Blended Family Dynamics and its Impact on Behavioral Communication and Overall Success

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ABSTRACT

With an average divorce rate of approximately 50 percent (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005), it is estimated that 20 percent of U.S. adolescents have at least one step-parent. Because familial structure plays a large role in shaping self-identity of oneself and the identity of the familial unit as a whole, blended families contrast to traditional families in terms of communication styles, behavioral outcomes, and several other factors. For the purposes of this paper, a “blended family” will refer to one in which the household contains at least one step-parent and a “traditional family” will refer to one in which both biological parents are married and living within the same household. In relation to these blended families, limited research has been done to understand the dynamic of the parent-child relationship as well as the impact on the overall family’s well-being, focusing on issues such as communication, discipline, and self-awareness of not only the step-parent and the step-child, but those of the biological parents and children involved as well. To research this theory, the Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM Theory) will be used. The intent of this paper is to investigate why blended families report a higher level of household issues comparative to traditional families and how communication plays a role in this increased level of discord.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Importance of the Study and Statement of Purpose

According to Gennetian (2005), studies show that stepchildren fare lesser than children raised within a traditional family structure. Setting aside concerns of each particular family’s socioeconomic status, race and culture, genders of stepchildren and stepparents, and other critical factors that could affect the outcomes of such studies, the limited amount of research that has been conducted on the blended family indicates decreased monetary and financial investment into the stepchild, decreasing his or her chances for success in life. “In a [traditional] family, children may be considered collective or public goods and it is efficient for both parents to invest in a child’s well-being. When parents separate, investment in a child decreases” (p. 417). While this can be an effective explanation for some types of blended families, the minimal amount of current research on the topic likely does not account for the several different types of blended familial reclassifications created since the last outdated research was performed. Additionally, little concrete resources exist which can validate these hypotheses, which make much that society knows about blended families to be inconclusive.

Definitions of Terms Used

Because of the many different types of blended families, definitions of key terms must be listed. For the purposes of this paper, adopted and fostered children are excluded, mainly to limit the large amount of research and familial dynamics that have yet to be explored in current
analysis of family structure-types. This paper will focus on blended families involving the following structure-types: stepchildren, stepparents, half siblings, stepsiblings, step couples, and blended families. The following definitions are derived from the United States Census Bureau and are the official definitions as listed with the United States Government.

*Stepchildren* are defined as children which reside in a household comprised of one biological parent, plus another adult figure who is participating in a parental role for that child. This adult figure does not need to be married to the child’s other co-residential parent. A*stepparent* is an adult figure playing a parental role to a child who has no biological ties to that child. The gender and age of the child and parental figures are irrelevant. *Half Siblings* share one biological parent, while *stepsiblings* share a parent, but that one parent is the biological parent of one child and the stepparent of the other child. A*step couple*, while not officially defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, is a couple in which one or both parties brings a child from a previous relationship into the new relationship. The term,* step couple*, is intended to refer to the relationship between the two adults and not the parent-child relationship, nor the stepparent stepchild relationship. When one or more of these relationships creates a family structure-type, that family is defined as a*blended family*. *Blended families* “are formed when remarriages occur or when children living in a household share only one or no biological parents. The presence of a stepparent, stepsibling, or half sibling designates a family as blended” (U.S. Census Bureau 2004).

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**
Chapter Two provides a thorough literary review, in which the underpinnings of familial dynamics and its effects on behavioral communication are studied. Later chapters of this study explore research questions and a conduction of current research on said topics, also to be explored in the literary review. Chapter Three defines the scope and methodology used for the research conducted in Chapter Four. Ethical considerations, limitations to the chosen research methods and questions, as well as anticipated and ideal participants will also be defined and discussed in detail. Chapter Four analyzes the results from the research conducted, to be followed up by Chapter Five, which wraps up with the conclusions of both the study and this study.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions

Ethically, one has an assumption that the Epicurean philosophy of selfishness is wrong. Epicurus claimed that everyone should promote his self-interest before others and only seek pleasure in life, and although other philosophers tend to echo these same thoughts, this selfishness is generally thought to be an undesirable quality in modern society. As it pertains to this study, the research points to the idea that the human is biologically wired to put himself before all others, although the results of the study point to a more utilitarian point of view in which individuals act and respond based on the potential consequences of their choices. In terms of social media, would Cinderella’s stepmother have treated Cinderella so poorly had her father not passed away and were able to witness the resulting cruelties? Likely not. However, humans are going against nature when they attempt to treat their stepchildren as “one of their own.” As a result, the nature of this study does not follow the more natural path of epicurean philosophy, but one of which the individual understands that he or she will be judged by society based on their chosen actions.

Theoretical Basis

According to the Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, triangulation—the act of creating dialectic tensions between family members—in stepfamilies—is rooted within communication boundaries and a family’s ability to coordinate or separate said boundaries.
(Afifi, 2003). While families of divorced parents who are able to facilitate a healthy co-parenting relationship has proven most beneficial in recreating a cohesive blended family, others who are unable to do so simply create a larger task in redefining previous boundaries and renegotiation of familial roles. The probability of creating alliances between a parent and child or two spouses increases within the blended family. For example, a child may attempt to form an alliance with the biological parent, ostracizing the stepparent in order to maintain boundaries and power roles previously attained in the traditional family. Conversely, the stepparent aligns with his or her spouse in order to create new boundaries and power roles in the stepparent/stepchild relationship. From the perspective of CPM theory, the most crucial boundary is that of informational boundaries; that is, each individual family members carefully selects what information to reveal or conceal and to whom. “[In managing informational boundaries], they are able to better manage the oppositional forces of both concealment and revealment. How stepfamily members regulate personal information depends upon their boundary structures and rule-management systems” (p. 731). By controlling the flow of information, the individual is exercising ownership, thereby determining membership within a family by way of inclusivity.

Aiding in the already heightened dialectic tensions of the stepfamily as opposed to the traditional family, research shows that blended family spouses report a lower level of marital satisfaction than do spouses within the traditional family. Although there is less discord reported in blended families with only one stepparent compared to those in which both parents are stepparents, researchers postulate that this is a result of increased number of individuals in the
family and therefore an increase in personality types and opportunity for conflict (Coleman, Ganong and Fine, 2000). However, another presumption for reported familial triangulation is said to be explained via the Incomplete Institutionalization Hypothesis of 1978. Popular consensus was that stepfamilies have a more difficult time adjusting as a result of lack of societal norms and institutional support for blended families. Additionally, blended family children were shown to have increased likelihood of involvement in drugs, premarital pregnancy, lower grades, depression, anxiety, and other unfavorable behaviors when compared to their traditional family counterparts as a mixed result of reduced involvement from biological parents and unclear expectations of stepparent involvement. “In this view, stepchildren fare worse than children in first-marriage families because, lacking culturally institutionalized support, stepparents are unsure about how to relate to stepchildren, and remarried adults lack appropriate solutions to family problems” (p. 11). Although highly popular, there is still limited research on the Incomplete Institutionalization Hypothesis at this time.

Some research additionally indicates that boundary ambiguity is less likely from a stepparent simply being involved in a child’s life; rather, the differences between a child’s household from one biological parent to another increases the likelihood for role confusion. According to Pasley, Rhoden, Visher, and Visher (1996), stepchildren are more likely to experience guilt and loyalty conflicts between parents, both biological and step alike, as a result of this ambiguity. Depending on the relationship between all parental figures involved, financial support can further increase tensions. “[Child support] can become a metaphor for control, love,
and other unresolved emotional issues related to regulating the flow of information and resources into and out of the family” (p. 344). Keeping child support and other financial obligations in mind – and depending on individual financial circumstances – this further refutes Case, Lin, and McLanahan’s (2000) claim that blended families and traditional families have very similar incomes and thusly has no impact on blended family dynamics. As a result, there is increased stress upon remarriages as triangulation occurs not only for the stepchild and stepparent, but for the biological parent as well, who likely feels a “role overload” between commitment to his or her new partner and existing loyalties to children from a previous union. Biological children are placed into a hierarchy as age, gender, and other factors skew their roles in the blended family as well. To clarify role expectations and decrease discord, blended families are encouraged to develop better communication and negotiation skills, although little to no empirical evidence supports this claim and no recommendation as to how to accomplish this outside of therapy, thus leaving stepfamilies without concrete support or valid resources yet again.

**The Literature**

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage for stepfamilies is the general societal preconceived notions that stepparents are “evil,” particularly stepmothers. Popular culture reinforces the ideas that all stepparents intend ill will towards their stepchildren and that blended families are undesirable in one way or another. Laythe (2002) claimed that stepmothers have been tied to illegitimate negative connotations dating back as far as the 15th Century and that ideas that the stepmother is lesser suited to care for a child in comparison to the biological mother are
unfounded. As a result, stepmothers – and stepparents in general – have faced increased strains on an already unnatural relationship, shifting the behavioral communication within the stepparent-stepchild relationship. “…women internalized…stereotypes about stepmothers long before they entered a relationship that required them to assume the role of stepmother…[the] fear of being linked to the negative image has fostered unnatural relationships and great expectations of ‘instant love’” (p. 35). Conclusively, the stepparent alters his or her behavior in order to force a seemingly natural relationship and ward off the negative connotations attached to the stepparent title.

Despite society’s negative connotations with stepparent titles, the study conducted by Baxter, Braithwaite, et al. (2004) determined that most stepchildren do in fact desire closeness with their stepparent. The desire stems from the stepchild’s perceptions of what family life should be, and in some cases, allows the stepchild to embrace the new stepparent for providing support and other attributes that the family lacked prior to the remarriage. Relational dialectics is once again at play as opposing forces govern the stepparent-stepchild relationship, altering communication between parties and maintaining the idea that a stepparent is an outsider amongst the family circle. For stepchildren in particular, emotional distance and closeness are both found to be present in feelings towards stepparents, despite their contradictory natures. The closeness yet distant feelings found in stepchildren are often attributed to lack of common interests as well as feelings that stepparents are to be treated more as a friend than as a parent. “…the source of the emotional distance [is] the ‘outsider’ status of the stepparent…the stepparent [is] ‘there,’
living inside the house but residing outside of the boundary of what [is] legitimized as the actual ‘family’” (p. 455). Participants of the Baxter et al. (2004) study described little to no ill will towards the stepparent; rather, the stepparent is embraced as a means of support and happiness for the biological parent, yet actual love or affection given to or received from the stepparent is often negligible. In addition to considering the stepparent an “outsider” from their family circle, stepchildren also reported feelings of betrayal to their biological, nonresidential parent, should they allow the stepparent to become too close and in some cases, stepchildren described the stepparent as a “wedge” between them and their biological parent.

One explanation as to why stepchildren may fare lesser in a blended family household as opposed to the traditional household is the idea of resource and economical capital. Case, Lin, and McLanahan (2000) suggest that a stepparent is less willing to invest time, money, or other capital into a non-biological child when he or she feels as though they gain less on their return as they do for a biological child. Research indicates that stepchildren may feel “scarred” from their biological parents’ divorce or separation, causing them to react negatively to a remarriage and a stepparent. Conclusively, this may account for triangulation and information boundaries during communication as the child attempts to maintain their role within the family as well as their control of information into and out of the household. However, unwillingness to adapt to the recreated family, decline in grades, and other exhibits of negative behavior may “prove” to a stepparent that “…investments in step children may not be as productive [as investing in biological children]” (p. 783). For example, if a stepparent attempts to help his or her stepchild
with a homework assignment but the stepchild resists the help from the stepparent, thusly not completing their assignment, the child’s grades are likely to drop, just as the stepparent will discover that attempting to help the stepchild is not a productive investment of his or her time. The text also suggests that stepparents may simply care less about their stepchildren because those children do not maintain their genetic line; however, Case, Lin, and McLanahan (2000) did admit that research relies on indirect evidence to come to this conclusion since there is very little research involved surrounding the inputs of stepparents, only the outcomes of their parenting. Furthermore, the claim that income cannot be identified as a cause for a stepparent’s unwillingness to invest because “…step and original two-parent families have very similar levels of income” lacks support and cannot be applied to the entire blended family population (p. 782). As a result, the majority of blended family research is conducted on outdated assumptions rather than direct evidence.

**Rationale**

Although behavioral communication is reported to change as a result of a stepparent, Vangelisti (2004) claimed that communication differences within the family also stem from changes between biological parent-child relationships in a blended family. Although there appears to be little research in this field as to how these stresses compare to changes in the blended family as opposed to the simple presence of the stepparent, newly divorced, single
parents face increased pressures in co-parenting with an ex-spouse as well as balancing and forming new relationships with potential new partners. “…1 year postdivorce custodial mothers showed less affection, communicated less often, punished more harshly, and showed more inconsistent discipline” (p. 229). Postdivorce fathers also showed a decline in parent-child relationship mannerisms as they began to interact more like peers. Over time, co-parenting turns into “parallel parenting,” forming two separate and distinct families, breaking down the communication patterns of an intact family, thusly compromising the quality of the parenting (p. 230). Because of these fundamental shifts in biological parent-child behavioral communication postdivorce, the burden of decreased child welfare cannot solely be placed on the shoulders of the stepparent.

**Parental Resource Dilution: What is it?**

Research by Gennetian (2005) indicates that parental resource dilution, or the decrease in a biological parent’s investment of time and money into their child, is a controversial subject for the blended family. While there is a plethora of studies focusing on the detriment of a child’s overall well-being and chance for success in a single-parent household, there is no solid explanation as to why a child may or may not fare worse when a stepparent is added to this same family dynamic. Wojtkiewicz and Holtzman (2011) claimed that a stepparent is less willing to devote time and effort into a stepchild’s academic success than their own biological child and with the income factor controlled, stepchildren often fare worse than when raised by a single parent. “…lower educational achievement in stepfamilies may be due to lower levels of parental
involvement and the residual effects of the marital conflict the children likely witnessed between their now-divorced biological parents” (p. 501).
Chapter Three: Scope and Methodology

Methodology

Because of the exploratory nature of this research, the methodology will be primarily qualitative. Marshall and Rossmann (1989) claimed that, “In qualitative inquiry, initial curiosities for research often come from real-world observations, emerging from the interplay of the researcher’s direct experience, tacit theories…and growing scholarly interests” (p. 6). Although quantitative research can provide statistics on behavioral differences between blended and traditional families, past research fails in the fact that it does not account for differences in blended and traditional parenting styles; generally, the differences are ignored. Cissna, Cox, and Bochner (1990) claimed,

…one of the greatest handicaps [blended] families experience is the common myth that stepparenting is just like parenting in the natural family: ‘A key or basic difference is that a stepparent has assumed the responsibility for helping to raise another individual’s children. Most of us have been conditioned to want our own children – not someone else’s.’ (p. 1)

Considering the differences in parenting styles between traditional and blended families, it is clear that a quantitative approach is less effective for this type of research in which there are many extenuating circumstances as well as variety of blended family types. Past, and often outdated, research has been compiled from individual perspectives as well as family counselors,
further indicating the need for qualitative research that explores each situation individually.

“…research regarding the stepfamily has not kept pace [with the growing number of stepfamilies in the United States]…[There is] a need for more empirical studies dealing with the various types of stepfamilies…” (p. 2). Furthermore, it is difficult to assess continuities for blended families when you consider the possible mixtures that make up said blended families; a blended family can include remarriages involving step-siblings, remarriages involving a single stepchild, cohabitation without remarriage and different combinations of children involved, a stepfather with stepdaughters and/or stepsons, a stepmother with stepdaughters and/or stepsons, etc. The dynamics between each type of blended family further differs between the traditional family (Coleman, Ganong & Fine, 2000). Given that this type of research encompasses a large historical period and is exploratory in nature, case-study research will provide the most in-depth analysis to determine differences between a single traditional family and the blended family in question during that particular circumstance.

Scope. Braithwaite, Baxter, and Harper (2009) summarized the blended family as follows: “The blended family is represented by multiple forms that defy simple definition, however these are families in which ‘at least one of the adults has a child or children from a previous relationship’” (p. 101). Further research summarizes that there are no less than fifteen different combinations of relationships that could potentially make up a blended family. As a result, the scope of this research will be refined to limit solely the stepparent-stepchild relationship, the stepsibling relationship, and the step-couple (a couple in which at least one of
the individuals involved brings children from a previous union into the new familial dynamic) relationship. This research does not include families that are blended due to adoption and will only include participants and studies performed in the United States.

The following relationships will be analyzed: stepsiblings, stepparent-stepchild, spouses in which one or both spouse brings one or more children from a previous relationship into the new family, and half-siblings, in which the children share only one parent. The ages and genders of participants sought will vary, with the goal to obtain an equal amount of participant types. Because of the limited research in this field, the study will focus solely on the blended family in the United States, so as not to have to take different cultural and societal international norms into account and further complicate the study.

Method. This research will utilize a case-study methodology. Because of the complexity of blended family relationships and the plethora of blended family types of relationships, the case study method enables a wider range for complexity without limiting specific variables. Yin (2014) explained the importance of case study research in that the phenomenon and context of the research is ambiguous.

Doing case study research would be the preferred method…when (1) the main research questions are ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions; (2) a researcher has little to no control over behavioral events; and (3) the focus of the study is contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon. (p. 1)
This case-study methodology will allow for the definition of the strengths and limitations to this field of study while investigating and supporting or refuting historical related studies (Yin 2014). The intended audience is both the blended family and the traditional family, as the aim of the study is to increase general knowledge and understanding of the two different familial structures and to understand how they differ on a communication spectrum.

**Research methods.** To best utilize this case-study research, an exploratory survey will be designed to test prevalent attitudes and ideas between blended family members, including stepparents, stepchildren, and spouses of stepchildren (i.e. the biological parent within the blended family). In addition to multiple choice questions regarding the participant’s perception of communication level, interest in the well-being and development of their stepchild or stepparent, and other relevant questions, there will be questions that require the participant to provide more detailed answers in their own words. These questions will be not be duplicated from previous research because little to no research of this nature has been done on this topic. The majority of research done on the blended family is so outdated at this point that previous research is practically irrelevant to this study now being conducted in 2015. Example questions for the survey include similarities to the following:

On a scale of one to five (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree; if N/A please leave blank), please rate your feelings regarding the following matters:

1. If a non-family related issue arose at work or at school, I would be inclined to share my
problem with and/or seek advice from my stepmother or stepfather.

2. I do not treat my stepchild or stepparent any different than I treat my own (biological) children or parents.

3. I feel as though my stepparent greatly influenced my well-being as a child and shaped who I am as I grew over the years.

4. I am more inclined to spend a greater amount of time, money, or effort into or on my biological child than I am my stepchild.

5. I have a cordial, working relationship with both of my stepchild’s parents.

Because blended family situations and circumstances vary, similar interview questions would be asked, but then analyzed as a whole to recognize patterns and causes for changes in blended family communication, behavior, and other contributing factors which make blended families stand apart from the traditional family. These interviews are meant to be of a more in-depth nature as opposed to semi-structured. Britten (1995) defines an in-depth interview as one more fitted to qualitative research, whereas semi-structured tends to be qualitative in measure. “In depth interviews…may cover only one or two issues, but in much greater detail... Further questions from the interviewer would be based on what the interviewee said and would consist mostly of clarification and probing for details” (p. 251). By utilizing both surveys and in-depth interviews, an exploratory evidence summary will provide credibility to modern research on the
blended family.

**Data analysis.** For the study’s data analysis, quantitative multiple-choice questions will be used to determine the percentage of participants who fall on different levels of the communication spectrum within the blended family. It will also determine the number of participants who feel as though there are more or less issues within their family because it is blended as opposed to being a traditional family structure. The analysis will be used to search for patterns for specific gender and age groups to determine whether some combinations of blended families report faring better than others, and if so, use the in-depth interviews to explore why this might be the case. Furthermore, the study will question as to why traditional families are given a more positive connotation than blended families as well as suggestions for decreasing the negative expectations tied to the stepparent-stepchild relationship. **Validity and reliability.** Ideal sample size is 50-100 survey participants, all of different ages and genders. The beginning of the survey will ask for those details in order to keep track of the types of responses received and also note limitations if there is a particular age or gender gap within the participants. The target is to survey stepchildren, stepparents, and spouses of stepparents with questions embedded in perceptions of communication, personal behavior, and ideas regarding blended family members, as well as resource investment regarding the stepchild and/or stepparent. In addition, the survey will ask some quantitative multiple-choice questions in order to gauge numbers or percentages related to the research. The beginning of the survey will have an optional field to provide a name for further follow-up so that participants can later be selected for in-depth interviews. **Ethical**
Considerations

The stepparent-stepchild relationship naturally faces many more challenges than the biological child-biological parent relationship, as does the blended family as a whole. Citing the “evil stepmother” characterization everywhere from Disney’s Cinderella to current media, stepparents and stepchildren alike are automatically considered unwanted “extras.” According to Case, Lin, and McLanahan (n.d.), psychological mechanisms developed through natural selection have wired parents to want their own children, not someone else’s, primarily due to the high investment in time, money, and resources that go into children. As a result, it is important to consider that although it may not be ethical for a stepparent to be hostile or mistreat their stepchild, human nature wires stepparents to view a stepchild as increased and unwanted stress and resource absorption. Psychologists Martin Daly and Margo Wilson (1987) claimed that evolutionary biology has wired parents to be altruistic in terms of their own children, yet hostile and aggressive toward non-biological offspring. “According to these researchers, natural selection favors adults who engage in nepotism and who reject ‘parasitic’ efforts on the part of nonbiological children. In short, Cinderella’s stepmother was not evil; she was simply protecting her own” (pp. 234-235). In terms of ethics, it is important to consider that a stepparent must work against their own human nature in order uphold the stepparent-stepchild relationship and essentially treat their stepchild as “one of their own.” Another ethical consideration that must be accounted for within the blended family is information ownership. Depending on a stepparent’s or stepchild’s relationship with the biological parent outside of the blended family, a blended
family member could decide to withhold or disclose particular information. Ethically, this accounts for triangulation and loyalty conflicts, and it determines communication boundaries and information processing within the blended family (Afifi 2003). “Custodial and noncustodial parent–child relationships and sibling relationships predate the stepfamily and have their own rules for revealing information. The stepparent may be perceived as an ‘outsider’ who is disrupting the family’s previous power distribution” (p. 730). This must also be considered as an ethical issue because family members are consciously revealing or withholding information in order to manipulate power structures and the family communication system, which, in turn, affects perception and behavior of blended family member relationships.
Chapter Four: The Study

Introduction

Participants for the survey were asked to optionally take the survey via social media. With a goal of 50-100 participants, the study met that goal with a total participant number of 87. Considering the survey was intended to encompass all different types of blended family relationships, a “non-applicable” answer was added to the majority of the questions. The limitations of the study, including the limitations created as a result of the survey, will be discussed later in this chapter. Participants, although not asked any detailed identifying questions, did ask for general information regarding age and gender so as to ensure that the study covered a variety of age ranges and both male and female perspectives. Note that the types of relationships in the first question of the survey copied below equals greater than 100 percent, as participants were allowed to check multiple relationship types, for example, if a participant was both a stepchild and a stepparent. Considering the heart of the study is the blended family, it is only natural to consider that multiple or all relationship categories may apply to a single participant. For the purposes of realistic reflection on the below results, the participants who selected “N/A” on each response will be deducted from the total number of respondents on that question for a more accurate percentile range on responses.

With 87 total participants, 74.71% of respondents were female and 25.29% of respondents were male. There were no respondents from the 0-17 years old age range, with the majority (45.98%) of respondents in the 26-35 years old age range. There were more responses
from the stepchild perspective than any other relationship type and 45.98% of these stepchildren indicated that they became part of a blended family by the age of 10 or younger. In terms of comfort in discussing issues with a stepparent, 27.27% of respondents indicated they would be highly disinclined to reach out to a stepparent for advice, with 34.54% stating that they would be highly inclined to do so. Also closely matched with statements of both 1 (highly disagree) and 5 (highly agree) was the response as to whether or not the stepchild felt as though their stepparent(s) greatly influenced their well-being as a child and helped shape their growth over the years. There was a 1-person difference in the results, with 16 disagreeing with that statement and 17 agreeing. 75.93% of participants felt as though having a stepparent did not make their childhood any less fulfilling, with 24.07% in disagreement. 64.38% of both stepchildren and stepparents alike admitted that they viewed one or the other in a parent or child role and not more as a “friend” role and 67.82% of respondents for all relationship types claimed they felt confident in finding resources for communicating with other blended family members should they need outside assistance.

For parents bringing a child from a previous relationship into the blended family, 57.5% of respondents stated that they felt as though their new significant other (i.e. the stepparent) welcomed their stepchild into their life and 92.5% of those respondents further claimed to welcome their significant other’s opinions and assistance in the raising and mentoring of that child. 16.07% of combined stepchildren and stepparents reported jealousy of the amount of time their biological parent spent with their stepparent or the amount of time their spouse spent with
their child from a previous relationship. When asked if the parent - including both biological and stepparents - felt as though either more time or more money was spent on the stepchild/child from the previous relationship, the majority of respondents felt as though both statements were untrue. And although the majority of biological parents claimed that they felt as though their child was welcomed in their new significant other’s life, 42.5% of those respondents felt as though their significant other did not treat all of their children as equals, regardless of whether or not the children were stepchildren or biological children. Out of all 87 respondents, 53 people felt as though blended families received a more negative connotation in comparison to the traditional family, and out of those 53 people, 40.23% of the time, they believed that the negative connotation was a combined derivative of social media and the news, personal experiences, and experiences they heard about from another person.

**Results of the Study**

The results from the survey are located in Appendix A.

**The Survey**

A copy of the survey published via kwiksurveys.com is located in Appendix B.

Participants were asked to complete the survey if they met the criteria for being a member of a blended family, such as a stepchild, stepparent, a half sibling, or stepsibling. Survey participants were asked to take the survey via social media, so as to preserve the anonymity and randomness of participant selection. Participants were not required to input their name or any other
identifying pieces of information and were allowed to check a “non-applicable” option if the question was not tailored to their relationship type, since the survey is meant to account for all different types of blended family members.

**Discussion**

Overall analysis of the results creates the assumption that perhaps blended families are given a more negative connotation than they experience in reality. 61% of the respondents felt as though they did know where to seek assistance for any communication boundaries they faced within the blended family, with only 31.03% of respondents claiming that they had ever given thought to our sought out assistance in communicating with another member of their blended family. For the most part, respondents appeared to be on either side of the extreme on the spectrum with which they could respond, generally with the answers of “1” and “5” being the most popular and the closest in number of selections. 42.86% of the total respondents indicated that they do not treat their blended family member any different than they would a biological family member, with the majority of stepparents claiming that they would not or do not spend a greater amount of time, effort, or money into their biological child than they would their stepchild. That being said, the study appears to indicate that not only do blended families report little variance in terms of communication or other issues as a result of being a part of a blended family in comparison to a traditional family, but most blended family members do not appear to treat or think of their stepparent or stepchild as any different than they would a biological family member. Additionally, since the majority of respondents felt that there were not larger amounts
of time or money spent on children outside of the relationship, it is likely that the theory of parental resource dilution may be either flawed or less supported than originally believed. It can further be assumed that although parental resource dilution claims that a child receives less of an investment from both parents in totality once the parents have split or become divorced, the loss in investment may either be totally or partially replenished by a stepparent. If the situation allowed, it may even be concluded that a stepchild receives the support and attention of three or four parents (two biological plus one or two stepparents), which provides even greater support and likelihood for success in the future. The theory that a stepparent’s involvement decreases a child’s likelihood for success is unsupported.

In terms of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory, the survey results do support this idea. Considering that the survey results were so split between the extremes on the scale - with practically equal numbers of respondents for both “1” and “5” - it is highly likely that those individuals were utilizing CPM Theory. While it cannot be postulated whether or not the theory was used negatively or positively in these situations, it can be assumed that respondents felt more or less inclined to share information with blended family members or to seek help with communication differences with those blended family members because they were testing these boundaries as a result of triangulation or possible alliances. Had the respondents faced a “traditional”-esque family dynamic, the study would have produced a higher number of neutral (“2,” “3,”, and “4”) responses on the survey rather than the strong feelings that “1” and “5” indicate. In fact, question five of the survey was poised to test how a respondent felt
precisely about their behavioral communication; when asked whether or not they would be inclined to share information with a blended family member, they selected “1” (27.27%) nearly as equally as they chose “5” (34.56%). This indicates that those respondents selectively chose to reveal or conceal information with a blended family member as a result of their comfort level and overall dynamic of being part of a blended family. The idea that CPM Theory is utilized as a result of being party to a blended family can best be refined if the traditional family was also surveyed in order to compare the results from this study’s survey. However, it is clear that the theory of communication boundaries being used to control overall role definition and communication dynamics within the blended family is still at play for the purposes of this study. Most importantly, it is critical that further research be conducted in order to continue to refine and understand CPM Theory as it relates to the blended family.
Chapter Five: Summaries and Conclusions

Limitations of the Study

Because there are so many different types of relationships within the blended family, the study would have provided more detail had multiple surveys been created tailored to each type of relationship. While attempting to prevent the survey from being too daunting, it needed to include a larger amount of questions to encompass all types of relationships without leaving anyone out. However, this required a “non-applicable” response on several of the questions, which in turn resulted in a smaller sample size for some of the questions in which “N/A” was highly selected. Additionally, there was a much higher response rate from women (74.71%) than men (25.29%) as well as the 26-35 year old age range than any other age range. Since there were no responses from anyone age 17 or younger, it is possible that the results are skewed in a more positive or mature light since the younger age groups were unrepresented.

Because this study used one larger survey instead of several smaller, more detailed surveys, a larger sample size would have been ideal. Social media was used to reach the audience, which, upon reflection, should have been used in addition to other platforms to reach a younger audience and to reach more male participants. Although anonymous, it would have been helpful to have optional text boxes as well in case participants wanted to include more details or add any details unavailable on the survey. Furthermore, a survey with the same or similar questions could have been directed to traditional families in order to track any patterns or similarities between the blended and traditional family surveys. Overall, a larger participant
range with more variety of responses from the male and younger populations, in addition to a series of smaller surveys tailored to the relationship type, would most likely have provided the most detailed feedback.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Future studies should be conducted on the blended family, but in a more sectional manner. Individual studies that focus on relationship type will allow more detailed research to be conducted on the blended family relationship types so that stepchildren, stepparents, half siblings, and step couples can be analyzed in comparison to their traditional counter-types in order to verify if there really is a large difference in behavioral communication simply as a result of being “blended.” Although the majority of respondents claimed that they knew where to find assistance in communicating with other blended family members should they require it, it would have been helpful to ask that they list these resources to see how many of them are actually being utilized. By understanding if respondents truly do know the resources available to them, it would allow for the people who provide those resources to understand whether they need to focus on awareness of their availability or not. Do blended families really require a greater amount or different kind of resource when it comes to communication differences within the family? At this level, that is still somewhat difficult to determine. Based on past studies aforementioned and this study’s results, it appears that the majority of respondents face little difficulties in embracing a blended family structure-type than how social media and society tends to portray.

**Conclusions**
In conclusion, previous studies which show that stepchildren fare worse than children living in a traditional family home can be assumed unsupported and circumstantial. While this may be true in some cases, there does not appear to be a basis for concluding that these are anything other than caveats that any family would face. Socioeconomic status, culture, genders of the stepparents and stepchildren, and other factors play a large role in a child’s development and success as well, so those factors also need to be analyzed on top of the specific relationship type (i.e. a stepmother’s effect on a stepdaughter versus her effect on a stepson).

While certain factors, such as the theory of parental resource dilution, have shown to decrease a child’s rate and access of future success, it can also be concluded that (in situational circumstances) a stepparent’s presence can counter that dilution. Theoretically, a child can be even *more* supported in a blended family situation if the child has multiple stepparents who invest time, effort, and money into the child in addition to the biological parents’ investment. While studies have shown that parents are biologically wired to cater to the needs and wants of their own biological child’s success before others, this does not necessarily mean that they purposefully act detrimentally towards their non-biological children.

In terms of communication, divorced partners who are able to co-facilitate healthy relationships with their children and their child’s stepparents can decrease any anomalies in behavioral communication that may exist otherwise. The theory of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) may still be present in some blended families; however, it cannot be applied to *all* blended families simply because they are blended, and it can even be argued that
CPM exists in some traditional families as well. How an individual protects and releases certain pieces of information to certain family members can be assumed to be used as a tool to accomplish that individual’s personal goals and intent to use that information, regardless of family structure-type. And although the creation of alliances increases in the blended family setting, again, this can be countered with a healthy co-facilitation between divorced partners in the relationship management that they choose to utilize in the raising of their child. Because much of the support previously used to shed a more negative light on the blended family is situational, unsupported, and outdated, it is critical that the blended family be placed under the magnifying glass several more times to critically study the differences, caveats, and circumstances that create a difference between the blended and traditional family.
References


Appendix A

The following relationship(s) apply/applies to me:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a stepparent.</td>
<td>36 (41.38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a stepchild.</td>
<td>44 (50.57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am in a relationship with someone who has children from a previous relationship.</td>
<td>27 (31.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child/children has/have at least one stepparent.</td>
<td>29 (33.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have half and/or step-siblings.</td>
<td>53 (60.92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have siblings from the same biological mother and same biological father.</td>
<td>48 (55.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Choose not to respond</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>22 (25.29%)</td>
<td>65 (74.71%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>26.99</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please enter your age range.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 17 or below</th>
<th>Age 18-25</th>
<th>Age 26-35</th>
<th>Age 36-45</th>
<th>Older than 45</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>12 (13.70%)</td>
<td>40 (45.98%)</td>
<td>20 (22.69%)</td>
<td>15 (17.24%)</td>
<td>13.08</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate your age range listed below in which you became part of a blended family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-10 years old</th>
<th>11-17 years old</th>
<th>18-25 years old</th>
<th>Older than 26</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>40 (45.98%)</td>
<td>15 (17.24%)</td>
<td>12 (13.79%)</td>
<td>20 (22.99%)</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A". Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter: If a non-family related issue arose at work or at school, I would be inclined to share my problem with and/or seek advice from my stepmother or stepfather.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>15 (17.24%)</td>
<td>8 (9.2%)</td>
<td>7 (8.05%)</td>
<td>6 (6.9%)</td>
<td>19 (21.84%)</td>
<td>32 (36.78%)</td>
<td>9.11</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A". Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter: I do not treat my stepchild or stepparent any different than I treat my own (biological) children or parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>9 (6.9%)</td>
<td>17 (10.64%)</td>
<td>6 (9.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0.34%)</td>
<td>30 (19.34%)</td>
<td>17 (19.54%)</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A". Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter: I feel as though my stepparent greatly influenced my well-being as a child and shaped who I am as I grew over the years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>16 (18.39%)</td>
<td>5 (15.75%)</td>
<td>8 (9.2%)</td>
<td>8 (9.2%)</td>
<td>17 (19.54%)</td>
<td>33 (37.93%)</td>
<td>9.36</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A". Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter: I am more inclined to spend a greater amount of time, money, or effort into or on my biological child than I am my stepchild.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>16 (16.39%)</td>
<td>6 (6.9%)</td>
<td>4 (4.6%)</td>
<td>7 (8.05%)</td>
<td>12 (13.79%)</td>
<td>42 (48.28%)</td>
<td>12.93</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A". Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter: I have a cordial, working relationship with both of my stepchild’s parents (or my child’s stepparent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>14 (16.09%)</td>
<td>6 (6.9%)</td>
<td>5 (5.75%)</td>
<td>7 (8.05%)</td>
<td>13 (14.94%)</td>
<td>42 (48.28%)</td>
<td>12.76</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe that the majority of arguments in my marriage stem from or are based upon my previous relationship and/or child from a previous relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>15 (17.24%)</td>
<td>36 (41.38%)</td>
<td>36 (41.38%)</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe I would have a more fulfilled childhood had I not had any stepparents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>13 (14.94%)</td>
<td>41 (47.13%)</td>
<td>33 (37.93%)</td>
<td>11.78</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I find that there is more strain between me and my half-siblings or stepsiblings than there is between myself and my siblings that share both the same biological mother and father.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>28 (32.16%)</td>
<td>27 (31.03%)</td>
<td>32 (36.78%)</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe that my significant other treats all of my children as equals, regardless of whether they are biological children or stepchildren.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>23 (26.74%)</td>
<td>17 (19.77%)</td>
<td>46 (53.49%)</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have noticed a significant amount of more time spent on my stepchild/child from a previous relationship than my biological child/child produced from my current relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>5 (5.76%)</td>
<td>24 (27.59%)</td>
<td>58 (66.67%)</td>
<td>21.92</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have noticed a significant amount of more money spent on my stepchild/child from a previous relationship than my biological child/child produced from my current relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>7 (8.24%)</td>
<td>26 (29.41%)</td>
<td>53 (62.35%)</td>
<td>18.93</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I often feel jealous of the amount of time that my parent spends with my stepparent (or I often feel jealous of the amount of time my significant other spends with his or her child from a previous relationship) as opposed to myself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15.98</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I think that "blended families" (i.e. those with stepparents and stepchildren involved) receive a more negative connotation from society than do "traditional families" (in which there are no stepparents and no children from previous relationships involved).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answered TRUE to the previous question, please select all items that you believe contributes to a negative connotation for the blended family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social media/the news</th>
<th>Movies and/or TV shows</th>
<th>Books and magazines</th>
<th>Experiences I heard about from a friend or family member</th>
<th>Personal experiences</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>35 (40.23%)</td>
<td>32 (38.76%)</td>
<td>17 (19.54%)</td>
<td>35 (40.23%)</td>
<td>35 (40.23%)</td>
<td>5 (5.75%)</td>
<td>34 (39.08%)</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I feel as though my child welcomes his/her stepparent(s) in his/her life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Data</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17.91</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I feel as though my significant other welcomes my child from a previous relationship in his/her life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Data</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17.11</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.08%)</td>
<td>(6.92%)</td>
<td>(54.02%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I welcome my significant other’s opinions and assistance in the raising and mentoring of my child from a previous relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Data</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18.83</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(42.53%)</td>
<td>(3.45%)</td>
<td>(54.02%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I view my stepparent or stepchild as more of a "friend" role than a child or parental role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Data</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(29.89%)</td>
<td>(54.02%)</td>
<td>(15.09%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If I were to look for assistance or counseling in communicating with other members of my blended family, I feel confident that I would know where to find these resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Data</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(57.82%)</td>
<td>(32.18%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have considered or used counseling or other resources in order to better communicate with one or more members of my blended family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Data</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(31.03%)</td>
<td>(68.97%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

1* The following relationship(s) apply/applies to me:

☐ I am a stepparent.
☐ I am a stepchild.
☐ I am in a relationship with someone who has children from a previous relationship.
☐ My child/children has/have at least one stepparent.
☐ I have half and/or step-siblings.
☐ I have siblings from the same biological mother and same biological father.

2* I am...

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Choose not to respond

3* Please enter your age range.

☐ Age 17 or below
☐ Age 18-25
☐ Age 20-35
☐ Age 36-45
☐ Older than 45

4* Please indicate your age range listed below in which you became part of a blended family.

☐ 0-10 years old
☐ 11-17 years old
☐ 18-25 years old
☐ Older than 26
5* For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A".

Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter:

If a non-family related issue arose at work or at school, I would be inclined to share my problem with and/or seek advice from my stepmother or stepfather.

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6* For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A".

Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter:

I do not treat my stepchild or stepparent any different than I treat my own (biological) children or parents.

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7* For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A".

Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter:

I feel as though my stepparent greatly influenced my well-being as a child and shaped who I am as I grew over the years.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- N/A

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8* For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A".

Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter:

I am more inclined to spend a greater amount of time, money, or effort into or on my biological child than I am my stepchild.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- N/A
9* For the following question, you will answer based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). If not applicable to your situation, please choose "N/A".

Please rate your feelings regarding the following matter:

I have a cordial, working relationship with both of my stepchild's parents (or my child's stepparent).

☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ N/A

10* I believe that the majority of arguments in my marriage stem from or are based upon my previous relationship and/or child from a previous relationship.

☐ True
☐ False
☐ N/A

11* I believe I would have a more fulfilled childhood had I not had any stepparents.

☐ True
☐ False
☐ N/A
12. I find that there is more strain between me and my half-siblings or stepsiblings than there is between myself and my siblings that share both the same biological mother and father.

True
False
N/A

13. I believe that my significant other treats all of my children as equals, regardless of whether they are biological children or stepchildren.

True
False
N/A

14. I have noticed a significant amount of more time spent on my stepchild/child from a previous relationship than my biological child/child produced from my current relationship.

True
False
N/A
16  I have noticed a significant amount of more money spent on my stepchild/child from a previous relationship than my biological child/child produced from my current relationship.

- True
- False
- N/A

16* I often feel jealous of the amount of time that my parent spends with my stepparent (or I often feel jealous of the amount of time my significant other spends with his or her child from a previous relationship) as opposed to myself.

- True
- False
- N/A

17* I think that “blended families” (i.e. those with stepparents and stepchildren involved) receive a more negative connotation from society than do “traditional families” (in which there are no stepparents and no children from previous relationships involved).

- True
- False

18* If you answered TRUE to the previous question, please select all items that you believe contributes to a negative connotation for the blended family.

- Social media/the news
- Movies and/or TV shows
- Books and magazines
- Experiences I heard about from a friend or family member
- Personal experiences
- Other
- N/A
19° I feel as though my child welcomes his/her stepparent(s) in his/her life.
- True
- False
- N/A

20° I feel as though my significant other welcomes my child from a previous relationship in his/her life.
- True
- False
- N/A

21° I welcome my significant other's opinions and assistance in the raising and mentoring of my child from a previous relationship.
- True
- False
- N/A

22° I view my stepparent or stepchild as more of a "friend" role than a child or parental role.
- True
- False
- N/A
23. If I were to look for assistance or counseling in communicating with other members of my blended family, I feel confident that I would know where to find these resources.
- True
- False

24. I have considered or used counseling or other resources in order to better communicate with one or more members of my blended family.
- True
- False

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you are interested in receiving a more detailed follow-up survey, please email mrucha2@zagmail.gonzaga.edu and indicate that you would like to receive the level 2 survey. This will not affect your responses for the survey you just took and your responses will remain anonymous.