem-solving. Participants acknowledged that these transitions were not linear; progress often cycled through periods of frustration, reconciliation, and renewed effort. Over time, communication became a stabilizing force that helped families move from emotional reactivity to relational understanding.

Parenting and role negotiation were described as both challenging and transformative. Participants P2 and P5 emphasized the need to maintain a united front in front of their children, choosing to handle disagreements privately. Participants P6 and P7

shared how differences in discipline styles initially caused strain but eventually led to growth through mutual compromise. Each participant expressed that parenting in a blended family required learning to lead with empathy rather than control, and fairness rather than favoritism.

Adjustment and resilience were recurring experiences that reflected emotional endurance and growth. Participant P6 noted that her child's grief resurfaced after the remarriage, while participants P9 and P5 shared that prayer and patience became essential tools in helping their families "find rhythm" and "start over when days were hard." Collectively, participants described resilience not as resistance to struggle but as the ability to remain grounded through faith, grace, and self-awareness.

Integration among children emerged as a gradual process shaped by fairness, inclusion, and shared routines. Participants P3 and P7 illustrated how family dinners, game nights, and vacations, often described as "forced family time," helped bridge differences and encourage closeness. However, participant P4's experiences highlighted that family integration could be hindered when extended family dynamics or uneven acceptance among relatives created emotional distance. Despite these challenges, participants reinforced that treating all children equally and maintaining consistent expectations fostered belonging and reduced rivalry.

Faith, culture, and extended family systems played significant roles in helping participants navigate the complexities of blended family life. Participant P7 described faith and cultural care as inseparable, explaining that in her family, "you take care of

whatever kid is in your presence.” Participant P8 expressed gratitude for her family’s involvement and emphasized that prayer and church traditions compensated for limited in-law support. Participant P9 viewed spirituality as the emotional anchor that sustained peace and accountability within her household. Across participants, faith and cultural identity served as sources of strength, resilience, and unity.

Overall, the lived experiences of these nine participants revealed that communication, faith, and intentional love were at the core of building successful blended families. Participants actively worked to blend their families, showing that the process required effort, communication, and commitment instead of passive adjustment. Their stories reflect patterns of growth through patience, shared prayer, open conversation, and cultural pride. Although each family’s path was different, they shared a common understanding that blended family success develops through continuous effort, mutual respect, and the belief that unity must be cultivated daily.

Chapter 4 included an overview of participant demographics, the research setting, data collection, analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the presentation of results through five major themes. Chapter 5 will present the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, implications for social change, and the conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how newly-married Black American spouses with children navigated experiences, challenges, and dynamics of blended family life within the first 6 years of remarriage. I aimed to address how these spouses communicated, established parenting roles, adjusted to new family structures, and relied on faith and cultural values to create stability in their homes. I focused on nine participants, each a spouse in a newly-blended family system, to gain insights regarding how love, communication, and resilience shaped their everyday experiences. Guided by Bowen's concepts of differentiation and triangulation, I examined how they balanced emotional connection, independence, and boundaries within their families.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their lived experiences in their own words. Data were analyzed manually using the Kostere and Kostere approach, which involved coding, categorizing, and clustering similar ideas until broader patterns and meanings emerged. Through this systematic process, five major themes were identified.

Theme 1 emphasized participants considered open dialogue, emotional honesty, and active listening vital for maintaining family unity. Communication served as both a bridge and a barrier, aiding conflict resolution, strengthening trust, and sustaining connections within blended households. Participants noted consistent and transparent communication made family members feel valued and understood, ultimately fostering emotional safety in their homes.

Theme 2 highlighted the significance of teamwork and shared discipline. Participants explained learning to parent together rather than having separately established rules within families. Unified decision-making and mutual respect between spouses reinforced both their marital bonds and overall family structure, providing children with clear expectations and a sense of balance.

Theme 3 involved how participants viewed growth as an ongoing process involving continuous effort, forgiveness, and faith. They described resilience as the ability to adapt and remain grounded through prayer, counseling, and patience. Participants acknowledged while challenges were inevitable, they served as opportunities to strengthen emotional connections and rebuild trust during family transitions.

Theme 4 was families worked to promote closeness through inclusion, fairness, and shared experiences. Participants reported equal treatment and joint activities helped reduce rivalry and foster a sense of belonging. Intentional acts of togetherness, including family meals, conversations, and shared routines, played a crucial role in helping children feel loved and secure, regardless of their biological ties.

Theme 5 illustrated the critical role of spirituality, prayer, and cultural identity in sustaining family life. Faith provided emotional grounding and direction, while extended relatives such as grandparents, aunts, and cousins offered additional support when available. Even when external family involvement was limited, spirituality and community connections helped participants maintain hope, gratitude, and resilience.

Collectively, these five themes demonstrate how newly-married Black American spouses navigate blended family life through communication, faith, and shared purpose. Findings highlight harmony within blended families is an ongoing process that is rooted in intentional connection, cultural pride, and the daily practice of love and understanding.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand ways newly-married Black American spouses navigated dynamics of blended family life during the first 6 years of remarriage. I addressed how participants experienced communication, parenting, emotional adjustment, sibling relationships, and the influence of faith and extended family. Findings from the study both confirm and extend prior scholarship on blended families by revealing how communication, shared parenting, resilience, family integration, and spirituality function as interdependent processes that strengthen family stability and unity among Black American couples.

#### **Theme 1**

Communication emerged as the central stabilizing force within participants' families. Participants emphasized the need for open, consistent, and transparent dialogue to maintain trust and family unity. P2 explained, "We have to talk behind closed doors first before presenting decisions to the kids." Similarly, P5 shared ongoing discussions and listening sessions prevented resentment and strengthened marital understanding, while P1 described how honest conversation diffused misunderstandings and nurtured emotional safety.

Communication is the foundation of successful blended families, as it minimizes misinterpretations and aligns expectations among family members (Jensen & Ganong, 2020; Turner et al., 2021). The current study extends this scholarship by emphasizing communication as an intentional daily practice rather than an assumed process. For Black American couples, communication also has cultural meaning serving as both a survival tool and means of emotional regulation (Anderson, 2019).

Via Bowen's family systems theory, these findings illustrate the process of differentiation, where spouses regulate emotional reactivity to maintain individuality while remaining connecte. Participants described learning to pause, reflect, and respond calmly during disagreements, which were behaviors that were consistent with Bowen's notion of emotional maturity. By mastering communication, participants established predictability, reduced anxiety, and built resilience within family systems. Communication thus functioned not only as a mechanism for problem-solving but also process of emotional balance and relational alignment within newly-blended households.

## **Theme 2**

The second theme involved how spouses learned to share parental responsibilities and define roles through collaboration and fairness. P6 described the tension she and her husband initially faced when merging different parenting styles, and said, "We had to learn to be on one accord." P7 stated she and her spouse intentionally make decisions privately to "avoid conflict in front of the children." Similarly, P2 described how establishing consistency in discipline "helped everyone understand what to expect."

Consistent and cooperative coparenting strengthens stepfamily functioning (Bates & Bates, 2022; Ganong et al., 2022). Participants' efforts to coparent collaboratively also reflected Bowen's concept of reducing triangulation, where partners minimize divided loyalties among children by maintaining unity and direct communication. By addressing disagreements privately, participants reduced emotional tension for their children and modeled healthy conflict resolution.

This study extends existing literature by demonstrating that parenting among Black American blended families involves culturally-informed practices emphasizing respect, collective care, and fairness. Anderson (2019) and Coates et al. (2024) noted that Black families often approach parenting as a shared responsibility across household and kin networks, reinforcing discipline through communal values. P7 and P8 embodied this approach, describing parenting as both a spiritual duty and a partnership grounded in love and consistency. Their experiences demonstrated that unity between spouses in parenting decisions created predictability for children, strengthened trust, and stabilized family relationships.

### **Theme 3**

Adjustment and resilience emerged as critical emotional processes within the blending experience. Participants described how patience, counseling, and prayer helped them adapt to new family roles while managing emotional challenges. P6 revealed that her child's grief "resurfaced after the remarriage," requiring therapy and compassion to reestablish balance. P9 shared, "Prayer helps me keep peace when things get hard,"

emphasizing that faith served as both a coping mechanism and a means of emotional regulation.

These findings confirm the work of Brown (2013) and Weiser et al. (2022), who found that resilience in stepfamilies involves sustained emotional effort and adaptive coping. Participants' ability to turn to faith and family dialogue reflects Anderson's (2019) concept of cultural resilience, in which Black families draw strength from shared spiritual traditions and intergenerational wisdom.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings illustrate Bowen's idea that emotional differentiation fosters resilience. Participants who developed self-awareness and emotional control were better equipped to handle stress and maintain connection within the family unit. For example, P5 discussed taking time alone to reflect before responding during conflict, describing this as "choosing peace over reaction." This deliberate regulation of emotions reflects Bowen's emphasis on balancing individuality and togetherness.

Ultimately, participants demonstrated that resilience was not simply the ability to recover from conflict but an ongoing process of self-reflection, emotional management, and faith-based endurance. The findings extend existing literature by showing that spiritual grounding, rather than external support alone, serves as a consistent source of healing and motivation for Black American blended families.

**Theme 4**

Participants described how establishing unity among children required intentional inclusion, fairness, and shared experiences. P3 discussed the importance of “family dinners and family nights” as opportunities for children to bond, while P4 emphasized equal treatment across all children to prevent division. P7 referred to these efforts as “forced family time,” noting that structured togetherness helped strengthen sibling relationships.

These experiences align with Landon et al. (2022) and Tucker and Finkelhor (2017), who found that family integration is strengthened through consistency, fairness, and shared rituals. The participants’ practices reflect Ganong et al.’s (2022) conclusion that equitable treatment among biological and stepchildren fosters a sense of belonging and reduces conflict.

Through the lens of Bowen Family Systems Theory, these behaviors also represent differentiation within the larger family unit. Parents who maintained calm and consistent leadership created a secure emotional environment where children could adjust to new roles. As P4 noted, “When everyone feels equal, the house feels peaceful.” This finding extends prior research by demonstrating that inclusion and fairness function not only as behavioral strategies but as emotional regulators that stabilize the family system.

Furthermore, this study expands on existing literature by centering Black American cultural values of communal care and shared responsibility. Anderson (2019) emphasized that Black families often view sibling and family relationships as

interconnected networks rather than isolated roles. Participants' use of family activities, faith-based discussions, and humor as bonding tools reinforced this collective framework and underscored that belonging is intentionally cultivated within blended households.

### **Theme 5**

Faith and external family systems emerged as deeply intertwined sources of support and stability. P7 explained, "You take care of whatever kid is in your presence," reflecting her belief that cultural responsibility extends beyond biological ties. P8 described her extended family as "the backbone," noting that her cousins and an aunt provided essential emotional and practical support. P9 stated, "Prayer, I recommend it consistently," positioning faith as her emotional compass and a consistent source of strength.

These findings confirm prior research by Turner et al. (2021), Bailey and Carter (2023), and Coates et al. (2024), which found that faith and kinship networks are central to resilience in Black American families. Participants' reliance on spiritual practices and extended kin mirrored Anderson's (2019) assertion that Black cultural identity emphasizes community-based care and collective perseverance.

### **Conceptual Framework**

From the perspective of Bowen Family Systems Theory, faith and family networks act as stabilizing systems that regulate emotional reactivity and maintain intergenerational balance. As Bowen (1978) proposed, families function as emotional units where self-regulation and differentiation foster harmony and prevent emotional

cutoff. In this study, participants' spiritual practices, such as prayer and collective worship, served as grounding mechanisms that reduced anxiety and strengthened emotional bonds. For example, P9 noted that prayer allowed her to "slow down and refocus before reacting," demonstrating how spiritual coping enhances emotional regulation within her family system.

The findings align with Turner et al. (2021), who observed that faith-based practices in remarried families encourage cohesion and shared purpose. Similarly, Coates et al. (2024) highlighted that spirituality and communal ties within Black American families serve as emotional anchors that sustain resilience through systemic challenges. Bailey and Carter (2023) found that extended kinship networks and faith traditions among African American households provide both material and emotional support, supporting the experiences shared by P8 and P9 in this study.

This theme extends Bowen's theoretical framework by framing spirituality as both a relational and systemic force within family dynamics. Faith not only connects participants to a higher power but also acts as a unifying practice that reinforces commitment, forgiveness, and harmony. As Priest (2021) noted, emotional differentiation allows individuals to stay grounded in times of stress, and the participants' use of faith achieved a similar effect by promoting emotional regulation and reducing conflict reactivity.

This also supports Anderson's (2019) discussion of cultural resilience, where Black American families rely on spiritual traditions to cultivate emotional balance and

collective endurance. In the same way, the participants' use of prayer, family gatherings, and cultural rituals reflected a culturally grounded process of differentiation, balancing individuality, emotional stability, and family unity.

These findings collectively build on previous research by illustrating how communication, emotional regulation, and faith serve as stabilizing factors within newly blended Black American families. Čepukienė and Neophytou (2024) emphasized the importance of communication in managing family stress. Anderson (2019) highlighted the role of faith and cultural resilience in promoting family well-being. Keller and Noone (2020) discussed how reducing triangulation helps to clarify roles within the family. Additionally, Turner et al. (2021) confirmed that shared spirituality and identity enhance integration in remarried families. Together, these studies underscore the importance of intentional communication, emotional grounding, and cultural faith practices in maintaining harmony within complex family systems.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study provided in-depth knowledge about newly married Black American couples in blended families, exploring how they navigate communication, parenting, emotional adjustment, sibling relationships, and faith within the first six years of remarriage. Although the findings offer meaningful insight into these lived experiences, several limitations to trustworthiness emerged during the research process.

One limitation involves participant representation. Only one spouse from each blended family participated, so the findings reflect individual perceptions rather than the

shared experiences of both partners. Since blended family dynamics are co-constructed, including both spouses could have provided a more balanced understanding of relational patterns, communication styles, and co-parenting strategies. Future research would benefit from dyadic interviews to get perspectives from both partners, which could improve the credibility and confirmability of the data.

A second limitation concerns participant composition. The study was open to newly married couples in blended families with at least one Black American spouse, but the sample mostly consisted of heterosexual partnerships. While this reflected the pool of volunteers rather than an intentional choice, future studies could aim to include a wider variety of family structures, such as same-sex, interracial, or cross-cultural marriages, to expand the scope and applicability of the findings.

A third limitation relates to researcher influence and participant self-reporting. As the only interviewer and transcriber, I conducted, recorded, and analyzed all interviews, which might have unintentionally introduced bias. Although reflexive journaling and following the Kostere and Kostere (2022) framework helped maintain objectivity, interpretations could still have been influenced by my assumptions both as researcher and practitioner. The study also depended on participants' honesty in sharing their experiences, assuming responses were truthful and accurate. Some may have omitted details or presented their experiences in socially acceptable ways, potentially affecting the depth and authenticity of the data.

Finally, conducting interviews virtually brought some minor limitations. While Zoom provided privacy and convenience, it limited the observation of nonverbal cues and was occasionally affected by brief connectivity issues. These factors did not seriously compromise the data, but in-person interviews might have captured richer contextual and emotional details.

In summary, although this study shed light on the lived experiences of newly married Black American spouses in blended families, these limitations point to areas for future research. Incorporating both partners' perspectives, exploring various family types, and using multiple data sources like joint interviews or follow-ups could strengthen the reliability and transferability of findings. Despite these challenges, this research offers valuable insights into how communication, resilience, and faith influence blended family adjustment and sets the stage for further exploration of diverse family systems.

### **Recommendations**

This study offers deep insights into the lived experiences of newly married Black American couples in blended families, showing how communication, role negotiation, sibling relationships, and faith interact to shape family resilience. While the findings enhance our understanding of these experiences, several recommendations for future research arise from both the strengths and limitations of the study. First, many participants (e.g., P3, P6, P9) identified faith and spirituality as central to their family stability. Future research should specifically explore faith-based coping and resilience within blended families.

Building on literature that emphasizes the protective role of spirituality in Black families (Lopez & Bailey, 2022; Coates et al., 2024), a phenomenological or narrative inquiry could examine how prayer, church involvement, and shared faith practices influence emotional bonds, conflict resolution, and differentiation. Investigating faith from this perspective would improve understanding of how spiritual frameworks mediate family stress and foster unity, extending the current findings and Bowen's concept of emotional grounding within a broader cultural and spiritual context.

Second, future studies should include both spouses in each blended marriage to capture diverse perspectives. This study relied on only one partner's viewpoint per family; therefore, future research could use joint interviews or couple-level case studies to explore agreement or disagreement in perceptions of communication, parenting, and family integration. Scholars such as Ganong et al. (2022) and Favez et al. (2019) highlight the importance of mutual understanding in co-parenting relationships, suggesting that dyadic data can reveal complex dynamics between triangulation and differentiation in remarried households.

Third, researchers should expand participant diversity to include various family structures. While the inclusion criteria required at least one Black American spouse, the sample mostly represented heterosexual marriages. Future studies should aim to include same-sex, interracial, and cross-cultural blended families to broaden the applicability of the findings and clarify how cultural or gender identities affect communication patterns and parental role negotiation (Cross et al., 2022; Wiborg & Yahirun, 2024).

Fourth, longitudinal designs should be used to explore how blended family dynamics change beyond the early years of remarriage. Turner et al. (2021) and Anderson (2019) stress that role adjustments, sibling bonding, and co-parenting stability develop over time. A multi-phase study tracking families over several years would offer valuable insights into how differentiation becomes stronger, communication evolves, and family systems stabilize or shift as children grow and external family support changes. Finally, given the importance of community and extended family support mentioned by participants (e.g., P2, P5, P8), future studies should investigate how social and faith-based networks enhance resilience among Black American blended families. Researchers like Bailey and Carter (2023) and Balachandran and Yeung (2020) show that extended kinship and community ties often serve as buffers against systemic inequities.

Examining how these networks work with counseling or family therapy could inform culturally responsive interventions aligned with Bowen's family systems framework. In conclusion, future research should build on this study by including spiritual, relational, and cultural dimensions to gain a fuller understanding of blended family life. By integrating dyadic perspectives, diverse family structures, and faith-based frameworks, future research can better show how love, communication, and resilience help families navigate the challenges of remarriage and blending.

### **Implications**

This study provides valuable insights for promoting positive social change at individual, family, organizational, and societal levels. The findings indicate that

intentional communication, shared parenting, and faith-based resilience can transform relationships and enhance family functioning within blended households. The lived experiences of newly married Black American couples revealed that emotional balance, open dialogue, and cultural grounding are essential for promoting stability and connection during remarriage. These insights lay the groundwork for improving counseling practices, community engagement, and educational initiatives tailored to the unique challenges faced by blended families. By integrating these lessons into personal, familial, and systemic contexts, this study contributes to broader efforts to enhance understanding, compassion, and unity among families navigating remarriage and cultural diversity.

At the individual level, the findings emphasize the importance of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and personal reflection in fostering healthy relationships during remarriage. Participants demonstrated that practicing patience, prayer, and mindfulness supports emotional resilience and effective communication. These results have theoretical implications for Bowen Family Systems Theory, suggesting that differentiation can be strengthened through culturally grounded self-regulation and faith-based coping strategies. Methodologically, this study highlights the need for continued exploration of emotional awareness and self-management techniques in family therapy research. Practitioners can apply these findings by helping individuals develop communication strategies that promote self-differentiation while maintaining emotional connection with their partners and children.

At the family level, the study revealed that consistent communication, shared parenting, and faith-based routines build trust, reduce tension, and foster a sense of belonging. Families that communicated expectations clearly and modeled respect created stability and unity among both children and adults. Empirically, these findings reinforce the significance of relational processes in promoting adaptation and cohesion in blended families. Theoretically, the results expand the application of family systems principles by illustrating how communication and spirituality work together to maintain balance in diverse households. Counselors and educators can implement family workshops focused on cooperative parenting, open dialogue, and shared decision-making to strengthen unity and enhance overall family satisfaction.

At the organizational level, the findings suggest that community organizations, schools, and counseling agencies can better support blended families by providing programs that address both emotional and spiritual well-being. Methodologically, this highlights the value of holistic approaches that integrate psychological and cultural dimensions of family life. Training programs for family practitioners, school counselors, and clergy should include culturally responsive models that recognize the role of faith, communication, and cultural identity in family stability. These programs could also incorporate case studies and reflection exercises to help practitioners identify and address the unique dynamics of blended families.

At the societal level, this study encourages a broader understanding of what constitutes a family in contemporary society. The experiences of Black American

blended families challenge traditional definitions and highlight the need for inclusive policies and counseling frameworks that reflect diverse family structures. The empirical implications emphasize that diverse representation in family research enriches theoretical development and practical intervention strategies. Policymakers and community leaders can use these findings to advocate for family education programs and initiatives that promote inclusivity, empathy, and cultural awareness. By acknowledging and supporting the strengths of blended families, society can work towards reducing stigma, fostering equity, and empowering families to thrive in all forms.

Ultimately, the potential for positive social change lies in recognizing that communication, faith, and emotional balance are transformative forces within families and communities. These qualities not only sustain blended families but also inspire healing, connection, and resilience across generations. Supporting families through culturally responsive counseling, faith-based outreach, and collaborative community partnerships can encourage stronger, healthier relationships and contribute to a more compassionate and unified society.

### **Conclusion**

As I reflect on this study, I recognize the depth of meaning and purpose it carried not only for me as a researcher but as a counselor, mother, and woman who understands the lived realities of blended families. This study was important because it gave a voice to newly married Black American spouses whose experiences are often overlooked in family research. I wanted to learn how these spouses communicate, adjust, and sustain

faith while building families rooted in love, growth, and perseverance. What I discovered was more than data; it was a testament to strength, unity, and the healing power of communication and faith.

My personal connection to this research made it especially meaningful. Having been born into a blended family and later becoming part of one myself, I have witnessed the evolving nature of family relationships and the emotional work it takes to maintain balance and peace. These experiences, both personal and professional, have given me a deep appreciation for how love endures even when families face transitions and new stages of growth. Working in the counseling field has strengthened my dedication to helping individuals and families communicate openly, heal from past wounds, and find strength in shared purpose. This study reaffirmed my belief that intentional communication, consistent effort, and faith-centered living can transform family dynamics in meaningful ways.

Throughout this journey, I learned that communication is not just about speaking; it is about listening, understanding, and connecting with empathy. Faith is not simply belief; it is the sustaining force that carries families through uncertainty and change. Family is not defined by perfection and is built through forgiveness, growth, and resilience. The participants' experiences revealed that success in blended families lies in choosing patience, humility, and love over conflict and division.

The take-home message from my study is clear: when families commit to understanding rather than reacting, to unity instead of separation, and to faith instead of

fear, they create legacies rooted in love and endurance. My hope is that this study inspires counselors, educators, and families to embrace every chapter of blended family life with grace, understanding, and intention. For me, this research represents both a professional achievement and a personal reflection of my lifelong mission to empower families to heal, communicate, and thrive as they redefine what togetherness truly means.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about your family?
2. How long have you been married?
3. What are the ages of your children?
4. What are your family dynamics like, particularly regarding integrating children from previous relationships?
5. Can you share how you manage relationships among children from past relationships within your home
6. Have you encountered any difficulties while blending your family? If so, what were they?
7. How did you navigate the differences in parenting styles between you and your spouse?
8. What role did your extended family (in-laws, grandparents, etc.) play in integrating children from previous relationships?
9. How would you describe the communication patterns within your family, especially about conflicts or disagreements?
10. Have you encountered any challenges in communicating effectively with your stepchildren or biological children? If so, how did you overcome them?
11. Can you share any feelings of stress or emotional struggles that came up during the blending process?

12. How did your children react to the new family structure? Were there any surprises or challenges that you weren't expecting?
13. How did you and your spouse decide on your parenting roles, particularly regarding stepchildren?
14. What approaches have you used to establish your role and authority as a parent or stepparent in your blended family?
15. How do you handle conflicts between your children (biological or stepchildren)?
16. Are there any strategies you use to address sibling rivalry or disagreements?
17. Have you encountered any difficulties in co-parenting with your spouse's ex-partners?
18. How do you manage these relationships for the sake of your children?
19. How do you feel about the support you have received from your extended family members?
20. In what ways does your cultural identity as a Black American influence the way you navigate blended family dynamics?
21. Are there any cultural values or traditions that you've found particularly important to maintain in your blended family?
22. Can you share any positive experiences that have come from being part of a blended family?

23. Can you share any unexpected rewards that have come from being part of a blended family?
24. What aspects of your blended family life are most fulfilling for you?
25. Is there anything you wish you had known before getting married and starting a blended family that might have helped in your transition?

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

This form is part of a process called informed consent to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. You are invited to take part in a research study that examines how newly married Black American couples with children experience the early years of blending their families. This study seeks to understand how couples navigate family relationships, including communication with one another, sibling dynamics among children, and the role of extended family members. The goal is to learn more about the challenges, strategies, and strengths that shape family life during the first six years of remarriage.

This study seeks ten volunteers who are:

- Black Americans who have been married for six years or less.
- One or both spouses must identify as Black American
- 18 years of age and older
- One person from the couple should have at least one biological child from their previous marriage.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Nichole King-Price, who is a PhD candidate at Walden University.

#### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand how these couples experience and manage the challenges associated with forming new familial connections and adjusting to their new roles within the blended family structure.

#### **Procedures**

After you consent, this study would involve you completing the following steps:

- confirm that you qualify by answering a few questions about the study requirements.
- commit 45 minutes to an hour of your time to participate in person or via Zoom, one-on-one.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So, everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not.

If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing. If distress arises, support and referral can be obtained via dialing 988 for a national crisis hotline.

Like most research, this study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by focusing on the lived experiences of newly blended Black American families. The study will contribute to an understanding of family dynamics and support efforts to develop more inclusive and culturally responsive family support systems.

Results of this study will be published online in [Scholarworks](#) and possibly other research sources

#### **Payment**

## Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

**CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS**



My name is Nichole King-Price, and I'm a PhD candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a research study exploring the lived experiences of newly married Black American blended families, and I would love for you to take part!



**WHO CAN PARTICIPATE:**

- \*Married for 6 years or less
- \*At least one spouse identifies as Black American
- \*Have at least one biological child from previous relationship (child may live in home or visit on weekends etc.)

**WHAT'S INVOLVED:**

- \*In-person and Zoom interviews up to 60 minutes
- \*You'll be asked interview questions about your experience as a newly married couple in a blended family with children
- \*You may skip any questions and leave the study at anytime. Your responses will remain confidential and linked only to a fictitious name

**WHY THIS MATTERS:**

I deeply value the lived experiences of Black American blended families and seek to understand how they navigate the joys, challenges, and transitions of merging households. Your insights can help shape more effective support systems, counseling resources, and community-based programming.

**TO PARTICIPATE OR LEARN MORE :**

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