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Family structure and family management practices: Associations with positive aspects of youth well-being

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Abstract

Using data from a national sample of 15-year olds (N = 681) we tested if four family management practices (parental knowledge, behavioral control, parental academic involvement, and unsupervised time with peers) differed between family structures (i.e., biological-parent, stepfather, or single-mother family). We then identified the family management practices associated with positive youth well-being (psychosocial maturity, positive friendship networks, and school bonding) within each family structure. Parental knowledge, academic involvement, and behavioral control were greater in biological-parent than single-mother families. Stepfather families only differed from biological-parent and single-mother families on parental academic involvement. Although family management practices were associated with youth well-being in all family structures, the specific family management practices associated with each aspect of youth well-being varied across structures. Results have implications for how family-based interventions might be adjusted to better account for the specific characteristics of biological-parent, stepfather, and single-mother families.

Keywords: Family structure, family management practices, youth well-being, stepfamilies, single-mother families

Family Structure and Family Management Practices: Associations with Positive Aspects of Youth Well-Being

In 1960 an estimated 27% of children in the United States resided in households headed by remarried, single, cohabiting, or non-biological parents, by 2014 that estimate had grown to 53% of children (Pew Research Center, 2015). Given this trend, determining the impact of family structure on family processes and youth well-being has become a pressing need (Ganong, Coleman, & Russell, 2015). Family management practices (i.e., parents' management of children's behavior and/or provisions of warmth and support) are critical family processes that can promote youth well-being by creating family environments that limit risk-taking opportunities and support youth development (Wang, Dishion, Stormshak, & Willet, 2011). Family systems researchers (see Cox & Paley, 1997) have theorized that families who experience family structure transitions and/or have fewer caregivers residing in the home, may encounter difficulties enacting effective family management practices (Bumpus & Rodgers, 2009; Fisher, Leve, O'Leary, & Leve, 2003). Divorce, remarriage, and single-parenthood may lead to fewer parental resources (e.g., time, energy, finances; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008), conflict or incompatible parenting across households (Jamison, Coleman, Ganong, & Feistman, 2014), and the (re)negotiation of post-transition relationships (Emery, 2012; Kinniburgh-White, Cartwright, & Seymour, 2010), all of which could disrupt family management. Those challenges may lead to family management practices that have a greater, or lesser, impact on youth well-being in distinct family structure contexts (Bumpus & Rodgers, 2009; Wang, et al., 2011; but see Amato & Fowler, 2002). In this study we tested if family management practices (i.e., parental knowledge, behavioral control, parental academic involvement, and unsupervised time with peers) differed between biological-parent, stepfather, and single-mother families. We then determined which

family management practices were associated with positive aspects of youth well-being (i.e., psychosocial maturity, positive friendship networks, and school bonding) in each structure.

Family Management Practices

The term family management practices encompasses a broad range of parental efforts, rooted within the parent-child subsystem, to shape children's developmental outcomes (Wang et al., 2011). Generally, family management practices can be divided into parental efforts to a) regulate children's behaviors or b) provide them with warmth and support (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Wang et al., 2011). Appropriate and effective family management allows parents to create environments and experiences that promote positive development and minimize negative outcomes (e.g. drug use, social maladjustment, poor academic performance; Amato & Fowler, 2002; Wang et al 2011). Although a variety of parenting behaviors and aspects of parent-youth relationships fit within the broad definition of family management practices, in this study we focused on four related to the regulation of youth behavior: parental knowledge, behavioral control, parental academic involvement, and unsupervised time with peers. We focused on these family management practices because prior research has shown they play important roles in shaping youths' developmental outcomes (e.g., Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010; Wang et al., 2011; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014), are particularly likely to be impacted by family structure as they involve coordination among youths' caregivers, and because each are modifiable, they are appropriate targets for family-based intervention efforts aimed at improving youth well-being.

Parental knowledge (i.e., how much parents are perceived to know about youths' daily activities, interest, and friends; Kerr et al., 2010) is expected to lead to parenting practices and family environments that support youth development (Abar, Jackson, & Wood, 2014). Parental knowledge may help parents react to youths' needs, communicate to youth that they are being

cared for, and help parents identify where to intervene in youths' lives (Hamza & Willoughby, 2011). Because parental knowledge is largely due to youths' self-disclosures to their parents rather than parental efforts to solicit information from their children (Crouter, Bumpus, Davis, & McHale, 2005; Keijers, Branje, VanderValk, & Meeus, 2010), previous researchers have considered parental knowledge to be distinct from parents' use of behavioral control, monitoring, or supervision (Kerr et al., 2010). *Behavioral control* reflects parental efforts to regulate youth activities and whereabouts, typically through rules, setting limits, and guiding youth decision making (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Wang et al., 2011). By setting appropriate limits and rules on adolescents' activities and whereabouts parents can prevent or reduce opportunities for risk-taking and communicate expected behavioral standards (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Wang et al., 2011). *Parental academic involvement* refers to activities parents engage in, at home or at school, that support youths' academic success (Hill & Tyson, 2009). For example, parents may assist with homework, studying, and/or completing school projects, or they may communicate and meet with teachers and other school personal, and/or attend school programs and athletic events (Hill & Tyson, 2009). *Unsupervised time with peers* increases over the course of adolescence as youth begin to expect and receive greater autonomy over their daily activities (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Daddis, 2004). Those trends can create a developmental dilemma (see Allen & Loeb, 2015). One the one hand it is normal and healthy for youth to desire control over activities with peers (Trost, Biesecher, Stattin, & Kerr, 2007). Researchers have consistently recognized, however, that unsupervised time with peers also has the potential to promote risk-taking (Siennick & Osgood, 2012). Therefore, allowing greater unsupervised time with peers may be a family management practice that undermines youth well-being, particularly if youth spend time with peers who engage in risk-taking.

Family Structure and Management Practices

The present study was guided by a family systems framework (see Cox & Paley, 1997). Within this framework, family structure is innately tied to the organization of family relationships and subsystems, boundaries, and hierarchies that are expected to influence individual family members' well-being (Cox & Paley, 1997; Demo & Buehler, 2013). The unique family tasks and stressors faced by biological-parent, stepfather, and single-mother families (described below) may set the stage for how parents in different family configurations engage in family management (Bumpus & Rodgers, 2009; Fisher et al., 2003). Thus parents living in some family structures being better able to, or choose to, employ some family management practices than others. Resulting in youth in different family structures benefiting from some, but not other, family management practices.

Single-mother families, by virtue of having a single caregiver in the home, may face particular challenges in supervising, regulating, and being involved in youths' lives (Simons, Chen, Simons, Brody, & Cutrona, 2006; Ziol-Guest & Dunifon, 2014). Single-mother families also tend to be economically disadvantaged compared to two-parent families (Prom-Wormley et al., 2014; Mclanahan & Percheski, 2008). Economic strain has been shown to undermine parenting behaviors such as warmth and involvement (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Additionally, demographers have shown that single-mothers have increasingly had to adopt longer working hours in order to maintain similar economic incomes as their historic peers (Fox, Han, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2013). As these changes in work hours do not appear to be offset by adjustments in single-parent's use of professional childcare services, youth in these family may experience less parental and adult-supervised time than their peers in two-parent families (Fox et al., 2013).

Stepfather families must navigate the development of step-relationships and redefine boundaries between parent-child, coparenting, and romantic subsystems (Coleman, Ganong, & Russell, 2013). Mothers in stepfamilies often report role conflicts and parenting challenges as they cope with difficulties in communication, differing expectations, and loyalty binds among or between their children from their previous relationship(s) and a new romantic partner (Weaver, & Coleman, 2010). Stepfathers may also have parental obligations for non-residential children, dividing their attentions or resources (Manning, Stewart, & Smock, 2003). Furthermore, some stepfathers may avoid active parenting (or be ineffective at it) if stepchildren do not accept them as parental figures (Kinniburgh-White et al., 2010).

Finally, family management practices in stepfather and single-mother families may both be impacted by ongoing interactions and relationships with youths' nonresidential parents. Most divorced parents coparent with their ex-spouses but many do not do so cooperatively (Beckmeyer, Coleman, & Ganong, 2014). Divorced parents often report struggling to come to terms with coparenting partners in regards to differing parenting strategies and beliefs (Jamison et al., 2014). In addition, conflict between residential and non-residential parents is associated with less optimal parenting techniques such as harsh discipline (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008). Married parents may also disagree about childrearing, but such quarrels rarely rise to the level of legal action as often as they do in post-divorce families (Emery, 2012).

Prior research on family structure and management has focused on comparing family management practices across family structures and has produced mixed findings. Though some researchers have found that parents in post-divorce families have less parental knowledge than those in biological-parent families (Bumpus & Rodgers, 2009; Wang et al., 2011) others have found no differences (Henry, Plunkett, & Sands, 2011; Jones-Sanpei, Day, & Holmes, 2009;

Padilla-Walker, Harper, & Bean, 2011). Likewise, investigations of behavioral control in different family structures have also yielded mixed findings, with some studies suggesting biological-parent and stepfather families use more behavior control than single-mothers (Jones-Sanpei, et al., 2009) and others finding no significant differences (Henry et al., 2011; Longmore, Manning, & Giordano, 2001; Simons et al., 2006). Prior research on parental academic involvement has generally found that biological-parent families are often more involved than other family structures, however, these differences appear to mostly be the result of disparities in other family resources (e.g., economic, social, and cultural capital; Myers & Myers, 2015). There has been little research on unsupervised time with peers across family structures, but previous research suggests that parental supervision in single-parent families is generally less than that in biological-parent families or stepfamilies (Astone, & McLanahn, 1991; Demo & Acock, 1996).

Although researchers have previously tested if parenting is differentially associated with youth outcomes (e.g., Amato & Fowler, 2002; Wang et al., 2011), most studies have focused on youth problem behaviors. In response, scholars have called for increases in research on determinates of positive youth outcomes, particularly among those living in structurally diverse families (Amato, 2010; Ganong, et al., 2015). In the current study, we addressed this gap in the literature by investigating the impact of family management techniques on positive aspects of youth well-being in an effort to inform family programming that not only mitigates risks, but also promotes positive youth development.

Current Study

In the current study we used data from a national sample of 15 year-olds to examine the impact of family structure on family management practices and then tested their associations with youth well-being. This exploratory study had two distinct aims. The first study aim was to

test if four family management practices (parental knowledge, behavioral control, parental academic involvement, and unsupervised time with peers) differed between biological-parent, stepfather, and single-mother families. Prior studies using similar between-groups analyses (e.g., Jones-Senapi et al., 2009; Henry et al., 2011) have not included the comprehensive set of family management practices we included in this study. The second study aim sought to address recent calls for additional within family structure analyses (Amato, 2010; Ganong et al., 2015). Therefore, we tested associations between family management practices and three positive indicators of youth well-being (psychosocial maturity, positive friendship networks, and school bonding) separately for youth living in each family structure. Our purpose with this aim was to identify family management practices associated with better positive youth development within each specific family structure context, rather than to make comparisons across contexts.

Method

Participants

Study data came from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD; NICHD ECCRN, 2001; United States Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, 2010). The SECCYD is a 15-year longitudinal study of a cohort of children born in the United States in 1991 (see NICHD ECCRN, 2001 for recruitment and original sample demographics). Originally, 1,364 children and their mothers were enrolled in the study and data were collected annually, as part of three study waves, until study children were in the sixth grade. There was an additional fourth wave of data collection when study children where 15 years old. The current study is based on the 979 families that provided family structure data at the Wave-IV assessment. The sample for the current study was limited to youth who had

complete data on the study variables and were living with both biological parents (i.e., biological-parent families), living with a stepfather (i.e., stepfather families), or living with a single-mother (i.e., single-mother families). The final sample consisted of 681 15-year old adolescents (see Table 1 for demographics and descriptive statistics).

(Table 1 about here)

Measures

Parental knowledge. Youth reported how much their parents' knew about their whereabouts, activities, and peers using a 6-item scale (α = .82) created for the SECCYD based on the work of Steinberg and Lamborn (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, Dornbush, 1991; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). Items were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *doesn't know at all* to 4 = *knows everything*) and scores were computed by averaging the available items (Enders, 2010), for youth who completed at least 5 of the 6 items (i.e., when youth only completed 5 items we averaged the items they completed). Higher scores reflect adolescents perceiving their parents' knew more about their daily activities and experiences.

Behavioral control. Youth reported parents' use of behavioral control using 7-items (α = .69) from the Making Decisions questionnaire, which was developed for the SECCYD based on prior research by Brody, Moore, and Glei (1994) and Eccles, Buchanan, Midgley, Fuligni, and Flanagan (1991). Specifically, youth were asked to rate how decisions were made in different areas of their lives (e.g., how late youth can stay up at night, which friends they can spend time with, how youth dress, and what they watch on TV). Each item was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *my parent(s) decide* to 5 = *I decide all by myself*). Behavioral control scores were computed by averaging the available items (Enders, 2010), after first reverse coding the items, for youth who completed at least 5 of the 7 items (i.e., when youth completed only 5 or 6 items we averaged the

items they completed). Higher scores reflect adolescents' perceived parents' exercised greater control over how they spend their time, who they spend it with, and their appearance.

Parental academic involvement. Parental academic involvement was measured with a scale (α = .83) developed by Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch (1996). Items assessed mothers' and fathers' involvement in youths' schooling (e.g., assisting with homework, attending school events, talking with teachers). Youth reported maternal (5-items) and paternal (5-items) academic involvement separately using a 3-point scale (0 = *never* to 2 = *always*). Parental academic involvement scores were computed by averaging across the items; higher scores reflect greater parental involved in their schooling and academic activities.

Unsupervised time with peers. Unsupervised time with peers was assessed with two items developed specifically for the SECCYD (see also Meldrum, Barnes, & Hay, 2015). Unsupervised time during the school week was assessed by asking youth: "During a typical week, how many days do you spend at least 30 minutes in the afternoon or evening after school with other kids such as friends or neighbors (not your brothers or sisters), without an adult around?" Youth could select between 0 to 5 weekdays. Unsupervised time over the weekend was assessed by asking youth: "During a typical weekend (Saturday and Sunday), how much time do you spend with other kids such as friends or neighbors (not your brothers or sisters), without an adult around?" Youth responded to this item using a six point scale: 0 = *none at all*, 1 = *less than 1 hour*, 2 = *1 to 3 hours*, 3 = *3 to 5 hours*, 4 = *5 to 7 hours*, and 5 = *More than 7 hours*. Scores for unsupervised time with peers were computed by averaging the two items together; higher scores reflecting spending more time in the company of peers without adult supervision.

Psychosocial maturity. Youth completed the Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (30-items; α = .87; Greenberger & Bond, 1976). Items assess youths' capacity for self-management,

responsibility, and work orientation. Each item was rated with a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). Psychosocial maturity scores were computed by averaging across the items; higher scores reflect youth perceiving they are more mature in their self-management, responsibility, and work orientation.

Positive friendship network. Youth rated the characteristics of their friendship network using a 15-item measure (α = .84) developed for the SECCYD based on the work of Olivieri & Reiss (1987). The items captured behavioral characteristics of youths' friendship group. There were seven positive (e.g., reads books for fun, work hard at school, and respectful of teachers) and eight negative (e.g., they cheat on tests, mean to other kids, and get into trouble) behaviors. Youth rated each item using a 5-point scale (1 = *none of them* to 5 = *all of them*). Positive friendship network characteristics scores were computed by summing across the items, after reverse coding the negative behavior items. Higher scores reflect youth perceiving greater positive behavior in their friendship network.

School bonding. Youth rated their attachment to their school using a 5-item scale (α = .76) developed for the SECCYD based on prior studies of school bonding (e.g., Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Each item was rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *not at all true* to 4 = *very true*). Sample items include: "I am happy with my school," "I feel close to others at my school," and "I feel like I am a part of my school." School bonding scores were computed by averaging across the items; higher scores reflect stronger and more positive connections to their school.

Control variables. On the basis of previous research suggesting associations between various demographic and family characteristics and youth wellbeing (see Ben-Arieh, 2006), analyses controlled for *adolescent sex* (male = 1, female = 0), *race/ethnicity* (white non-Hispanic = 1, others = 0), and *family income-to-needs ratio* (<1 = income is below needs, ≥1 = income is

at or greater than needs). Based on research demonstrating parenting behaviors are in part a reaction to children's current behaviors and characteristics (see Kerr & Stattin, 2003) we also controlled for *depressive symptoms* (Children's Depression Inventory-Short Form; 10-items; α = .81; Kovacs, 1992), and *youth impulse control* (Weinberger Adjustment Inventory; 7-items; α = .82; Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). Youth exhibiting greater depressive symptoms, compared to those who do not, may elicit different types of family management from parents. Similarly, youth who show themselves more capable of regulating impulsive behavior may be parented differently than those who appear more impulsive.

Analysis Plan

We first used MANCOVA to determine if family management practices differed between family structures. The MANCOVA controlled for youth sex, race/ethnicity, household income-to-needs ratio, youth depressive symptoms, and youth impulsiveness. We used hierarchical multiple regression (HMR) to examine the within family structure associations between the family management practices and youth well-being. HMR models for each outcome (psychosocial maturity, positive friendship network, and school bonding), were computed for each family structure (biological-parent, stepfather, and single-mother). In each HMR the first step included the control variables and the second step included the family management practices. For ease of presentation, we only provided the final regression model coefficients in the in-text results tables. The online supplemental materials include full regression tables.

Results

Family Structure Differences in Family Management Practices

We used MANCOVA to determine if family management practices differed between the family structures. The multivariate effect for family structure was significant, Wilk's $\lambda = 0.93$, F

= 5.86, $p < .001$, partial-$\eta^2 = .034$. There were significant family structure differences for parental knowledge, $F = 4.33$, $p = .014$, partial-$\eta^2 = .013$, behavioral control, $F = 4.09$, $p = .017$, partial-$\eta^2 = .012$, and parental academic involvement, $F = 21.18$, $p < .001$, partial-$\eta^2 = .059$. However, unsupervised time with peers did not differ between family structures, $F = 0.69$, $p = .504$. To identify the specific significant differences in parental knowledge, behavioral control, and parental academic involvement between family structures, we conducted ANCOVAs, controlling for the same variables noted above, for each family management practice.

For *parental knowledge*, youth in biological-parent families reported greater parental knowledge than those in single-mother families, but did not differ from those in stepfather families. Parental knowledge also did not differ between stepfather and single-mother families. A similar pattern was found regarding *behavioral control,* wherein youth living in biological-parent families reported their parents used greater behavioral control than those living in single-mother families, but did not differ from those in stepfather families, and no differences were found between stepfather and single-mother families. For *parental academic involvement*, youth in biological-parent families also reported greater parental academic involvement than those in both stepfather and single-mother families, but again, parental school involvement did not differ between stepfather and single-mother families (See Table 1 for group comparisons).

Family Management Practices and Youth Well-Being

Biological-parent families. Results of the HMRs for biological-parent families are provided in Table 2. Family management practices accounted for approximately 3% of the variance in *psychosocial maturity*, $F(4, 476) = 5.61$, $p < .001$. Parental knowledge, $\beta = .09$, $p = .040$, and parental academic involvement, $\beta = .14$, $p < .001$, were associated with greater psychosocial maturity but the other family management practices were not. Family management

practices accounted for approximately 10% of the variance in *positive friendship networks*, $F(4, 476) = 18.82$, $p < .001$. Parental knowledge, $\beta = .18$, $p < .001$, behavioral control, $\beta = .09$, $p = .027$, and parental academic involvement, $\beta = .16$, $p < 001$, were each associated with more positivity in friendship networks, but unsupervised time with peers was not. Finally, family management practices accounted for approximately 6% of the variance in *school bonding*, $F(4, 476) = 8.98$, $p < .001$. Parental knowledge, $\beta = .13$, $p = .007$, and parental academic involvement, $\beta = .19$, $p < .001$, were associated with greater school bonding but the other family management practices were not.

(Table 2 here)

Stepfather families. Results of the HMRs for stepfather families are provided in Table 3. Family management practices accounted for approximately 9% of the variance in *psychosocial maturity*, $F(4, 84) = 3.02$, $p = .022$. Parental academic involvement, $\beta = .24$, $p < .019$, was associated with greater psychosocial maturity but the other family management practices were not. Family management practices accounted for approximately 13% of the variance in *positive friendship network*s, $F(4, 84) = 4.30$, $p = .003$. Parental knowledge, $\beta = .26$, $p = .014$, and parental academic involvement, $\beta = .23$, $p = .019$ were associated with more positivity in friendship networks but the other family management practices were not. Finally, family management practices accounted for approximately 13% of the variance in *school bonding*, $F(4, 84) = 4.25$, $p = .004$. Parental academic involvement, $\beta = .33$, $p = .001$, was associated with greater school bonding but the other family management practices were not.

(Table 3 here)

Single-mother families. Results of the HMRs for single-mother families are provided in Table 4. Family management practices did not account for significant variance in *psychosocial*

maturity, $F(4, 91) = 0.43$, $p = .785$. Family management practices accounted for approximately 11% of the variance in *positive friendship networks*, $F(4, 91) = 3.76$, $p = .007$. Unsupervised time with peers, $\beta = -.25$, was associated with less positivity in friendship networks but the other family management practices were not. Finally, family management practices accounted for approximately 14% of the variance in *school bonding*, $F(4, 91) = 4.97$, $p = .001$. Parental knowledge, $\beta = -.27$, $p = .015$, was associated with less, but behavioral control, $\beta = .36$, $p < .001$, was associated with greater school bonding. The other family management practices were not associated with school bonding.

(Table 4 here)

Discussion

We believe the results from this study make several important contributions to the literature on family structure, family management practices, and youth well-being. First, we found family structure differences in family management practices primarily appear to be between biological-parent and single-mother families. Stepfather families only differed from biological-parent and single-mother families on parental academic involvement. Second, we found evidence that family management practices are associated with positive youth well-being across family structures. Finally, we provided evidence for how family management practices were associated with positive youth well-being within specific family structure contexts.

Parents appear capable of establishing some level of protective family management regardless of their family configuration, and differences we observed in family management practices between family structures were small rather than large. Still, implementing family management practices may be easier when two caregivers are in the home (see Simons et al., 2006). The similarity in family management practices between biological-parent and stepfather

families may suggest having two caregivers in the home allows for greater opportunities to obtain knowledge about youths' daily activities, enact rules to regulate their activities, and be involved in academics (Padilla-Walker et al., 2011; Simons et al., 2006). Conversely, single-mothers may have fewer opportunities for family management, a situation exacerbated by experiencing greater economic strain (Fox et al., 2013). Interestingly, family management practices in stepfather families, besides parental academic involvement, were also similar to single-mother families. Stepfather families may share characteristics with both biological-parent and single-mother families. Some remarried couples may try to recreate a nuclear family norm, while others establish distinct family boundaries, with mothers acting as primary caregiver for their children and stepfathers establishing a more supportive role (Coleman et al., 2013).

Family management practices appear to support positive youth development in biological-parent, stepfather, and single-mother families, however, our results illustrate within specific family structures some family management practices may be more promotive than others. Such variation may reflect the challenges present (e.g., economic strain, negotiating roles and boundaries, managing relationships with nonresidential parents) or absent in each family structure, as parents work to manage youth experiences. As biological-parent families are likely experiencing fewer challenges than stepfather and single-mother families, they may be best positioned to obtain information about their youth and use it to promote positive development. This may explain why parental knowledge, academic involvement, and behavioral control were associated with youth well-being in biological-parent families. Youth well-being in stepfather families was primarily associated with parental academic involvement. We speculate that parental academic involvement may be an unambiguous way, compared to parental knowledge and behavioral control, for parents to communicate to youth that they are being cared for,

without overstepping potentially delicate stepfamily boundaries (Coleman et al., 2013). Finally, family management practices appear to be less consistently associated with youth well-being in single-mother families, which may reflect the challenges of having fewer caregivers in the home and a greater likelihood of economic strain. Interestingly, in our sample, parental knowledge in single-mother families was associated with *less* school bonding, but behavioral control was associated with *more*. Parental knowledge is primarily due to youths' self-disclosure to parents (Kerr et al., 2010), perhaps this negative association reflects that youth who are experiencing problems at school are disclosing those experience to mothers, leading to greater perceived parental knowledge. In contrast, single mothers who exert more control over their children's daily activities may be directing youths' attention towards academics and extracurricular activities at school. Success in those areas may lead to feeling a stronger connection with their school community. Future longitudinal research is needed to replicate these findings and determine the direction of effect.

Implications for Family-Based Interventions

A central focus of family education is to provide programs that address the needs of parents and youth in their specific family contexts. Many post-divorce parent education programs, however, tend to focus on interpersonal relationships (e.g., coparenting between ex-spouses) more than family management practices (Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 2011). As family management practices appear less common in single-mother compared to two-parent families, single-mothers may benefit most from a programmatic focus on how to enact family management practices in the context of shifting economic, emotional, and parental resources. Our results also support the inclusion of information regarding parental academic involvement in programs for stepfather families. Programs developed specifically for families with adolescents

(Kumpfer & Hansen, 2014), which commonly do focus on family management practices, could also benefit from tailoring for specific family structures. Based on our results, family programmers should recognize implementing specific family management practices (e.g., parental academic involvement) may be more difficult or less effective in some family types (e.g., single-mother families) compared to others (e.g., biological-parent families).

Limitations

The results of this study must be considered within the context of its limitations. First, the study is cross-sectional, precluding us from testing if family structure transitions lead to changes in family management practices or that family management practices lead to changes in youth well-being. For example, youth behavior may influence parents' family management, though we attempted to account for this by controlling for two youth characteristics, depressive symptoms and impulse control, which may affect family management practices. Second, we lacked information regarding how long youth had lived in stepfather and single-mother family structures. Family management practices within these families may be influenced by the length of time since they experienced their family transition, with families with more recent transitions facing more challenges than those who experienced the transition years ago (Amato, 2010; Ganong et al., 2015). Third, the youth in this study were all 15 years old. Developmental stage may thus influence the associations found between family structure and management practices. We also rely on youth reports of family management practices. Although youth and parents may perceive family management differently, researchers (e.g., Brannstetter & Furman, 2013) have suggested that youths' perceptions of parenting are the most proximal influence on their well-being. Additionally, the reliability of our measure of behavioral control is rather low, which can reduce our ability to find significant associations between behavioral control and youth well-

being (Card & Barnett, 2015). Finally, we note that the family management practices and family structures included in this study are not exhaustive measures of these constructs.

Future Directions and Conclusion

The results from our study contribute to an already mixed set of findings regarding family structure, family management, and youth well-being. Perhaps now is the time for a systematic review of the exigent literature on family structure and management practices, with a particular emphasis on how sample and methodological characteristics may be contributing to these mixed findings. Applying systematic and meta-analytic review techniques to the research on family structure and management practices may help clarify the associations between these constructs and provide researchers with information regarding where continued research is needed. Future research should also continue focusing on within group studies of specific family structures. That is, studies specifically on biological-parent, stepfather, and single-mother families, as well as other family structures not included in the current study, can identify specific processes and experiences associated with family management practices and may also shape how they are associated with youth well-being. In such studies it may be particularly beneficial to integrate a person-x-content perspective (see Rosa & Tudge, 2013) in order to capture the complex interactions between family processes, youth and parent characteristics, and youth well-being. Scholars and public officials continue to discuss if family structure or family processes are the primary determinate of youth well-being (Ganong et al., 2015). Our results suggest both are important but in different ways. Ultimately, growing our understanding of how structure may inform or impact processes within families can allow family scientists and practitioners to both better understand family dynamics and target interventions.

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Table 1.

Sample Demographics and Descriptive Statistics by Family Structure.

	Full Sample (N = 681)	Biological-parent (n = 486)	Stepfather (n = 94)	Single-mother (n = 101)	
	% or *M* (*SD*)	*%* or *M* (*SD*)	*%* or *M* (*SD*)	*%* or *M* (*SD*)	$F(2, 680)$ or $\chi^2(2)$
Male youth	51.2%	49.4%$_a$	68.1%$_b$	44.6%$_a$	13.15**
White non-Hispanic youth	85.2%	89.1%$_a$	78.7%$_b$	72.3%$_c$	22.31***
Family income-to-needs ratio	5.69 (5.66)	6.40 (5.90)$_a$	4.51 (5.22)$_b$	3.35 (3.76)$_b$	15.13***
Youth depressive symptoms	1.96 (2.63)	1.78 (2.53)$_a$	1.96 (2.52)$_{ab}$	2.78 (3.02)$_b$	6.02**
Youth Impulse control	3.55 (0.90)	3.62 (0.90)$_a$	3.19 (0.94)$_b$	3.57 (0.83)$_a$	8.89***
Parental knowledge[a]	2.99 (0.53)	3.04 (0.51)$_a$	2.90 (0.57)$_{ab}$	2.85 (0.55)$_b$	4.33*
Behavioral control[a]	2.11 (0.63)	2.15 (0.63)$_a$	1.99 (0.61)$_{ab}$	2.03 (0.62)$_b$	4.09*
Unsupervised time with peers[a]	2.25 (1.52)	2.17 (1.51)	2.54 (1.51)	2.35 (1.58)	0.69
Parental academic involvement[a]	1.40 (0.38)	1.47 (0.34)$_a$	1.26 (0.42)$_b$	1.20 (0.42)$_b$	21.18***
Psychosocial maturity	3.35 (0.34)	3.38 (0.33)$_a$	3.30 (0.34)$_{ab}$	3.26 (0.37)$_b$	7.26**
Positive friendship network	57.74 (7.32)	58.43 (7.17)$_a$	55.02 (7.95)$_b$	56.95 (6.81)$_{ab}$	9.49***
School bonding	3.32 (0.56)	3.40 (0.52)$_a$	3.09 (0.62)$_b$	3.21 (0.61)$_b$	15.64***

Notes. [a]Results of ANCOVA controlling for youth sex, race/ethnicity, income-to-needs ratio, depressive symptoms, and impulsivity. Percentages and means in the same row with different subscripts are significantly different. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 2.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Biological-Parent Families (N = 486).

	Psychosocial maturity			Positive friendship network			School bonding		
	b	*SE*	*β*	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*b*	*SE*	*β*
Male	-0.07	0.03	-.11**	-2.22	0.54	-.16***	-0.11	0.04	-.10*
White, non-Hispanic	0.02	0.04	.01	-0.67	0.85	-.03	0.16	0.07	.10*
Income-to-needs	0.01	0.00	.08*	0.05	0.04	.04	0.01	0.00	.06
Depressive symptoms	-0.04	0.01	-.30***	-0.33	0.11	-.12**	-0.07	0.01	-.32***
Impulse control	0.13	0.02	.35***	2.48	0.33	.31***	0.04	0.03	.06
Parental knowledge	0.06	0.03	.09*	2.49	0.61	.18***	0.13	0.05	.13**
Behavioral control	-0.03	0.02	-.05	0.98	0.44	.09*	0.00	0.04	-.00
Unsupervised time with peers	0.00	0.01	.02	-0.34	0.19	-.07	0.01	0.02	.03
Parental academic involvement	0.13	0.04	.14**	3.42	0.85	.16***	0.28	0.07	.19***
F(df) – step 1	54.70(5, 480)***			39.46(5, 480)***			24.27(5, 480)***		
ΔR^2 – step 1	.36			.29			.20		
F(df) – step 2	5.61(4, 476)***			18.82(4, 476)***			8.98(4, 476)***		
ΔR^2 – step 2	.03			.10			.06		

Notes. For ease of presentation only coefficients from the final models are presented. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Table 3.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Stepfather Families (N = 94).

	Psychosocial maturity			Positive friendship network			School bonding		
	b	*SE*	*β*	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*b*	*SE*	*β*
Male	-0.06	0.07	-.08	-1.87	1.52	-.11	-0.23	0.12	-.17
White, non-Hispanic	-0.06	0.07	-.07	-0.50	1.70	-.03	0.08	0.14	.05
Income-to-needs	0.00	0.01	.02	0.04	0.14	.02	0.01	0.01	.12
Depressive symptoms	-0.02	0.01	-.18	-0.26	0.30	-.08	-.06	0.02	-.24*
Impulse control	0.13	0.04	.36**	2.50	0.85	.30**	0.13	0.07	.19
Parental knowledge	0.04	0.06	.07	3.59	1.44	.26*	0.05	0.11	.04
Behavioral control	0.05	0.05	.09	-0.70	1.22	-.05	0.11	0.1	.11
Unsupervised time with peers	0.03	0.02	.13	-0.02	0.49	-.00	0.04	0.04	.10
Parental academic involvement	0.19	0.08	.24*	4.43	1.85	.23*	0.48	0.15	.33**
F(df) – step 1	6.36(5, 88)***			5.65(5, 88)***			4.88(5, 88)**		
ΔR^2 – step 1	.27			.24			.22		
F(df) – step 2	3.02(4, 84)*			4.30(4, 84)**			4.25(4, 94)**		
ΔR^2 – step 2	.09			.13			.13		

Notes. For ease of presentation only coefficients from the final models are presented. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Table 4.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Single-Mother Families (N = 101).

	Psychosocial maturity			Positive friendship network			School bonding		
	b	*SE*	*β*	*b*	*SE*	*β*	*b*	*SE*	*β*
Male	-0.16	0.07	-.21*	-2.27	1.28	-.17	-0.23	0.12	-.18
White, non-Hispanic	-0.07	0.07	-.09	-0.61	1.40	-.04	0.13	0.12	.10
Income-to-needs	-0.01	0.01	-.07	-0.26	0.17	-.14	0.00	0.02	.00
Depressive symptoms	-0.05	0.01	-.43***	-0.17	0.21	-.08	-0.07	0.02	-.36***
Impulse control	0.20	0.04	.46***	3.26	0.75	.40***	0.12	0.07	.16
Parental knowledge	-0.05	0.07	-.08	-0.42	1.31	-.03	-0.30	0.12	-.27*
Behavioral control	-0.04	0.06	-.06	1.13	1.08	.10	0.35	0.10	.36***
Unsupervised time with peers	-0.01	0.02	-.05	-1.08	0.43	-.25*	0.01	0.04	.03
Parental academic involvement	0.06	0.08	.07	2.27	1.53	.14	0.26	0.14	.18
F(df) – step 1	13.76(5, 95)***			6.19(5, 95)***			4.62(5, 95)**		
ΔR^2 – step 1	.42			.25			.20		
F(df) – step 2	0.43(4, 91)			3.76(4, 91)**			4.97(4, 91)**		
ΔR^2 – step 2	.01			.11			.14		

Notes. For ease of presentation only coefficients from the final models are presented. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$