

## Adolescents' Perceptions of Family Belonging in Stepfamilies

Valarie King

Department of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University  
211 Oswald Tower  
University Park, PA 16802, USA  
vek1@psu.edu  
(814)863-8716

Lisa M. Boyd

Department of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University  
211 Oswald Tower  
University Park, PA 16802, USA  
lmb5594@psu.edu  
(502)930-1913

Maggie L. Thorsen

Department of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University  
211 Oswald Tower  
University Park, PA 16802, USA  
mx1991@psu.edu  
(814)865-1691

**Acknowledgements:** This research was supported by funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to Valarie King, principal investigator (SES-1153189), and by funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to the Population Research Institute at The Pennsylvania State University for Population Research Infrastructure (R24 HD41025) and Family Demography Training (T-32HD007514). This research uses data from Add Health, a program project directed by Kathleen Mullan Harris and designed by J. Richard Udry, Peter S. Bearman, and Kathleen Mullan Harris at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and funded by grant P01-HD31921 from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, with cooperative funding from 23 other federal agencies and foundations. Special acknowledgment is due Ronald R. Rindfuss and Barbara Entwisle for assistance in the original design. Information on how to obtain the Add Health data files is available on the Add Health website (<http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth>). No direct support was received from grant P01-HD31921 for this analysis.

DRAFT for review for PAA 2014. Do not cite or quote without permission.

## Adolescents' Perceptions of Family Belonging in Stepfamilies

### Abstract

Prior research has established that adolescents' perceptions of family belonging are associated with a range of well-being indicators, and that adolescents in stepfamilies report lower levels of family belonging than adolescents in two-biological parent families. Yet, we know little regarding what factors are associated with adolescents' perceptions of family belonging in stepfamilies. The current study addresses this issue by using nationally representative data (Add Health) to examine the associations between an array of family characteristics and adolescents' perceptions of family belonging in stepfather families (N = 2085). Results from structural equation models suggest that mothers can play an especially important role in helping adolescents in stepfamilies feel they belong. In addition, Hispanic adolescents reported significantly higher levels of family belonging than White and Black adolescents, despite the fact that they were not more likely to report having positive ties to mothers or stepfathers.

Children are increasingly likely to spend at least part of their childhood in a stepfamily due to high rates of divorce, nonmarital childbearing, and remarriage; over 10% of all two-parent families in the United States are stepfamilies (Kreider & Ellis, 2011; Teachman & Tedrow, 2008). Approximately 25% of all U.S. children will spend at least some time in a married stepfamily (Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995), with the vast majority residing with a stepfather rather than a stepmother (Stewart, 2007). The implications of these trends for children's well-being are of increasing concern given research indicating that children in stepfamilies generally have lower well-being than children in two-biological-parent households and on average show little or no advantage over children in single-parent households (Amato 2010, 1994). Studies comparing children in different family structures, however, tend to emphasize the deficits of stepfamilies rather than giving attention to the factors that promote positive stepfamily functioning (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Sweeney, 2010). A focus on average differences in child well-being also obscures the fact that the majority of children living in stepfamilies are faring as well as children living with two biological parents.

This lack of attention to factors that promote positive stepfamily functioning is unfortunate given that a better understanding of how stepfamilies can serve as positive environments for children's development and achievement would aid in the creation of effective programs and policies to enhance the well-being of children growing up in stepfamilies. One aspect of stepfamily functioning that is receiving increased consideration is the quality of parent-child ties within stepfamilies (King, 2009; King, Ledwell, & Amato, 2013; Sweeney, 2010).

Increased efforts toward trying to understand the factors that promote ties between children and their mothers and stepfathers is not surprising given that the quality of parent-child ties are associated with child well-being in both two-biological-parent families (Videon, 2005) and stepfamilies (King, 2006; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). In addition to the quality of parent-child

ties, studies suggest that the extent to which children feel they “belong” to the family is also associated with child well-being (e.g., Cavanagh, 2008). Family belonging encompasses a child’s feelings of inclusion and acceptance within their families, and goes beyond parental involvement and feelings of closeness with each parent (Goodenow, 1992; Leake, 2005), although the latter are undoubtedly related to perceptions of family belonging. Although several studies have reported that children living in two-biological parent families report higher levels of family belonging than children living in stepfamilies (Brown & Manning, 2009; Cavanagh, 2008), surprisingly few studies have considered what factors are associated with children’s perceptions of family belonging in stepfamilies (see Leake, 2007 for an exception).

The current study employs nationally representative data on adolescents in stepfather families from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), with the primary aim of examining predictors of family belonging among children in stepfamilies. We also consider whether the factors that are associated with positive perceptions of family belonging are similar for boys and girls. Particular attention is paid to how perceptions of family belonging are related to the quality of ties between family members. Finally, we conduct a longitudinal analysis using data from the first two waves of Add Health to examine how changes in children’s ties to mothers and stepfathers are associated with changes in feelings of family belonging over the course of approximately one year.

Our study focuses on children during adolescence, a crucial point in the life course for accomplishing key developmental tasks and avoiding risky behaviors that can lead to poor outcomes that often persist well into adulthood. Adolescence can be a challenging time for all families. As children enter adolescence, many families experience declines in parental involvement, supervision, and control and increases in parent-child conflict (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2000). These processes may be exacerbated in stepfamilies, especially those

formed during this time (Bray & Easling, 2005). Yet close, supportive parent-child relationships are thought to be especially important for adolescents in stepfamilies because they are more vulnerable to peer influence and at greater risk for poor outcomes than children from undisrupted two-parent families (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Perceptions of family belonging among adolescents in stepfamilies are likely to be similarly important in protecting them from poor outcomes. For these reasons a better understanding of stepfamily processes during this crucial time period is warranted.

### *Background*

As Maslow (1954/1970) long ago argued, individuals have a basic psychological need to feel they belong, in addition to needing love and affection from other individuals (see also Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For children, families--and parents in particular--can help meet this need by providing love and affection. In addition, family members can create a home environment that helps children feel like they belong to this larger family group. Alternatively, negative home environments and relationships can interfere with feelings of family belonging with attendant negative consequences for children's well-being.

Family belonging might be especially challenging to attain in stepfamilies. In a traditional two-parent family, children are biologically related to both parents and all siblings, which likely fosters the feeling that one belongs to this family. Stepfamilies are formed when mothers (or fathers) choose new partners, with children having little say in the matter. The entrance of a stepfather might also be accompanied by the addition of stepsiblings to the household. Mothers and stepfathers need to make special effort to ensure that children feel they belong to this unit, given that it is based on remarriage rather than biology. Although the need for belonging may be more difficult to attain in stepfamilies, it may be especially important for

stepchildren's well-being and development, given the challenges facing these incompletely institutionalized family forms (Cherlin, 1978; Sweeney, 2010).

Family belonging (Leake, 2007), alternatively referred to as family cohesion/cohesiveness (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1994; Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979) family connectedness (Brown & Manning, 2009; Cavanaugh, 2008; Resnick et al., 1997), or positive family environment (Amato & Kane, 2011), encompasses a child's feelings of inclusion within their families: of being understood, having fun together, and of being paid attention to (Goodenow, 1992; Leake, 2005). Measurement of this construct in the extant literature has taken two different approaches. One approach (e.g., Cavanaugh, 2008; Leake, 2007), and the approach taken here, is to measure family belonging as a construct that is distinct from parent-child relationship quality (the latter usually being indicated by measures of parental involvement and/or children's feelings of closeness to parents). The second approach is to combine these dimensions of family relationships into a single scale (e.g., Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; Resnick et al., 1997). Critics of the latter approach argue that global measures of family relationships obscure the mechanisms by which family processes influence child well-being, and provide evidence that perceptions of family belonging and parent-child relationship quality are separate constructs that are independently associated with child well-being (Cavanaugh, 2008; Leake, 2005).

Despite some differences in how family belonging is measured, a growing literature suggests that it is protective against a wide range of negative child outcomes, including emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, violence, early sexual debut, negative academic behaviors, and use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana (Cavanaugh, 2008; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; Resnick et al., 1997). Unfortunately, few studies have examined what factors influence children's perceptions of family belonging. To our knowledge, only Leake (2005,

2007) has specifically examined factors associated with adolescents' feelings of belonging in stepfamilies, and these findings were based on a small sample ( $n = 60$ ) of students from high schools and undergraduate university classes in a small Midwestern city.

*What factors might promote perceptions of stepfamily belonging?*

Family belonging is a family level or holistic construct that refers to the entire family, not to any specific relationship. Of course, relationships contribute to people's feelings of belonging. Thus, although a variety of family characteristics are considered, we pay particular attention to how perceptions of stepfamily belonging are related to, and presumably influenced by, relationships within the family. This focus is supported by several theoretical perspectives, including life course theory (Elder, 1998), which emphasizes the importance of examining how individual lives are linked to other lives across the life course. Family system theories (Minuchin, 1974) assume that all parts of the family system are interconnected, and that changes or problems in one subsystem have the potential to affect other subsystems. These perspectives suggest that an adolescent's perception of family belonging will be influenced by the quality of the relationships that exist between family members. As is shown in Figure 1, our conceptual model reflects this supposition. In particular, the quality of the relationship between adolescents and their mothers, and between adolescents and their stepfathers, are likely to be influential in directly contributing to adolescents' perceptions of family belonging.

*Figure 1 (conceptual model) about here*

Relationship quality is defined in this study as adolescent's perceptions of closeness and engagement with each parent in activities and communication. A positive marital relationship between the mother and stepfather can also enhance the home environment and contribute to feelings of family cohesiveness. The influence of other family characteristics (referred to as background variables in the figure) is more distal. These variables (such as child age and race)

may be associated with feelings of family belonging directly, or indirectly, through the more proximate relationship variables.

As noted earlier, only one known study has explicitly examined factors associated with adolescents' feelings of belonging in stepfamilies. Leake's (2007) study of Midwestern students found the following factors to be significantly associated with feelings of stepfamily belonging: a positive relationship with the biological parent, a positive relationship with the stepparent, younger (rather than older) adolescents, and the absence of stepsiblings. Feelings of stepfamily belonging were not significantly associated with the adolescent's gender, age at stepfamily formation, nonresident father contact, or gender of the resident stepparent. Using nationally representative data, our study considers a wider range of factors that may be associated with perceptions of family belonging in stepfamilies.

*Mother-Child Relationship.* For adolescents living with their biological mothers and a stepfather, the quality of the mother-child relationship is likely to be a significant predictor of children's feelings of family belonging. In such families, the mother-child bond is often the only enduring residential bond experienced across the child's life. Mothers not only play a central role in providing the love and affection that promotes feelings of family belonging (Maslow, 1954), but in many cases may also be pivotal in fostering child adjustment in stepfamilies (Smith, 2008). In addition, mothers with close ties to their children may work to ensure they develop positive relationships with the stepfather (Marsiglio, 1992) and other members of the stepfamily, helping to create a more cohesive family environment.

*Stepfather-Child Relationship.* The entrance of a stepfather into a household influences all other family members and their interaction with one another (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). During this transition, many children maintain close relationships with their mothers and develop close ties with their stepfathers, but others experience deteriorating relationships with



their mothers and resist the entrance and authority of the stepfather (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2000; King, 2009; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Close stepfather-stepchild relationships can contribute to positive stepfamily functioning and have the potential to enhance children's feelings of family belonging. Alternatively, problematic relationships with stepfathers may lead adolescents to feel less supported by their family and contribute to a desire to leave home (Aquilino, 1991; Kiernan, 1992).

Although we hypothesize that both the mother-child and stepfather-child relationships will be associated with family belonging, it is less clear which of these relationships will be more strongly associated with perceptions of belonging. On the one hand, the large variability in the quality of stepfather-stepchild relationship (King et al., 2013) and the stress and tension experienced during the transition to stepfamily living suggests that the quality of the stepfather-stepchild relationship may play a larger role in affecting an adolescent's perception of family belonging. On the other hand, the pivotal role of mothers in enhancing, or detracting from, family functioning and child well-being (Smith, 2008) suggests that the quality of the mother-child relationship will have the most influence on feelings of family belonging. The quality of the stepfather-child relationship may also have less bearing on adolescent feelings of family belonging to the extent that adolescents do not consider the stepfather to be a member of their "family." Children in stepfather families usually consider their biological mother to be a member of their family, but children vary with regard to whether, and how, they consider stepfathers as a member of their family (Fine, Coleman, & Ganong, 1998; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; author citation, 2013). Consistent with this premise, Leake (2007) found significant associations between both the biological parent-child and stepparent-child relationship and the adolescent's perception of stepfamily belonging, but with a stronger association exhibited in the biological parent-child relationship.

*Mother-Stepfather Relationship.* Many studies report a positive link between marital quality and the (step)parent-child relationship (Fine & Kurdek, 1995; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; King, 2006). A positive marital relationship between the mother and stepfather may also enhance the home environment and contribute to feelings of family cohesiveness. Parents in supportive marriages may be more available to respond to children's needs and be more attuned to supporting each other's relationships with the children. Conflict and marital disagreements, on the other hand, may interfere with family cohesiveness and contribute to an adolescent's desire to leave home to escape an unpleasant environment.

*Family and Child Characteristics.* We consider a number of background variables that may be associated with feelings of family belonging directly, or indirectly through the more proximate relationship variables. With respect to *gender*, several studies report that boys have better relationships with stepfathers than do girls (Jensen & Shafer, 2013), that adolescent girls in stepfamilies are more likely than boys to disengage from their families (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998), and that, more so than boys, girls in stepfamilies leave the parental home significantly earlier than girls living with both biological parents (Aquilino, 1991). With respect to *age*, parental involvement and closeness to parents tends to decline during adolescence (King, 2009; Stewart, 2005) as adolescents increasingly desire greater autonomy and spend more time with peers (Furstenberg, 2000).

A few studies have examined *racial-ethnic* differences in stepfamily relationships, but these have yielded mixed findings with regard to differences between White and minority families (Stewart, 2007). Perhaps most relevant to the current study, a recent study of stepfather families using Add Health found no differences in the reported quality of the mother-child relationship or stepfather-child relationship between Whites, Blacks, or Hispanics, although Black mothers reported having lower quality marital relationships than White mothers (King et

al., 2013). Little is known about stepfamily relationships in *immigrant families*. The process of migration and differences between parents born and reared in another country and their U.S.-born children can be a source of intergenerational conflict (Chilman, 1993), suggesting that family cohesion might be harder for these families to attain. In contrast, Coleman, Ganong, and Rothrauff (2007) found that Latinos held stronger beliefs about family obligations to parents and stepparents than European Americans, regardless of generational status. Likewise, many scholars have noted that Latinos place particular importance on family solidarity and needs of the collective over personal needs, often referred to as familism (Coltrane, Gutierrez, & Parke, 2008), suggesting family cohesion may be greater in Latino stepfamilies.

Recent research has found that adolescent *religiosity* is associated with reporting more positive ties to both mothers and stepfathers (King et al., 2013). Most religions emphasize the importance of family relationships and encourage parents to be actively involved in the lives of their children (King, 2010; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, and Murray-Swank, 2003). Thus, in addition to potential direct effects, religiosity may be indirectly associated with perceived stepfamily belonging through its association with the mother-child and stepfather-child relationship.

*Income and parental education* are generally associated with higher levels of parental involvement (Amato, 1998; Cooksey & Fondell, 1996), and greater economic resources may reduce stress and enhance feelings of family belonging. The *length of time a stepfamily has been together* has been found to be associated with closer stepfather-stepchild bonds (Sweeney, 2010), although it is negatively related to marital quality (King et al., 2013).

Research on the influence of different types of siblings (*full, step, or half*) on stepfamily dynamics is limited and sometimes mixed (Leake, 2007). A few studies suggest that the presence of full- and half-siblings, but the absence of stepsiblings, can enhance stepfather-

stepchild relationships and stepfamily cohesion (Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011; King et al., 2013; Leake, 2007).

*Gender differences.* For exploratory purposes, we assess the potential moderating role of child gender. Given prior research on the differences between adolescent girls and boys living in stepfamilies, and the greater family disengagement exhibited by girls in particular, the factors that predict family belonging may differ for boys and girls. For example, negative family dynamics such as marital conflict or less positive relationships with mothers or stepfathers may have a more negative influence on feelings of stepfamily belonging for girls than for boys.

## METHOD

This study used data from the first two waves of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Add Health is a nationally representative, school-based, longitudinal dataset, the first wave of which was collected during the 1994-95 school year. Data was drawn from the adolescents in grades 7 through 12 who participated in the Wave I in-home interviews ( $N = 20,745$ ). Parent data ( $n = 17,670$ ) was collected from one parent (the biological mother, in most cases) for each in-home sampled student (see Bearman, Jones, & Udry, 1997, for a detailed description of the data).

The analytic sample was confined to adolescents with valid sample weights who reported residing with their biological mother and a married stepfather ( $n = 2,085$ ; questions about relationships with a stepfather were not asked if mothers were cohabiting rather than married). The longitudinal analysis was based on adolescents who were interviewed for a second time, approximately one year later, in 1996. The Wave II sample design excluded adolescents who were in Grade 12 at Wave I, reducing the number of respondents with stepfathers to 1,803. An additional 255 adolescents did not complete interviews in 1996. Finally, we excluded adolescents

who were no longer residing with a stepfather at Wave II. These restrictions reduced the final longitudinal sample to 1,192.

The analysis comprises three parts. First, structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques were used to examine the cross-sectional associations between three dyadic family relationships and the adolescent's perceived belonging to his or her stepfamily. The same model was then analyzed as a multi-group model by gender to determine whether associations identified in part one of the analysis held true for both boys and girls. Finally, a lagged analysis was conducted to investigate whether the associations between family relationships and belonging change as a result of changes in family relationships over the course of a year.

Structural equation modeling is a particularly appropriate approach given the multiple pathways proposed and the underlying latent constructs of the current study, outlined in the conceptual model. Analyses were conducted in Mplus version 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). Mplus used a full information maximum likelihood (FIML) technique to deal with missing data. Results are based on weighted data and all analyses take into account the Add Health sample design (i.e. clustering and stratification).

### *Measures*

The dependent variable *stepfamily belonging* was measured with four observed indicators ( $\alpha = .74$ ) from the adolescent interview (with five response options from 1 = *very little*, to 5 = *very much*): 'How much do you feel your family understands you?' ( $\bar{x} = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ), 'How much do you feel you want to leave home?' (reverse-coded,  $\bar{x} = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ), 'How much do you feel you and your family have fun together?' ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ), and 'To what extent do you feel your family pays attention to you?' ( $\bar{x} = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ). (Unless otherwise noted, all variables refer to the Wave I survey and were created using reports from the adolescent.) Although adolescents on average reported fairly high scores on the four indicators of stepfamily

belonging, moderate variation existed in this measure. For example, approximately 14 percent of adolescents disagreed quite a bit or very much with both the statement that their families understand them and that they have fun together, while about 7 percent of adolescents felt their families paid little or no attention to them. Sixteen percent of adolescents reported that they would like quite a bit or very much to leave home.

The latent construct *mother-child relationship* was measured with three scales: mother-child closeness, shared mother-child activities, and mother-child communication. Mother-child closeness consisted of five items rated on a five-point scale asking youth how close they feel to their mother, how much they feel she cares about them, how much they feel she is warm and loving, their satisfaction with their communication, and satisfaction with their relationship ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ,  $\bar{x} = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 0.06$ ). An index of activities that adolescents engaged in with their mothers during the previous four weeks was the sum of five dichotomous (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) items including shopping, playing a sport, attending church, seeing a movie, and working on a school project ( $\bar{x} = 1.50$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). Communication was the sum of three dichotomous (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) items regarding whether adolescents talked with their mothers during the previous four weeks about grades, school, or dating or parties ( $\bar{x} = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). The factor loading for communication on the mother-child relationship latent variable was relatively low (standardized  $\lambda = .21$ ). As a check, we ran the main model reported here again, removing communication and only using closeness and activities to create the mother-child relationship latent variable. Results and conclusions were similar to the model including communication. Therefore, communication was retained in the model to improve the content validity of the mother-child relationship latent variable.

The items and scales for the *stepfather-child relationship* latent construct were identical to those for mother-child relationship: closeness ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ,  $\bar{x} = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ), activities ( $\bar{x} =$

0.95,  $SD = 1.12$ ), and communication ( $\bar{x} = 1.06$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). In preliminary analyses we also created a latent construct for the child's relationship with the nonresident biological father (identical scales for activities and communication, and 1 item for closeness), but it was unrelated to perceptions of family belonging (consistent with Leake, 2007) and not retained in the final model.

The latent construct *mother-stepfather relationship* was measured with three observed indicators drawn from the mother interview: current relationship happiness (measured on a 1-to-10 scale,  $\bar{x} = 8.50$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ), whether the mother and stepfather had talked about separation in the previous year (1 = *no, have not talked about separating*, 0 = *yes, have talked about separating*;  $\bar{x} = 0.80$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ), and how infrequently the mother and stepfather fight (1 = *fight a lot*, 4 = *not at all*;  $\bar{x} = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ). Each variable was coded such that a higher score indicated higher relationship quality.

With respect to background factors, the adolescent's *gender* was a dichotomous variable with 1 = *female* (51%) and 0 = *male*. The adolescent's *age* was measured in years ( $\bar{x} = 15.39$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ). *Race-ethnicity* was measured as a set of dummy variables for the mutually exclusive categories 'non-Hispanic white' (69%; reference group), 'non-Hispanic black' (13%), 'Hispanic' (12%), and 'other race' (6%). The adolescent and stepfather's joint *immigrant status* was categorized with a set of dummy variables: both the adolescent and stepfather were born in the U.S. (70.2%; reference group), only the adolescent was born in the U.S. (4.5%), and the adolescent was not born in the U.S. (the stepfather may or may not have been; 3.6%). The adolescent's *religiosity* was measured with a three-item scale incorporating measures of church attendance, the importance of religion to the individual, and participation in other church activities ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ,  $\bar{x} = 2.46$  on a four-point scale,  $SD = 0.98$ ).

*Income* was reported in the parent's interview and was transformed using the natural log function ( $\bar{x} = 3.50, SD = 2.09$ ). The *mother's educational attainment* was reported by mothers (or taken from the adolescent interview when mother reports were missing) and measured continuously with a range from 1 = *did not graduate from high school*, to 4 = *college degree or more* ( $\bar{x} = 2.54, SD = 1.01$ ). The *length of time* the adolescent had lived in the stepfamily was measured in years ( $\bar{x} = 7.43, SD = 4.61$ ). Three continuous variables indicated the number of *full-* ( $\bar{x} = 0.72, SD = 1.93$ ), *step-* ( $\bar{x} = 0.17, SD = 0.84$ ) and *half-siblings* ( $\bar{x} = 0.63, SD = 1.27$ ) in the household.

The longitudinal analysis involved Wave II versions (measured identically to those in Wave I, with similar reliability coefficients, means, and standard deviations) of the following variables: stepfamily belonging, mother-child relationship, and stepfather-child relationship (because parents were not re-interviewed, the mother-stepfather relationship had to be omitted).

## RESULTS

*Measurement Model.* Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the measurement model provided a good fit for the latent relationship variables, as presented in Figure 2 and Table 1. Examination of modification indices revealed that the fit of the final measurement model could be improved by including correlations between the residuals of several observed variables (see Figure 2). The resulting Chi-square (148.47,  $df = 54$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, .03), and comparative fit index (CFI, .97) for the measurement model indicate good fit. In addition, standardized loadings for the observed indicators of the relationship and belonging variables and correlations between latent variables were generally high. The mother-child and stepfather-child relationships in particular were highly correlated with stepfamily belonging, as well as with each other, suggesting that the two may independently impact the adolescent's feeling of belonging to the stepfamily.



*Figure 2 and Table 1 about here*

*Structural Model.* As is suggested by the conceptual model (see Figure 1), the structural model posits that dyadic within-family relationships—namely the mother-child, stepfather-child, and mother-stepfather relationships—directly influence the extent to which adolescents feel they belong to their stepfamilies. Additional background variables are also hypothesized to have direct effects on stepfamily belonging, as well as indirect effects through other family relationships. According to well-accepted fit indices, the model as proposed fits the data adequately: RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.91.

Standardized regression coefficients for the structural model (see Table 2) indicate that two of the three family relationships in the model significantly predict adolescents' perceptions of family belonging when selected characteristics of the child and family are controlled for. The mother-child relationship is most strongly related to the outcome of interest, with a coefficient of 0.774 ( $p < .001$ ). The stepfather-child relationship is also a significant predictor of stepfamily belonging, but is smaller in magnitude ( $b = 0.230, p < .01$ ). The quality of the mother-stepfather relationship appears to have no association with adolescents' perceived belonging to the stepfamily. (In addition, preliminary analyses that included the nonresident father-child relationship in the model as a fourth latent predictor of belonging indicated that the quality of this relationship had no bearing on the adolescent's feeling of family belonging ( $b = -0.01, p > .70$ ). This construct was therefore not retained in the final model.)

With respect to other covariates, only two background variables had direct effects on stepfamily belonging. Adolescents from stepfamilies with higher incomes reported lower belonging on average ( $b = -0.067, p < .01$ ) than adolescents from stepfamilies with lower incomes, while adolescents who identified as Hispanic reported stronger feelings of belonging relative to White adolescents ( $b = 0.07, p < .05$ ). Additional analyses revealed that perceived

stepfamily belonging among Hispanic adolescents was also significantly higher than among Black adolescents ( $b = 0.11, p < .05$ ).

Several additional variables were associated with levels of stepfamily belonging indirectly, via either the mother-child or the stepfather-child relationship. Indirect effects were calculated using the Sobel (1982) test for mediation of significant pathways (results not shown). The analysis revealed an indirect effect of respondent's age on sense of stepfamily belonging (indirect effect =  $-0.06, p < .001$ ) by way of the mother-child relationship, reflecting the fact that older adolescents tend to have less close relationships with parents. We also find a significant indirect effect of religiosity on stepfamily belonging through the mother-child relationship (indirect effect =  $0.08, p < .05$ ) due to the fact that more religious adolescents report closer relationships with mothers.

Three additional covariates had indirect effects on stepfamily belonging through the stepfather-child relationship. Here again the analysis revealed a negative indirect effect of age ( $-0.02, p < .05$ ), indicative of older adolescents' less close relationships with parents. The indirect effects of religiosity (indirect effect =  $0.03, p < .05$ ) and number of full siblings in the household (indirect effect =  $0.02, p < .05$ ) were also significant. Adolescents who reported being more religious and having more full siblings also reported closer relationships with stepfathers, which contributed to a greater sense of belonging to the stepfamily.

*Gender Multigroup Model.* A multigroup model was used to test for the possibility that gender moderates the associations between the mother-child and stepfather-child relationships and stepfamily belonging. A test for factorial invariance suggested that the constructs of interest could be measured the same way for boys and girls. An unconstrained model in which all parameters were allowed to vary freely across groups was compared to a constrained model in which factor loadings for stepfamily belonging were set to be equal across groups. A

comparison of the two models using the Satorra-Bentler chi-square test and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (Kline, 2011) indicated that the stepfamily belonging latent variable works similarly by gender.

With factorial invariance established, we again used the Satorra-Bentler chi-square test to determine whether gender moderated the structural pathways between the independent variables and stepfamily belonging. These tests led to the conclusion that the associations between the independent variables and perceived stepfamily belonging were not moderated by gender and were therefore statistically similar for male and female adolescents.

*Longitudinal Analysis.* A longitudinal analysis incorporating the second wave of Add Health examined the associations between the mother-child and stepfather-child relationships and perceptions of stepfamily belonging over approximately a one-year time span (see Figure 3). The key structural paths in the longitudinal model were from the mother-child relationship and stepfather-child relationship at time 2 to belonging at time 2, controlling for all corresponding time 1 scores. The resulting time 2 scores are conceptually similar to change scores. This analysis allowed us to determine whether changes in closeness to mothers or to stepfathers were associated with changes in feelings of belonging. Fit for the final lagged model was acceptable (RMSEA = 0.035, CFI = 0.91).

*Figure 3 about here*

The lagged analysis indicated that changes in both the mother-child and stepfather-child relationships significantly predicted change in stepfamily belonging between times 1 and 2. Standardized results showed that change in the mother-child relationship was a much stronger predictor of change in belonging than was change in the stepfather-child relationship ( $b(\text{mother}) = 0.64, p < .001$ ;  $b(\text{stepfather}) = 0.24, p < .05$ ). When all Wave 1 controls from the original analysis were included in the model, the relative magnitude of the coefficients changed little, but

the influence of change in the stepfather-child relationship became non-significant. Additional analyses indicated that this loss of significance was not driven by a single variable, but was due rather to a combination of them. Change in the mother-child relationship remained a strong and significant predictor of change in belonging ( $b = 0.771, p < .001$ ). (The fact that belonging at time 1 did not predict belonging at time 2 in the final multivariate model reflects the primacy of the mother-child relationship. In bivariate models, belonging at time 1 strongly predicted belonging one year later ( $b = 0.606, p < .001$ .)

## DISCUSSION

Prior research has established that adolescents' perceptions of family belonging are associated with a range of well-being indicators (Cavanagh, 2008), yet we know little regarding what factors influence adolescents' perceptions of family belonging in stepfamilies (Leake, 2007). Using nationally representative data, the current study was designed to address this gap in the literature on stepfamilies. Results point to a number of factors that are associated with perceptions of family belonging among adolescents in stepfather families.

Consistent with our conceptual model, the perceived quality of the relationship between adolescents and their mothers is strongly and significantly associated with adolescents' feelings of family belonging. Although the amount of change between the two waves of the study was modest, results from the longitudinal analysis suggest that change in the quality of the mother-child relationship is related to changes in perceptions of family belonging, providing additional support for the conceptual model that posits a direct influence of family relationships on perceived belonging. Taken together, the cross-sectional and longitudinal findings support the idea that the mother-child relationship is of primary importance in determining adolescents' feelings about their families. Not only does having information about the mother-child relationship at a given point in time signal something about the adolescent's feeling of

belonging, but if the mother-child relationship changes, the adolescent's feeling of belonging to the stepfamily will likely change as well. The finding that the mother-child relationship is particularly influential is consistent with Leake's (2007) findings, and with the notion that mothers play a pivotal role in successful stepfamily functioning (Smith, 2008).

The role of the stepfather-child relationship in contributing to feelings of family belonging is less clear. Adolescents' relationships with stepfathers are significantly bound up with their feelings of belonging cross-sectionally, suggesting that stepfathers may also play an independent and important role in fostering feelings of family belonging. The longitudinal analysis, however, is unclear with respect to whether changes in relationships with stepfathers are linked to changes in belonging (the influence of change in the stepfather-child relationship became non-significant after controls were added to the model). It may be that the two relationships are fundamentally different in some way: Changes in the mother-child relationship change the adolescent's perception of the family as a whole, while shifts in relations with stepfathers do not, though they may factor into a broader sense of belonging to one's family at any given point in time.

Contrary to expectations, the quality of the mother-stepfather relationship was not independently associated with adolescent perceptions of stepfamily belonging. It appears that the quality of the relationship adolescents have with each of their parents is a more important factor influencing perceptions of family belonging than is the tenor of the mother-stepfather relationship. Of course, it should be kept in mind that some of the most conflicted and unhappy marriages are selected out of stepfamily samples over time through divorce, which may lead to an underestimation of the association between marital quality and feelings of family belonging.

After accounting for the mother-child and stepfather-child relationship, few other family or child characteristics were directly associated with stepfamily belonging. Results revealed,

however, that Hispanic adolescents reported significantly higher levels of family belonging than White and Black adolescents, despite the fact that they were *not* significantly more likely to report having more positive ties to mothers or stepfathers. Further, immigrant status was not associated with stepfamily belonging, nor did it explain the difference between Hispanics and Whites or Blacks. The lack of racial-ethnic differences in the mother-child and stepfather-child relationship is consistent with a recent study using Add Health and similar parent-child relationship measures (King et al., 2013), as well as other studies that suggest that there are more similarities between White and Hispanic stepfamily relationships than there are differences (Coltrane et al., 2008). The higher level of perceived family belonging reported by Hispanic adolescents may be related to familism and their stronger beliefs about family obligations--regardless of relationship quality between individuals--noted by Coleman, Ganong, and Rothrauff (2007). These scholars suggest that the obligation to help family members extends to stepparents as well as parents, and that marriage to a parent is sufficient to make the stepparent part of the kin network, regardless of generational status. They argue that White, African-American, and Asian-American stepparents do not obtain kin status as easily as do Latino stepparents. Our finding that Hispanic adolescents perceive higher levels of stepfamily belonging deserves further research attention to better understand the family processes that underlie it. Given that there can be significant variation within major racial-ethnic groups such as Hispanics (e.g., Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans), future research would benefit from more attention to this diversity in stepfamily processes as well.

One unexpected finding was the negative association between family income and feelings of stepfamily belonging. Despite the potential of greater economic resources in reducing family stress, it was adolescents in lower income families who reported higher levels of stepfamily belonging. Perhaps this finding in part reflects the greater centrality of kin in lower income

families that has sometimes been noted in the literature (Adams, 1970; King & Elder, 1998; Lareau, 2003), but further research is needed to shed light on this issue.

Three additional characteristics were significantly, but only indirectly, associated with perceptions of stepfamily belonging via the mother-child and/or stepfather-child relationship: adolescent age, religiosity, and number of full siblings in the household. Consistent with prior research (King et al., 2013), older adolescents perceived having less positive relationships with both their mothers and their stepfathers, whereas religious adolescents reported more positive relationships with both parents. The number of full siblings was also associated with adolescent reports of more positive relationships with stepfathers, thereby indirectly enhancing perceptions of stepfamily belonging. Despite some suggestion in the literature that the presence of stepsiblings is negatively related to stepfather-stepchild ties and feelings of stepfamily belonging (Leake, 2007), the present study found that the number of stepsiblings and half-siblings in the household were unrelated to reports of positive parent-child ties as well as feelings of stepfamily belonging.

Although we expected that girls might report lower levels of stepfamily belonging than boys given research suggesting that girls in stepfamilies are more likely to disengage from their families (Hetherington et al., 1998), child gender was unrelated to perceptions of family belonging in our study. This finding is consistent, however, with Leake's (2007) study of Midwestern students, which also found gender to be unrelated to perceptions of stepfamily belonging. Our findings also indicate that the correlates of stepfamily belonging are similar for girls and boys. Coupled with the findings from King, Ledwell, and Amato (2013) that the correlates of positive stepfather-stepchild ties are also similar for girls and boys, it appears that interventions to foster positive stepfamily functioning may work equally well for adolescent girls and boys.

Although this study identified a number of important factors associated with feelings of stepfamily belonging, data limitations precluded an examination of other potentially important factors that should be examined in future research. For example, a better understanding of the influence of siblings requires more attention to the nature and quality of these relationships as well, but these data are unfortunately not available in Add Health. Data limitations also prevented an examination of how changes in the mother-stepfather relationship are associated with changes in perceptions of stepfamily belonging because mothers, the source for this information, were not interviewed after Wave I. Future research would also benefit from examining how feelings of stepfamily belonging change over longer periods of time, ideally from the beginning of stepfamily formation. Measures from later waves of Add Health (III, IV), when many children were no longer living with parents, are not comparable to those used in this analysis and therefore could not be incorporated. The current study is also limited to married stepfathers because adolescents in the Add Health study living with mothers and cohabiting partners were not asked about their relationships with stepfathers. Cohabiting stepfamilies are likely to differ in important ways from married stepfamilies (King, 2009; Nock, 1995), and this growing family form deserves attention in future research.

Prior research suggests that feelings of stepfamily belonging protect adolescents from a wide range of negative outcomes, yet we know little regarding what factors influence these perceptions of family belonging. With an increasing number of children growing up in stepfamilies, it is important to better understand what factors aid in their adjustment and contribute to feelings of belonging within stepfamilies. The current study addresses this gap in the literature by using nationally representative data to examine the associations between an array of family characteristics and adolescent's perceptions of stepfamily belonging. Results suggest that mothers can play an especially important role in helping children feel they belong.



## REFERENCES

- Adams, B. N. (1970). Isolation, function, and beyond: American kinship in the 1960's. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 32, 575-597. [doi:10.2307/350252](https://doi.org/10.2307/350252)
- Amato, P. R. (1994). The implications of research findings on children in stepfamilies. In A. Booth & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Stepfamilies: Who benefits? Who does not?* (pp. 81-87). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Amato, P. R. (1998). More than money? Men's contributions to their children's lives. In A. Booth & A. C. Crouter (Eds.), *Men in families: When do they get involved? What differences does it make?* (pp. 241-278). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 650-666. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00723.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00723.x)
- Amato, P. R., & Kane, J. B. (2011). Parents' marital distress, divorce, and remarriage: Links with daughters' early family formation transitions. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32, 1073-1103. [doi:10.1177/0192513X11404363](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X11404363)
- Aquilino, W. S. (1991). Family structure and home-leaving: A further specification of the relationship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 999-1010. [doi:10.2307/353003](https://doi.org/10.2307/353003)
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529. [doi:10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497](https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497)
- Bearman, P. S., Jones, J., & Udry, J. R. (1997). The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health: Research Design. Available: <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth/design>.
- Bray, J. H., & Easling, I. (2005). Remarriage and stepfamilies. In W. M. Pinsof & J. L. Lebow (Eds.), *Family psychology: The art of the science* (pp. 267-294). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Brown, S. L., & Manning, W. D. (2009). Family boundary ambiguity and the measurement of family structure: The significance of cohabitation. *Demography*, *46*, 85-101. [doi:10.1353/dem.0.0043](https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.0.0043)
- Bumpass, L. L., Raley, R. K., & Sweet, J. A. (1995). The changing character of stepfamilies: Implications of cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing. *Demography*, *32*, 425-436. [doi:10.2307/2061689](https://doi.org/10.2307/2061689)
- Cavanagh, S. E. (2008). Family structure history and adolescent adjustment. *Journal of Family Issues*, *29*, 944-980. [doi:10.1177/0192513X07311232](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X07311232)
- Cherlin, A. (1978). Remarriage as an incomplete institution. *American Journal of Sociology*, *634-650*. [doi:10.1086/226830](https://doi.org/10.1086/226830)
- Chilman, C. S. (1993). *Hispanic families in the United States: Research perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coleman, M., Ganong, L., & Fine, M. (2000). Reinvestigating remarriage: Another decade of progress. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *62*, 1288-1307. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01288.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01288.x)
- Coleman, M., Ganong, L. H., & Rothrauff, T. C. (2006). Racial and ethnic similarities and differences in beliefs about intergenerational assistance to older adults after divorce and remarriage. *Family Relations*, *55*, 576-587. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00427.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00427.x)
- Coltrane, S., Gutierrez, E., & Parke, R. D. (2008). Stepfathers in cultural context: Mexican American families in the United States. In J. Pryor (Ed.), *The international handbook of stepfamilies: Policy and practice in legal, research, and clinical environments*, (pp. 100-124). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- Cooksey, E. C., & Fondell, M. M. (1996). Spending time with his kids: Effects of family structure on fathers' and children's lives. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 693-707. [doi:10.2307/353729](https://doi.org/10.2307/353729)
- Crosnoe, R., & Elder, G. H. (2004). Family dynamics, supportive relationships, and educational resilience during adolescence. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25, 571-602. [doi:10.1177/0192513X03258307](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X03258307)
- Duncan, T. E., Duncan, S. C., & Hops, H. (1994). The effects of family cohesiveness and peer encouragement on the development of adolescent alcohol use: A cohort-sequential approach to the analysis of longitudinal data. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 55, 588-599.
- Elder, G. H. (1998). The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development*, 69, 1-12.
- Fine, M. A., & Kurdek, L. A. (1995). Relation between marital quality and (step) parent-child relationship quality for parents and stepparents in stepfamilies. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 9, 216. [doi:10.1037/0893-3200.9.2.216](https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.9.2.216)
- Fine, M. A., Coleman, M., & Ganong, L. H. (1998). Consistency in perceptions of the step-parent role among step-parents, parents and stepchildren. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15, 810-828. [doi:10.1177/0265407598156006](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407598156006)
- Furstenberg, F. F., Jr. (2000). Sociology of adolescence and youth in the 1990s: A critical commentary. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62: 896-910. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00896.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00896.x)
- Furstenberg F. F., Jr., & Cherlin, A. J. (1991). *Divided families: What happens to children when parents part*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Ganong, L. H., Coleman, M., & Jamison, T. (2011). Patterns of stepchild–stepparent relationship development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73, 396-413. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00814.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00814.x)
- Goodenow, C. (1992). Strengthening the links between educational psychology and the study of social contexts. *Educational Psychologist*, 27, 177-196. [doi:10.1207/s15326985ep2702\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2702_4)
- Hetherington, E. M., Bridges, M., & Insabella, G. M. (1998). What matters? What does not? Five perspectives on the association between marital transitions and children's adjustment. *American Psychologist*, 53, 167-184. [doi:10.1037/0003-066X.53.2.167](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.53.2.167)
- Hetherington, E. M., & Clingempeel, W. G. (1992). Coping with marital transitions. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 57(2 - 3), Serial No. 227. [doi:10.2307/1166050](https://doi.org/10.2307/1166050)
- Hetherington, E. M., & Kelly, J. (2002). *For better or for worse: Divorce reconsidered*. New York: Norton.
- Hetherington, E. M., & Stanley-Hagan, M. (2000). Diversity among stepfamilies. *Handbook of Family Diversity*, (pp. 173-196). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jensen, T. M., & Shafer, K. (2013). Stepfamily functioning and closeness: Children's views on second marriages and stepfather relationships. *Social Work*, 58, 127-136. [doi:10.1093/sw/swt007](https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swt007)
- Kiernan, K. E. (1992). The impact of family disruption in childhood on transitions made in young adult life. *Population Studies*, 46, 213-234. [doi:10.1080/0032472031000146206](https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472031000146206)
- King, V. (2006). The antecedents and consequences of adolescents' relationships with stepfathers and nonresident fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 910-928. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00304.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00304.x)

- King, V. (2009). Stepfamily formation: Implications for adolescent ties to mothers, nonresident fathers, and stepfathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 954-968.  
[doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00646.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00646.x)
- King, V. (2010). The influence of religion on ties between the generations. In C. G. Ellison & R. A. Hummer (Eds.), *Religion, families, and health: Population-based research in the United States* (pp. 86-105). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- King, V., & Elder, G. H. (1998). Education and grandparenting roles. *Research on Aging*, 20, 450-474. [doi:10.1177/0164027598204004](https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027598204004)
- King, V., Ledwell, M., & Amato, P. R. (2013, August). Factors associated with positive relationships between stepfathers and adolescent stepchildren. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York, NY.
- Kline, R. B. (2011). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Kreider, R. M. & Ellis, R. (2011). Living arrangements of children: 2009. Current Population Reports, P70-126. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods*. University of California Press.
- Leake, V. S. (2005). Steps between, steps within: Adolescents and stepfamily belonging. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Publication Number 3231196.
- Leake, V. S. (2007). Personal, familial, and systemic factors associated with family belonging for stepfamily adolescents. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 47, 135-155.  
[doi:10.1300/J087v47n01\\_08](https://doi.org/10.1300/J087v47n01_08)
- Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Murray-Swank, A., & Murray-Swank, N. (2003). Religion and the sanctification of family relationships. *Review of Religious Research*, 220-236.  
[doi:10.2307/3512384](https://doi.org/10.2307/3512384)

- Marsiglio, W. (1992). Steppathers with minor children living at home: Parenting perceptions and relationship quality. *Journal of Family Issues*, *13*, 195-214.  
[doi:10.1177/019251392013002005](https://doi.org/10.1177/019251392013002005)
- Maslow, A. H. (1954/1970). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing up with a single parent: What helps, What hurts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Muthén, L. K., & Muthén, B. O. (2010). *Mplus User's Guide*. Sixth Edition. Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén.
- Nock, S. L. (1995). A comparison of marriages and cohabiting relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, *16*, 53-76. [doi:10.1177/019251395016001004](https://doi.org/10.1177/019251395016001004)
- Olson, D. H., Sprenkle, D. H., & Russell, C. S. (1979). Circumplex model of marital and family systems: I. Cohesion and adaptability dimensions, family types, and clinical applications. *Family Process*, *18*, 3-28. [doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.1979.00003.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.1979.00003.x)
- Pryor, J., & Rodgers, B. (2001). *Children in changing families: Life after parental separation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Resnick, M. D., Bearman, P. S., Blum, R. W., Bauman, K. E., Harris, K. M., Jones, J., Tabor, J., Beuhring, T., Sieving, R., Shew, M., Ireland, M., Bearinger, L. H., & Udry, J. R. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *278*, 823-832. [doi:10.1001/jama.1997.03550100049038](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1997.03550100049038)
- Smith, M. (2008). Resident mothers in stepfamilies. In J. Pryor (Ed.), *The international handbook of stepfamilies: Policy and practice in legal, research, and clinical environments*, (pp. 151-174). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- Sobel, M. E. (1982). Asymptotic confidence intervals for indirect effects in structural equation models. *Sociological Methodology*, 13, 290-312. [doi:10.2307/270723](https://doi.org/10.2307/270723)
- Stewart, S. D. (2005). How the birth of a child affects involvement with stepchildren. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 461-473. [doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00128.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00128.x)
- Stewart, S. D. (2007). *Brave new stepfamilies: Diverse paths toward stepfamily living*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sweeney, M. M. (2010). Remarriage and stepfamilies: Strategic sites for family scholarship in the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 667-684. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00724.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00724.x)
- Teachman, J., & Tedrow, L. (2008). The demography of stepfamilies in the United States. In J. Pryor (Ed.), *The international handbook of stepfamilies: Policy and practice in legal, research, and clinical environments*, (pp. 3-29). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Videon, T. M. (2005). Parent-child relations and children's psychological well-being: Do dads matter? *Journal of Family Issues*, 26, 55-78. [doi:10.1177/0192513X04270262](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X04270262)

Table 1. *Measurement Model*

	Unstandardized		Standardized	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<i>Factor Loadings</i>				
<b>Stepfamily Belonging (SFB)</b>				
Family understanding	1.000	0.00	0.646	0.03
Does not want to leave home	0.934	0.08	0.503	0.03
Family has fun together	1.212	0.08	0.789	0.02
Family attentiveness	1.046	0.06	0.763	0.02
<b>Mother-Child Relationship (M-C)</b>				
Closeness	1.000	0.00	0.724	0.03
Activities	0.358	0.04	0.366	0.03
Communication	0.279	0.04	0.212	0.03
<b>Stepfather-Child Relationship (SF-C)</b>				
Closeness	1.000	0.00	0.884	0.03
Activities	0.313	0.03	0.417	0.03
Communication	0.445	0.04	0.450	0.03
<b>Mother-Stepfather Relationship (M-SF)</b>				
Happiness	1.000	0.00	0.848	0.03
Not talk about separating	0.160	0.01	0.564	0.03
Low conflict	0.325	0.03	0.587	0.03
<i>Correlations</i>				
SFBelong with M-Crel	0.319 ***	0.03	0.865 ***	0.04
SFBelong with SF-Crel	0.357 ***	0.03	0.691 ***	0.03
SFBelong with M-SFrel	0.194 ***	0.04	0.206 ***	0.04
M-Crel with SF-Crel	0.257 ***	0.03	0.610 ***	0.05
M-Crel with M-SFrel	0.088 *	0.04	0.114 *	0.05
SF-Crel with M-SFrel	0.376 ***	0.06	0.348 ***	0.05
<i>Error Correlations</i>				
SF Comm with Mother Comm	0.276 ***	0.02	0.577 ***	0.02
SF Acts with Mother Acts	0.147 ***	0.01	0.561 ***	0.03
SF Close with Mother Close	0.042 *	0.02	0.199 *	0.08
Mother Acts with Mother Comm	0.056 ***	0.01	0.160 ***	0.03
SF Comm with Mother Acts	0.040 ***	0.01	0.118 ***	0.03
Chi-square = 148.47	RMSEA = 0.03			
DF = 54	CFI = 0.97			

*Note:* All variables in the measurement model are measured at Time 1 only.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



Table 2. *Structural Model Predicting Stepfamily Belonging (N = 2,085)*

	Step family Belonging	Mother-Child Relationship	Stepfather-Child Relationship	Mother-Stepfather Relationship
<i>Family Relationships</i>				
Mother-Child Relationship	0.774 ***			
Stepfather-Child Relationship	0.230 **			
Mother-Stepfather Relationship	0.018			
<i>Child Characteristics</i>				
Female	-0.003	-0.084	-0.066	0.003
Age	0.016	-0.200 ***	-0.177 ***	0.029
Race				
Black <sup>a</sup>	-0.032	0.041	0.019	-0.092 *
Hispanic <sup>a</sup>	0.070 *	-0.030	-0.054	0.023
Other race <sup>a</sup>	-0.064 *	0.065	-0.008	-0.059
Immigrant status				
Only adolescent was born in US <sup>b</sup>	-0.029	0.022	-0.060	-0.067
Adolescent was not born in US <sup>b</sup>	0.056	-0.012	0.030	0.018
Religiosity	-0.016	0.122 **	0.135 ***	0.043
<i>Family Characteristics</i>				
Income (log of)	-0.067 **	0.032	0.002	0.001
Mother's education	-0.025	0.068	-0.030	-0.098 **
Years in stepfamily	0.001	-0.010	0.039	-0.174 ***
Number of full siblings	-0.007	0.021	0.093 **	0.007
Number of step siblings	-0.042	0.044	0.015	0.017
Number of half siblings	-0.039	-0.017	-0.013	0.018
Chi-square = 579.08	RMSEA = 0.03			
DF = 180	CFI = 0.91			

*Note:* Coefficients for the Family Relationship variables are fully standardized. Coefficients for all other variables are standardized on the dependent variable only. For all four latent variables, a higher score indicates a more positive relationship. All variables in the structural model are measured at Time 1 only.

<sup>a</sup>Reference group for race is 'White.' <sup>b</sup>Reference group for immigrant status is 'Both born in US.'

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

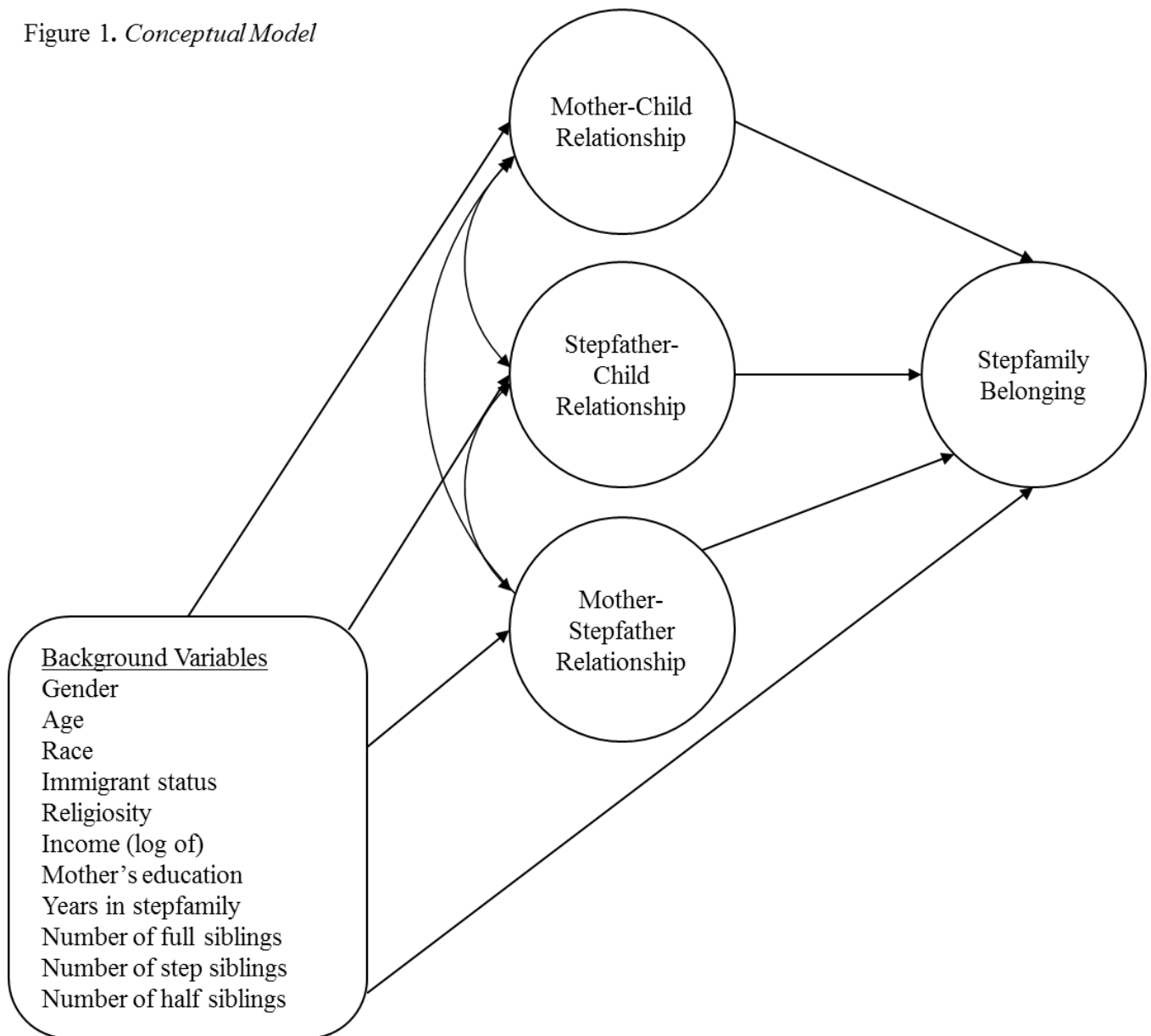
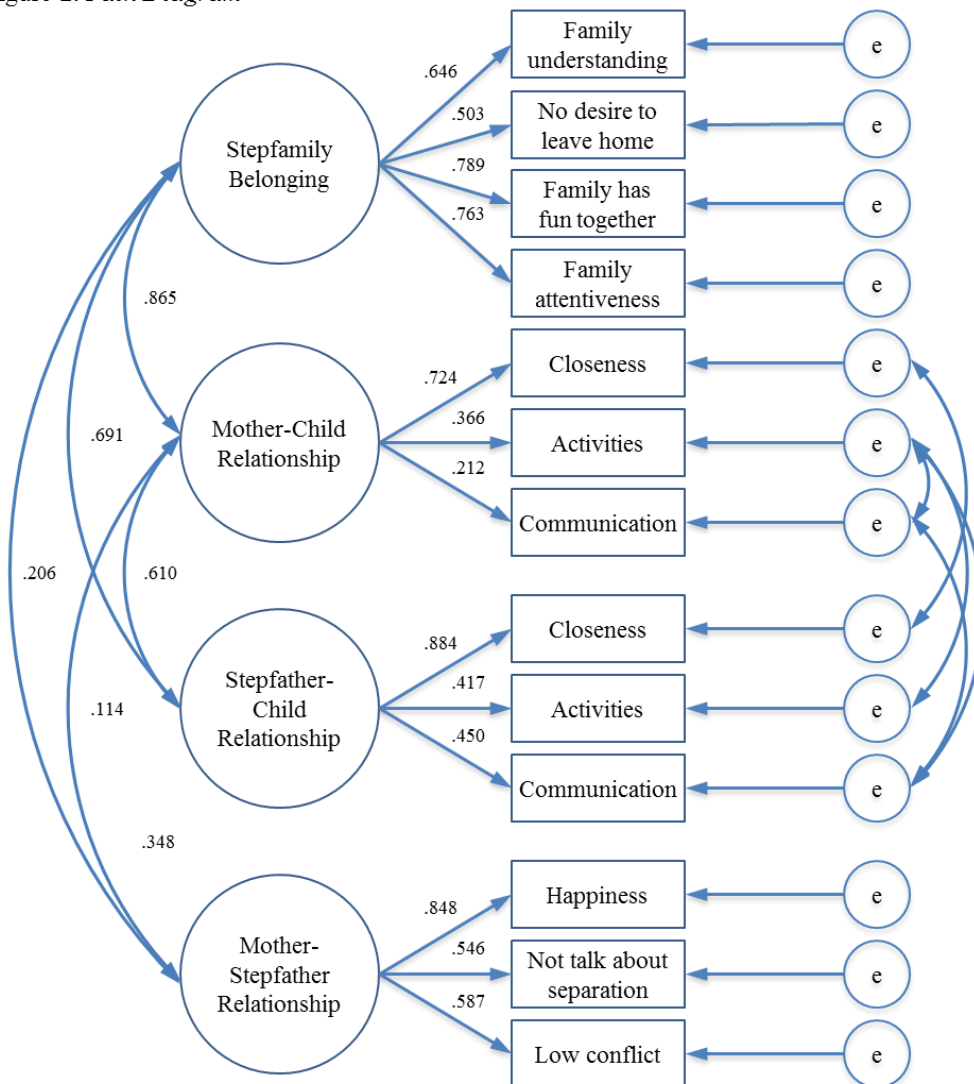
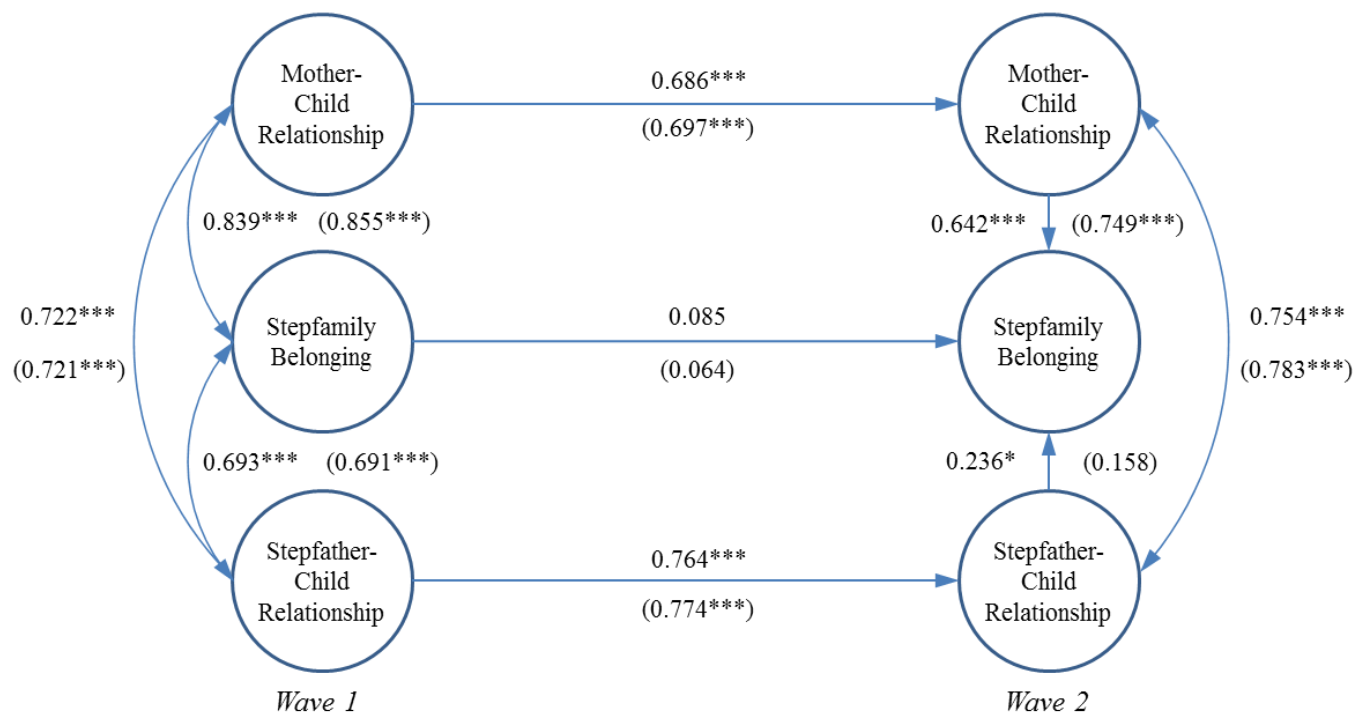
Figure 1. *Conceptual Model*

Figure 2. Path Diagram



**Correlations between residuals:**  
 Mother close with SF close = 0.199  
 Mother acts. with SF acts. = 0.561  
 Mother acts. with SF comm. = 0.118  
 Mother acts. with mother comm. = 0.160  
 Mother comm. with SF comm. = 0.577

Chi-square = 148.47 DF = 54  
 RMSEA = .03 CFI = .97  
 Note: All coefficients are fully standardized.

Figure 3. *Lagged Analysis***Bivariate model:**

Chi-square = 391.416

RMSEA = .036

DF = 152

CFI = .950

**Model with all controls:**

Chi-square = 850.992

RMSEA = .035

DF = 346

CFI = .908

*Note:* Coefficients from the full model (includes all controls) are in parenthesis. All coefficients are fully standardized. Controls for the full model are gender, age, race, immigrant status, religiosity, income, mother's education, years in a stepfamily, number of full siblings, number of step siblings, and number of half siblings.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .