

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ELEVEN SCHOLARLY JOURNALS: WHAT HAS
BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT ADOLESCENTS' INTERPERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS IN STEPFAMILIES?

A DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

For my husband and our children thank you for your never-ending patience and love.

For my parents

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ABSTRACT

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A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ELEVEN SCHOLARLY JOURNALS: WHAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT ADOLESCENTS' INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN STEPFAMILIES?

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The purpose of this study was to ascertain what is being written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies in eleven scholarly journals: *Family Process*, *Family Relations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *Adolescence*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* from 2003 to 2013. This research study utilized the content analysis method. The sample for this project was delimited to the articles in all issues of the selected journals. Each article was read and analyzed by the principal investigator.

The results of the content analysis were reported using quantitative methods to determine the frequencies of articles that contained the appropriate combination of terms searched and the total number of articles on the topic of adolescents in stepfamilies, including which discipline generated those articles. The primary content themes were presented qualitatively. There was a total of 6,413 articles, thirteen of those (0.202%) addressed adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. Of the eleven selected

scholarly journals, only three journals addressed this topic. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* generated the majority of the articles, containing 2.295% of its total of published articles. *Journal of Marriage and Family* had 0.311% of its total of published articles, and *Journal of Family Psychology* had 0.105% of its total of published articles. The Five major themes which emerged after rounds of the coding process by three separate investigators are boundary and role ambiguity, social capital, bonding, loss and pain, and adjustment to change.

There is limited empirical research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies and not much has been written in the field of family therapy about how to work with this population. Family therapists can have crucial role to play in enhancing interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies and the processes of healthy stepfamily development. A discussion of results was presented, and implications and recommendations for future studies were given.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Interactions among family members and the development of relationships are important aspects of healthy adjustments of both families and adolescents within families in the United States (Furrow & Palmer, 2007; Lansford, Ceballo, Abbey, & Stewart, 2001). There is an added challenge in a stepfamily system due to the task of creating healthy relationships among members whose relationships came about due to this new family structure. Amato and Sobolewski (2001) contend that marital dissolution is more than a single event, but a process that not only begins before separation of couples, but one that continues after the divorce is concluded. According to Hetherington (1989), children and parents experience distress during and after the divorce process and parents who remarry may also experience challenges which include adjustment boundaries and blending of new family structures (Braithwaite, Baxter, & Harper, 1998). In addition, it is argued that the remarriage of divorced parents, which also involves dealing with stepparents and siblings, might result in a new source of challenge for the children of divorce (Amato, 2005; Amato, 2010; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985).

Little is known about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies even though evidence suggests that an increasing number of adolescents live in stepfamilies (Brown, 2006; Lansford et al., 2001; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991). Adolescence is reported to be a difficult time for a child to adjust to the complexity of parental remarriage (Hetherington, 1999a; Rogers & Rose, 2002; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Parent-child

relationships have been noted to be crucial for the development of adolescents given that “... parents are responsible not only for loving and nurturing their child but for teaching and modeling prosocial coping and social skills, as well as monitoring behaviors” (Lopez, Katsulis, & Robillard, 2009, p. 135). The relationships between parents and adolescents in stepfamilies may be different from those in first-marriage families. Rosenberg (1988) argued that step relationships are ambiguous and lack universally agreed-upon norms governing them. Research suggests that parent-child interactions and the quality of their relationships are different from those seen in first-marriage families (Bray, 1992; Bray & Berger, 1993; Fine & Kurdek, 1995). Less family cohesion, flexibility, openness, and interactions in stepfamilies were found in a study by Peek, Bell, Walden, and Sorell (1988), however, it is argued that the development of relationships between adolescents and parents in stepfamilies may depend on biological connections as the biological parent and the adolescent have a shared history and a stronger sense of involvement prior to the stepfamily formation (Fine & Kurdek, 1995).

Parenting is an important factor in family relationships and co-parenting is crucial, not only in intact families, but in stepfamilies (Whiteside, 1998). Evidence suggests that parents who do not fulfill their parental responsibilities could place their children at risk for developing internalizing and externalizing problems (Heaven, Newbury, & Mark, 2004). When parents have different parenting styles, parenting alliance may become a major factor that will affect the adjustment of both parents and adolescents in stepfamilies and it is argued that adjustment can take many years to

complete (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). In addition, adolescents' adjustment may be related positively to parenting practices within the context of parental involvement and supervision (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1994). As a result, these challenging transitions might inevitably have undesirable impacts on adolescents' adjustment in a stepfamily unit.

Sibling relationships (full siblings, half siblings and stepsiblings) are important factors that determine adolescents' psychological and psychosocial outcomes in stepfamilies (Baham et al., 2008). Bernstein (1997) revealed that relationships between half siblings in stepfamilies are influenced by many factors involving all family members, and these factors provide the context within which relationships are developed in stepfamilies (Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011).

In light of the level of complexity in stepfamily relationships (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000), individuals in stepfamilies may seek the help of family therapists and other helping professionals in more significant numbers than individuals from other family structures. It is hoped that this study will better inform family therapists about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies and the different variables that influence the quality of these relationships.

Statement of the Problem

Remarriage after parental divorce is becoming a norm in the United States (Amato, 2010; Dupuis, 2007; Heard, Gorman, & Kapinus, 2008; Isaacs, 2002; Michaels, 2007). This is a major transition given that the remarried families form new family

structures with their children from previous relationships, and both parents in the new reconstituted families may have children together thereby forming stepfamilies.

According to Isaacs (2002), when stepfamilies are formed through remarriage or cohabitation, children tend to be exposed to a number of reorganizations in the new families. For example, the birth of a new child has been suggested to alter parental involvement with stepchildren (Stewart, 2005). Marital transitions following divorce and remarriage are common in modern families (Brown, 2006; Ginther & Pollak, 2004), and research studies have demonstrated that there may be an increased risk of behavioral problems and negative psychosocial outcomes among children of stepfamilies compared to their counterparts in intact families (Hetherington, Bridges, & Isabella, 1998; Michaels, 2006; Shalay & Brownlee, 2007).

Research suggests that adolescence is a significant period for human development (Robila & Taylor, 2001), and adolescence is a time when many children are least adaptable and are most vulnerable to the adverse effects of their parents' remarriages and divorce (Hetherington, 1989). It is reported that an increasing number of adolescents live in stepfamilies (Brown, 2006; Lansford et al., 2001; Sessa & Steinberg, 1991), however, there is a lack of information about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies and how these changes in family structure affect sibling relationships in stepfamilies. Although sibling relationships are important factors that determine adolescents' psychological and psychosocial outcomes in stepfamilies (Baham et al., 2008), there is a dearth of research on the nature of the relationship among the

siblings (Bernstein, 1997). According to Lansford et al., (2001), research on demographic changes in family structures in the United States has often compared children's and parents' outcomes in two-parent biological families and those in single-parent families, thereby ignoring stepfamilies. On a similar vein, a decade review of major family therapy journals from 1979 to 1990 on stepfamilies revealed that of the three major marriage and family therapy journals, *The Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Family Process*, and *The Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies*, only ten articles addressed stepfamilies and accompanying issues (Darden & Zimmerman, 1992).

New relationships after divorce have created the need for researchers to examine factors that predict adolescents' outcomes in stepfamilies (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). There is a need for research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies as these family structures have largely been omitted (Braithwaite et al., 2001; Darden & Zimmerman, 1992; Ginther & Pollak, 2004). According to Bernstein, studies tend to be based on adults' reports of their children and stepchildren rather than children's accounts of their own experiences in stepfamilies. It is argued that voices of adolescents in stepfamilies have been marginalized in research concerning the family and adolescents (Arnett, 2005; Way, 2005) and adolescents have been treated in studies as passive participants whose responses cannot be relied upon (Bassett & Beagan, 2008). Some explanations for this omission include the fact that adolescents are generally not expected to be responsible for themselves (Gecas & Seff, 1990) and they do not possess the cognitive skills needed to make some decisions about their lives (Neal, 1995).

Consequently, those responsible for the welfare of adolescents, such as parents, have often spoken on their behalves as research participants (Pole, Mizen, & Bolton, 1999).

The focus of this study was to find out how well family therapy, family studies, and child development journals are attending to the topic of adolescents in stepfamilies, and to ascertain what is being written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. It is hoped that this could lead to a better understanding of the factors that influence these relationships, as well as the processes by which these relationships develop. Research on adolescents in stepfamilies could be beneficial to family therapists and family scientists in the provision of the framework upon which to practice and to guide the direction of research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ascertain what is being written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies in eleven scholarly journals:

Family Process, Family Relations, Journal of Marriage and Family, American Journal of Family Therapy, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, Journal of Family Psychology, Journal of Research on Adolescence, Adolescence, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, and American Journal of Orthopsychiatry from 2003 to 2013.

Research Question

The general research question guiding this analysis was the following: What has been written in selected scholarly journals about adolescents' interpersonal relationships

in stepfamilies from 2003 to 2013 (*Family Process, Family Relations, Journal of Marriage and Family, American Journal of Family Therapy, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, Journal of Family Psychology, Journal of Research on Adolescence, Adolescence, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, and American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*)? This research question provided the framework for the coding and analysis of articles addressing adolescents in stepfamilies.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will apply:

Adolescent: a male or female from 13 to 17 years of age.

Stepfamily: a family resulting from the union of two adults where at least one partner has a child from a previous relationship (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Stepparent: an adult (stepfather or stepmother), who by marriage or cohabitation is the co-parent of their spouse's birth child (*Encyclopedia of Children's Health*, 2014).

Stepsibling: a sibling of the target child who is not biologically related to the child and has entered the family system through the child's stepparent (Baham, Weimer, Braver, & Fabricius, 2008).

Half sibling: a sibling/child who is a result of the union between the target child's biological parent and the target child's stepparent (Baham et al., 2008).

Full sibling: a sibling of the target child who has the same biological parents as the target child (Baham et al., 2008).

Divorce: as defined by *Merriam-Webster* (2013), “the ending of a marriage by a legal process.”

Remarriage: occurs when a previously married individual enters a second or higher order marriage (Sweeny, 2010).

Boundary Ambiguity: refers to a lack of clarity as to who is in and who is out of the family system (Stewart, 2005).

Role Ambiguity: refers to the agreement between family members on the definition of each member’s role in the family (Gosselin, 2010).

Social Capital: refers to parental involvement or “transmission of resources that parents invest in their children” and parenting styles or “the quality of emotional bond between parents and children” (Coleman, 1990, cited in Willets & Maroules, 2004, p. 118).

Bonding: as defined by *Merriam-Webster* (2013), “the formation of a close relationship (as between a mother and child) especially through frequent or constant association.”

Assumptions

The following assumptions ground this investigation:

1. Interpersonal relationships are important aspects of stepfamily development.
2. Minimal research exists on adolescents’ interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies.
3. Adolescents’ positive or negative outcomes in stepfamilies are influenced by interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies.

4. Family therapists can benefit from research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies.
5. Stepfamilies with adolescents can benefit from family therapy when confronted with the complexities of interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies.

Delimitations

The delimitations for the purpose of this research study are the following:

1. Only refereed articles published from 2003 to 2013 that address adolescents in stepfamilies will be the focus of this study.
2. Only the selected peer-reviewed journals *Family Process*, *Family Relations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *Adolescence*, and *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* will be the sample for this study.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the current trend in the development of stepfamilies and the increase in the number of adolescents who live in this family structure. Although research focuses on stepfamilies and the effects on the adjustments of family members, little is known about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. Consequently, the purpose of the study was to ascertain what is being written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies in eleven scholarly journals from 2003 to 2013, to ascertain how family therapy, family studies, and child

development journals are attending to the topic of adolescents in stepfamilies, as adolescents negotiate the tasks involved in this developmental stage, including adjustment to a new family structure.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will present a review of literature on adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparents, stepfathers, stepmothers, stepsiblings, and blended families in combination with stepfamilies. The articles that will be included in the research sample will be excluded for the literature review. Most research on stepfamilies has tended to focus on a deficit model by highlighting the problems and weaknesses in stepfamilies (Cherlin, 1978; Coleman et al., 2000). Cherlin (1978) described stepfamilies as incomplete institutions because they lacked institutionalized guidelines and support which characterize traditional families. According to Creswell (2003) the use of various sources of inquiry enables the investigator to read and to compare and contrast on the numerous themes that emerge. Consequently, an examination of literature will be conducted to include demographic trends, divorce and adolescents' adjustment, adolescents in stepfamily structures, and parenting alliance.

Demographic Trends

According to Cherlin (2010), demographic trends in the 2000s indicated ongoing separation of families and households due to factors which include "... childbearing among single parents, the dissolution of cohabiting unions, divorce, repartnering, and remarriage" (p. 403). Evidence suggests that marriage in the United States has changed significantly during the second half of the 20th century; divorce rate has increased, as well as single parent families (Amato, 2000; Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000).

According to Sweeny (2010, p. 667), “Contemporary marriages are less likely to end with the death of a spouse than was true half a century ago and are now considerably more likely to end through a decision to divorce.” In addition, Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, and Anderson (1989) noted that about 75 percent of women who are divorced and 80 percent of divorced men remarry. In addition, Collishaw, Goodman, Pickles, and Maughan (2007) noted that there have been significant changes in family life, including a rise in the numbers of stepfamilies and substantial trends in adolescent mental health, including an increase in conduct problems. In a study by Adler-Baeder, Pittman, and Taylor (2005), it was reported that a considerable number of military personnel have experienced divorce, remarriages, as well as parenting non-residential children. The authors noted that military personnel who are divorced or remarried appear to be slightly over-represented among those in enlisted ranks, joint service couples, and lower education categories.

An increasing number of adolescents are reported to live in reconstituted families (Brown, 2006; Fine et al., 1991; Lansford et al., 2001) and adolescence is noted to be a challenging time for a child to adjust to parental marital transitions (Hetherington, 1999a; Rogers & Rose, 2002; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Brown’s study (2006) looked at the influence of parental marital and cohabitation transitions on adolescent delinquency, depression, and school engagement. The findings of the study indicated that adolescents who experienced family transitions reported decreased well-being compared to their counterparts in intact, two-parent biological families. In addition higher levels of

delinquency, depressive symptoms, and lower levels of school engagement were reported by adolescents who experienced a family transition.

In a secondary analysis of a subsample of high school sophomores from a national data set, Zimiles and Lee (1991) compared students from intact, single-parent, and remarried families with regard to academic achievement, high school grades, and educational persistence. Larger differences were found among the three groups in terms of drop-out behavior. It was found that students from intact families were least likely to drop out of high school compared to their counterparts from single-parent and remarried families.

According to Hetherington, adolescence is not only a time when changes in physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes occur, it is also a time when adolescents engage in some normative developmental tasks. These tasks include becoming more independent and autonomous, and maintaining, among other things, bonds of attachment with family members (Hetherington 1999a). Studies have found that developmental transitions may be particularly challenging for adolescents in divorced or remarried families (Bray, 1999; Hetherington, Stanley, & Anderson, 1989) and it is argued that each family transition and different family structures involve distinctive challenges, risks, and resources that may affect the adjustment and well-being of individual family members (Hetherington, 1999b).

Divorce and Adolescents' Adjustment

Research on divorce (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993) has widely reported on the overwhelming challenges of adjustment which children of divorce experience, due to negative effects of marital dissolution on their well-being. Parental divorce and its effects on children's adjustment has been a hot topic of debate and concern for parents, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. A number of studies were based on the premise that divorce is a stressful life transition to which children and adolescents have to adjust and one which is followed by a series of stressful circumstances for them (Amato, 2000; Hanson, 1999; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). These included reduced contact with non-custodial parents (usually fathers), increased tension between children and custodial parents (usually mothers), ongoing conflict between parents, a decline in standard of living, and an increase in residential mobility, which usually involved moving to neighborhoods with limited community resources (Amato, 2000; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Gnides, 1998; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). Adolescents who are most vulnerable socially and emotionally are those who experience multiple transitions in parenting arrangements throughout their childhood (Hetherington 1999a; Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Several studies conducted on adolescents' adjustment to stepfamilies (Barber, & Lyons, 1994; Crossbie-Burnett, & Giles-Sims, 1994; Fine, Donnelly, & Voydanoff, 1991; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1994; Neiderhiser, Reiss, Hetherington, & Plomin, 1999) as

well as studies on adolescent well-being (Demo & Acock, 1996; Sprujit, 1997), or on adolescents' relationships with family members (Kurdek, & Fine, 1995), suggest that divorce and remarriage are often associated with experiences that place adolescents at increased risk for developing social, psychological, behavioral, and academic problems. According to Sessa and Steinberg (1991), the development of autonomy is the main challenge of adolescence within the context of parent-child relationship, as this is a period when adolescents develop a sense of self. As a result, these challenging transitions might inevitably have undesirable impacts on adolescents' adjustment in stepfamily units.

Demo and Acock (1996) examined the influence of family structure and family relationships on adolescent well-being using data from the National Survey of Families and Households. The authors looked at socio-emotional adjustment, academic performance, and global well-being among adolescents ages 12 to 18 in different family structures. Results indicated that families with divorced parents and stepfamilies reported high levels of mother-adolescent disagreement and the lowest levels of parental supervision and mother-adolescent interaction compared to adolescents in intact families. Adolescents in these families were reported to have experienced more personal and emotional adjustment and school problems.

Tillman (2007) looked at family structure pathways and academic disadvantages among adolescents in stepfamilies. This study used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). It was found that adolescents in divorced or separated family structures experienced significantly lower academic outcomes compared

to their counterparts who have always lived with both biological parents. The results suggested that living in a stepfamily does not benefit adolescents and may be detrimental to them, particularly for adolescents who have experienced a number of stressful family transitions.

Nevertheless, while some investigators have taken extreme stances to assert that marital dissolution has long-lasting adverse effects on children of divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000), others contend that the overall group differences between children of divorce and children in intact families are small (Amato, 1994; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Amato (2001) argued that studies in the 1990s found a small difference between these two groups and research indicates that about 75 to 80 percent of children and young adults do not suffer from major psychological problems (Amato, 1999, 2000; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). In presenting the results of a longitudinal study of the effects of divorce and remarriage on children's adjustment, Hetherington (1989) reported that more problems were demonstrated by boys in divorced families and more adjustment problems were noted in children in remarried families compared to children in intact families. However, Hetherington noted that some children also showed notable resiliency despite multiple life stressors.

It is important to not only focus on factors that increase risks for children of divorce, but on the protective factors that promote resiliency in children, which enable children to recover from the adverse temporary effects of divorce. In their study, Kelly

and Emery (2003) identified protective factors reducing risks for children of divorce as “... specific aspects of the psychological adjustment and parenting of custodial parents, the type of relationships that children have with their nonresident parents, and the extent and type of conflict between parents” (p. 356).

In addition, divorce has been reported to benefit some individuals and only leads others to suffer temporary decrements in their well-being (Amato 2000; Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001). Other research on this issue suggests that most of the children of divorce are resilient and are not distinguishable from their counterparts in intact families (Amato, 1994, 2001; Emery & Forehand, 1994). It is argued that remarriage resulting in stepfamily formation can present an escape from poverty for a single mother following a divorce (Sweeney, 2010) and a way of forming new and satisfying relationships geared toward promoting the well-being of children and adults. Evidence suggests that children of divorce from high conflict and violent marriages may derive the most benefit from their parents’ divorces, given that they no longer endure the conditions associated with their parents’ high conflict marriage (Amato, 2001; Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995). On a similar vein, Hetherington (2006) argued, “Although divorce leads to an increase in stressful life events, such as poverty, psychological and health problems in parents, and inept parenting, it also may be associated with escape from conflict, the building of new more harmonious relationships, and the opportunity for personal growth and individuation” (p. 204).

Adolescents in Stepfamily Structures

Many studies have tended to focus on the problems and weaknesses in stepfamilies (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Wallerstein et al., 2000). Reorganization of the family structure poses a challenge for many families and given that most individuals choose to remarry after a divorce, blending of new family structures can lead to challenges such as adjustment of boundaries (Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman 2001).

According to Hetherington (1989), adolescence is commonly associated with increased conflict between adolescents and their parents due to the restructure of family decision-making, tension around sexuality issues, or parental monitoring. These parental stressors, combined with ones associated with divorce and remarriage, suggest that adolescents in stepfamilies face unique challenges in sustaining positive levels of well-being (Brown, 2006; Crosbie-Burnett, 1989). From a developmental view point, "... adolescence is the stage of life when the youth is faced with biological, cognitive, psychological, and social challenges. A smooth transition to adulthood involves negotiating these challenges successfully" (Hines, 1997, p. 375). Adolescence is not only a time when changes in physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes occur (Erikson, 1968; Hall, 2007), it is also a time when adolescents engage in some normative developmental tasks (Hetherington), and a time when their relationships with their parents are renegotiated and redefined as they aspire toward autonomy and independence (Hines, 1997; Mazur & Hubbard, 2004), as well as maintaining bonds of

attachment with family members (Hetherington; Faber, Edwards, Bauer & Wetchler, 2003).

Sessa and Steinberg (1991) provided a theoretical analysis of the way the adolescents in single parent and stepfamilies negotiate autonomy-related transitions. They proposed that the development of autonomy is different for adolescents in these family structures compared to their counterparts in traditional or intact family structures. They noted that divorce and remarriage may affect the development of autonomy in two ways. According to them, when marital changes occur in preadolescence or early adolescence, the development of autonomy may be observed in the form of early onset of changes in the relationships between adolescents and their parents. They also argue that the development of autonomy may be altered if marital change such as divorce or remarriage occurs prior to adolescence.

In their study, Barber and Lyons (1994) examined family processes and the adjustment of adolescents in intact and remarried families. The authors administered surveys to 758 tenth graders from intact families and 95 from stepfather families and they used measures of cohesion, democratic decision-making style, permissiveness, and conflict to predict self-rated depression, worry, and self-esteem. Results indicated that remarried families were more conflictual and less cohesive than intact families. Conflict had negative effects in both families, while cohesion and democratic decision-making had positive effects on the adjustment of adolescents. However, in remarried families,

parental permissiveness was related to adolescents' higher self-esteem compared to those in intact families.

Studies have found that developmental transitions may be particularly challenging for adolescents in divorced or remarried families (Bray, 1999; Hetherington, Stanley, & Anderson, 1989). It is argued that each family transition and different family structures involve distinctive challenges, risks, and resources that may affect the adjustment and well-being of individual family members (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985; Barber & Lyons, 1994).

In an investigation on what adolescents believed to be the stressful and non-stressful aspects of stepfamily living, Lutz (1983) surveyed 103 adolescents living in stepfamilies, who were between the ages of 12 and 18. In the questionnaire, eleven stressful categories were identified and these included: discipline, divided loyalty, biological parent elsewhere, member of two households, desire for natural parents to reunite, unrealistic expectations, social attitudes, compounded loss, family constellation, sexual issues, and pseudomutuality (p. 369). It was found that divided loyalties and discipline were perceived to be stressful by most of the adolescents while social attitudes and being a member of two households were seen as stressful by the least number of adolescents. Results also indicated that demographic factors such as the number of years in the stepfamily structure were significant. For example, higher perceived levels of stress (PLS) were found in adolescents who lived in stepfamilies for two years or less and

results also suggested that the presence of stepsiblings was likely to increase the perceived levels of stress.

In another study, Fine, Donnelly, and Voydanoff (1991) looked at the relation between adolescents' perception of their family lives and their adjustment in stepfather families. Adolescents and biological mothers from 117 stepfamilies were interviewed. Results indicated that the adjustment of adolescents was related to their perceptions of lower levels of parental punishment, more parental rewards and consistency, more parental agreement in child-rearing issues, more traditional beliefs regarding marriage and family life, and less anger at their mothers' remarriage. The authors contended that these findings support the view that adolescent adjustment in stepfather families are related to their perception of their family lives in this family structure.

Parenting Alliance

Parenting is an important factor in interpersonal relationships in families and the quality of parenting has been noted to play a crucial role in child development (Konold & Abidin, 2001). Parenting alliance in marital relationships pertains to parenting together (Floyd, Gilliom, & Costigan, 1998) and it involves the ways in which spouses or partners provide support and show respect for each other in their parental roles (Abidin & Brunner, 1995) as well as how they work together in co-parenting alliance (Gable, Belsky, & Crnic, 1992). According to Weissman and Cohen (1985), parenting alliance is a unique marital relationship that deals with parenting and in their view, a sound parenting alliance can buffer children's adjustment problems in parental divorce. In a

study by Skopin, Newman, and McKenry (1993), it was found that agreement between the stepfather and mother in regards to raising the adolescent was the most important predictor of relationship quality. Parenting alliance is an important factor in stepfamilies and it is argued that parents must keep in mind that attending to children's needs, engaging with the family, and being supportive once the family unit has changed are the keys to developing a healthy loving family environment for children (Hetherington et al., 1998).

Parental psychological adjustment is an important factor in children's well-being. In a meta-analysis which involved 92 studies, Amato and Keith (1991) reported that a positive relationship was found between parents' mental health and children's mental health. Thus, children whose parents were better adjusted tended to fare better than those whose parents were not well adjusted. Evidence suggests that when this factor is taken into account, some of the differences in adjustment between children of divorce and those in intact families disappear (Amato & Keith).

Parental competence is a risk associated with children's outcome. Parenting skills and the types of relationships between parents and children, affect children's well-being (Hetherington et al., 1985; Steinberg, 2001). Studies found that many parents reported reductions in their parental practices immediately after divorce (Hetherington, 1999b; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), and this contributed to some of the problems children experienced. It was also found that when custodial parents provided warmth, emotional support, adequate monitoring, authoritative discipline, and maintained age-appropriate

expectations, children experienced positive adjustment compared with children whose divorced custodial parents were inattentive, less supportive, and used coercive discipline (Amato, 2000; Hetherington, 1999a).

Crosbie-Burnett and Giles-Sims (1994) examined the relationship between stepparenting styles (Authoritarian, Authoritative, Supportive, and Disengaged) and adolescent adjustment. Results indicated that the Disengaged style was associated with the lowest level of adolescent adjustment while the Supportive style was associated with the highest level of adolescent adjustment regardless of whether the stepparents disciplined adolescents.

Summary

This chapter reviewed changes in family structures which result in the formation of stepfamilies, including demographic trends in the number of adolescents in stepfamilies. Research has focused on the effects of divorce on children, including adolescents' adjustments to parental divorce. This chapter also highlighted different effects of family transitions, including divorce and remarriage on adolescents in stepfamily system and the need to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding that may provide guidance for family therapists who may work with stepfamilies. However, little literature was found that focused on interpersonal relationships as it relates to adolescents in stepfamilies. Consequently, it is important to gain better understanding in regards to interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies in order to best provide interventions that will lead to positive outcomes adolescents and their families.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the content analysis methodology selected for this research project. Content analysis is "... a research method that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inference from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena ... and the goal of content analysis is to enhance the inferential quality of the results by relating the categories to the context or environment that produced the data" (Downe-Wanboldt, 1992, p. 313). In this research study, text will be limited to the written word in the selected journal articles. This is a flexible method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication and an approach which will allow the researcher to focus on and to classify large amounts of text into a number of categories or themes that represent similar meaning (Cavanaugh, 1997).

This research project is a descriptive analysis identifying and describing articles addressing adolescents in stepfamilies or blended families, which contain any of the following terms: adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, and blended family in combination with stepfamily. Therefore, this approach started with identifying certain words or content in the text in order to understand the context in which they are used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is argued: "To describe the occurrences of words, phrases, or sentences without consideration of the contextual environment of the data is inappropriate and inadequate. The analyst must be cognizant of the context and must justify the findings in terms of the context or environment that

produced the data” (Downe-Wanboldt, 1992, p. 314). Definitions, constructs, and assumptions, which were presented in Chapter I in this study, guided the researcher to focus on the main concepts from the articles and to identify salient themes (Babbie, 2004). This research study utilized the content analysis method including classifying, coding, and analyzing the data for emerging themes or patterns (Babbie, 2004). The researcher recorded key words, salient themes and topics from the articles selected from the eleven journals.

Sample

The purpose of this study was to ascertain what is being written about adolescents’ interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies in eleven scholarly journals:

Family Process, Family Relations, Journal of Marriage and Family, American Journal of Family Therapy, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, Journal of Family Psychology, Journal of Research on Adolescence, Adolescence, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, and American Journal of Orthopsychiatry from 2003 to 2013. The sample for this research project was delimited to the articles in all issues of the journals listed above, which were published from 2003 to 2013 and this excluded articles which are book reviews, honorariums to any particular scholars, introductions, commentaries and responses, and forwards.

Family Process is published in the United States. It is an international, multidisciplinary journal which is committed to publishing original articles, including qualitative and quantitative clinical research, and training in couple and family therapy.

Family Process is published by Family Process Institute, which is dedicated to the development of theory, research, practice and training in the broad area of family systems process and intervention. *Family Process* was founded in 1962 and it is widely considered to be the pre-eminent publication of its kind in the field of family research and therapeutic intervention. This academic/scholarly journal is published quarterly and it covers family mental health and psychotherapy. It is indexed in EBSCO host, ProQuest, Gale, Academic Search Complete, and in many other databases (*Family Process*, 2013).

Family Relations is published in the United States by Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, Inc. It is an academic/scholarly journal, which is published five times a year and it covers applied scholarly articles with emphasis on family relationships across the life cycle with implications for intervention, education, and public policy. This journal was previously known by other titles and the title history include the following: *Family Coordinator* (until 1980), *Family Life Coordinator* (until 1968), and *The Coordinator* (until 1959). *Family Relations* is published by the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) and it is mandatory reading for family practitioners, educators, marriage and family therapists, researchers, and social policy specialists. This journal is indexed in many databases including ERIC, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, SocINDEX, Family and Society Studies, and Education Research Index (*Family Relations*, 2013).

Journal of Marriage and Family is published five times a year in the United States. It provides a forum covering theory, research interpretation, and critical discussion on subjects related to marriage and the family. This journal was formerly known as

Marriage and Family Living (until 1964) and as *Living* (until 1941). It is published by the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) and for more than 70 years, this journal had been a leading research journal in the family field. It features original research and theory, research interpretation and reviews, and critical discussion concerning all aspects of marriage, other forms of close relationships, and families. This journal is indexed in many databases including ERIC, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, SocINDEX, Family and Society Studies, and Education Research Index (*Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2013).

American Journal of Family Therapy was first published in the United States in 1973. It is published in the United States by Taylor and Francis, Inc. It is published five times a year and it provides an interdisciplinary forum for innovation, theory, research, and clinical practice in family therapy. It was formerly known as *International Journal of Family Counseling* (until 1979) and *Journal of Family Counseling* (until 1977). This journal continues to be the incisive, authoritative, independent voice in an ever-changing field. Contents include the latest techniques for treating families and research on a variety of topics. This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, Family and Society Studies, and Education Research Index (*American Journal of Family Therapy*, 2013).

Journal of Marital and Family Therapy is published quarterly in the United States by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. It provides information about marital and family functioning and the most effective

psychotherapeutic treatment of couple and family distress. This is a flagship journal of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) and the largest circulation family therapy journal in the world. This journal advances the professional understanding of marital and family functioning and publishes articles on research, theory, clinical practice, and training in marital and family therapy. This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, Family and Society Studies, and Education Research Index (*Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 2013).

Journal of Divorce and Remarriage is published eight times a year in the United States. It is published in the United States by Taylor and Francis, Inc. It presents current interdisciplinary findings on all aspects of divorce, from clinical practice to theory and relevant research. It was formerly known as *Journal of Divorce* (until 1990). The landmark journal is an authoritative resource covering all aspects of divorce including pre-divorce marital and family treatment, marital separation and dissolution, children's responses to divorce and separation, single parenting, remarriage, and stepfamilies. It is a valuable instrument for many professionals, which enriches the clinical skills of marriage and family specialists, as well as enhances the therapeutic and legal resources for couples and families needing specialized help with divorce issues. This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, and Education Research Index (*Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 2013).

Journal of Family Psychology is published bi-monthly by the American Psychological Association in the United States. It delivers a variety of perspectives on the study of family systems, emphasizing empirical research on a wide range of family-related topics. This journal is devoted to the study of the family system from multiple perspectives and to the application of psychological methods to advance knowledge related to family research, patterns and processes, and assessment and intervention, as well as policies relevant to advancing the quality of life for families. This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, SocINDEX, and Education Research Index (*Journal of Family Psychology*, 2013).

Journal of Research on Adolescence is published quarterly in the United States by the Society for Research on Adolescence. It features studies on quantitative and qualitative methodologies applied to cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development and behavior. This journal is multidisciplinary and international in scope. It employs a diverse array of methodologies and features articles pertinent to the variety of developmental patterns inherent throughout adolescence, including cross-cultural studies. This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, SocINDEX, and Education Research Index (*Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 2013).

Adolescence was published quarterly in the United States by Libra Publishers, Inc. until 2009, when publication ceased. The articles covered a variety of viewpoints on

topics relating to adolescents. This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, Gale, ERIC, ProQuest, SocINDEX, and Education Research Index (*Adolescence*, 2009).

Journal of Youth and Adolescence is published monthly in the Netherlands by Springer Science & Business Media B.V. It is designed to enable psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, counselors, and educators to share ideas relevant to the subject of youth and adolescence. The journal publishes papers based on experimental evidence and data, theoretical papers, and comprehensive article reviews. This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, Gale, ERIC, ProQuest, SocINDEX, and Education Research Index (*Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2013).

American Journal of Orthopsychiatry (AJO) is an academic/scholarly journal that is published bi-monthly in the United States by the American Psychological Association. It provides articles that advance the knowledge relevant to mental health and human development from a multidisciplinary and inter professional perspective. The journal was founded in 1930 and it is described as the genesis for new approaches, including family therapy, group therapy, the community mental health movement, and various initiatives in services and treatment (Melton, 2003). This journal is indexed in many databases including EBSCO host, Elsevier BV, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, SocINDEX, Medline, and Education Research Index (*American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 2014).

Data Collection

The researcher retrieved all issues of the eleven journals published from 2003 to 2013 from the library at Texas Woman's University. First, the researcher systematically searched each journal using the online database Academic Search Complete which is available through Texas Woman's University Library in order to obtain the articles for inclusion in the content analysis. The researcher took steps to either include or exclude articles in this study, by determining articles that contained the manifest content, which is "... content that resides on the surface of communication and is therefore easily observable" (Rourke, et al., 2000, p. 7). Therefore, the researcher used the journal title and the search field "all terms in the text" to search for articles which included the terms adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, and blended family in combination with stepfamily. Once the search identified any article that included one or more of these terms, the researcher read the title of the article, as well as the abstract in order to determine if the article would be appropriate for inclusion in the research project.

Second, the researcher read and analyzed each article selected, keeping in mind the primary research question, "What has been written in selected scholarly journals about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies?" The researcher printed any article that appeared to meet the delimitations of the study. Furthermore, the researcher requested an article, through Interlibrary Loan, if the article was unavailable "full-text" from the database.

Third, for inclusion in the study, the researcher read each article in its entirety to determine if the manifest content included the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. If the researcher determined that an article was appropriate to be included in the content analysis, all the articles, which included the terms adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, or blended family in combination with stepfamily, were read in detail and coded by content.

Categories for Coding

Content analysis is used for making "... inferences in systematic, objective, and qualitative ways from secondary data in order to measure or observe variables of interest" (Kerlinger, 1994, cited in Lee & Kim, 2001, p. 305). As a research methodology, content analysis focuses on the nature of the content of the data and it can be analyzed based on manifest or latent contents (Babbie, 2004). Therefore, the researcher considered the manifest content such as written words or phrases in a text (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999), as discussed in the previous section, as well as the underlying meaning of the text, known as latent content (Babbie, 2004). The researcher determined if the manifest content of the article made it appropriate for inclusion in the content analysis. For the purpose of this study, the articles included the terms adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, or blended family in combination with stepfamily. Furthermore, the researcher read and re-read each article to evaluate and analyze the latent content, in order to capture the underlying meaning of the written word.

The researcher began the process of categorizing and coding information by selecting the key words or phrases which related to or described the terms adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, or blended family in combination with stepfamily. This was documented on the Coding Worksheet (Appendix A). The researcher made narrative notes about each article and its content. The Coding Worksheet (Appendix A) included the name of the journal, full citation of the article, a section for narrative notes, and predetermined categories of theory/academia, research, training, and clinical practice. Documentation of authors' professional credentials and affiliations was included in the Coding Worksheet. Furthermore, the coding worksheet included research methodology, participants, description of sample, and location of study. The researcher continued to analyze the latent content by reading and re-reading the included articles in addition to important sections of the texts to determine the emerging themes.

The researcher provided a list of the articles included in the analysis in Appendix B and this list included the complete title for each article and its American Psychological Association (APA) citation.

Treatment of Data

The researcher recorded the total number of articles in the selected journals published in the years 2003-2013, including the number of articles that contained the appropriate combination of terms searched, as well as the total number of articles which

discussed the topic of adolescents in stepfamilies to provide a baseline which the researcher used to obtain percentages and frequencies from each publication.

The researcher read each article to verify inclusion, and documented the author and his/her professional affiliation, including key words, and phrases. The researcher presented data regarding the discipline of the author quantitatively. The primary content themes in the articles were presented qualitatively. Appendix B contains the list of articles from each of the eleven journals that met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Appendix A is the Coding Worksheet which provided the structure and guidelines which the researcher used for the analysis. The themes which emerged in the articles included in the content analysis were presented qualitatively; and this included examples of the text from which the themes emerged. The researcher created tables to represent the results along with a narrative.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Given that data were analyzed to derive themes, as discussed in the previous section, the researcher read and re-read the texts five times in order to make sense of the data and to establish credibility in the analysis of the qualitative data. To ensure trustworthiness and authenticity as well as to increase the validity of the coding process of the content analysis, two colleagues trained in qualitative research were used to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2007). They read the articles to identify emerging themes and patterns. Triangulation is a validity process and according to Creswell and Miller, (2000) "... triangulation is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find

common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. A popular practice is for qualitative inquirers to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes” (p. 127). One independent coder completed a doctorate degree in Family Therapy and is a practicing family therapist. The other independent coder completed a doctorate degree in Child Development and works in a university setting as an instructor. Both completed a course in advanced qualitative research methods.

The researcher provided a brief orientation and training for the independent coders prior to their involvement in the study. The principal investigator gave the two independent researchers the list of assumptions and definitions for this research project. They were given the research question which guided this study along with the Coding Worksheet (Appendix A). Each of the two independent coders was given five randomly selected articles from the articles that were included in this study (Appendix B). They read the articles and each of them completed the Coding Worksheet for each article. The principal investigator met with the independent coders for detailed discussion of the results, the key concepts and emerging themes from the ten randomly selected articles, five of which was assigned to them respectively. Each coder was in agreement and there were no additional recommendations or changes to the research process or Coding Worksheet.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is one of a mechanism of data collection and there is a potential for certain biases due to the researcher's life experiences. The researcher was conscious of potential for bias and was prepared to set aside any biases or opinions.

The researcher is a doctoral student at Texas Woman's University in Denton. The researcher is a female of Nigerian origin and a stepparent with a keen interest in stepfamily or blended family systems. The researcher has three children ages 23, 22, and 16, including stepchildren ages 35, 19, and 18. The researcher has a Bachelor's degree in Education/English, a Master's degree in Social Work, and a Master's degree in Human Sciences. The researcher completed all of the course work for the Doctoral Degree in Family Therapy. The researcher has over 15 years work experience in social services, including community mental health, group practices, health insurance industry and private practice as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT). The researcher's preferred model of working with clients is the solution focused model. Through this content analysis, the researcher wishes to answer the question, "What has been written in selected scholarly journals about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies from 2003 to 2013?" so that family therapy and other helping professions will attend to this pertinent topic in their literature and research and in their work with adolescents and their families.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology of the content analysis research which will be used for this project. The sample population for this research study includes articles in all issues of eleven professional, peer-reviewed journals, *Family Process*, *Family Relations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *Adolescence*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* published from 2003 to 2013. The study sought to answer the research question, “What has been written in selected scholarly journals about adolescents’ interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies from 2003 to 2013?” Articles addressing adolescents in stepfamilies were analyzed for inclusion in the research project and the articles included were analyzed qualitatively for emerging themes and patterns. Each selected article was read by the researcher and a Coding Worksheet was completed for each. The researcher included two colleagues trained in qualitative research who reviewed and analyzed randomly selected articles for agreement of themes, in order to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity. The two independent coders were in agreement with emerging themes and key concepts; they made no changes to the methodology or additional recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This research project is a descriptive content analysis to answer the research question, “What has been written in selected scholarly journals about adolescents’ interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies from 2003 to 2013?” The sample population for this research project included articles in all issues of the eleven peer-reviewed journals: *Family Process*, *Family Relations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *Adolescence*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* from 2003 to 2013.

The articles addressing adolescents in stepfamilies were selected for the content analysis if they included any of the following terms: adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, and blended family in combination with stepfamily. This chapter will discuss the results of the analysis of the selected articles in two sections: The manifest content of the inquiry expressed quantitatively, and the latent content of the inquiry which is the qualitative component of the study. Thus, the number of articles included in the study and the other information about the analyzed articles is presented quantitatively. Key phrases and themes which were discovered in the process of qualitative data analysis of the selected articles will be presented in this chapter.

Quantitative Content Analysis

A total of 13 articles from the selected journals were included in the content analysis (Appendix B). The researcher included these articles in the content analysis by searching electronically the correct combination of keywords using the database Academic Search Complete through the Texas Woman's University Library. Each journal title was searched separately and the researcher selected articles if they included any of the following terms: adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, and blended family in combination with stepfamily. If there was any room for doubt in the title regarding whether the article met the criteria for inclusion, the abstract was read and if this still left room for doubt regarding whether the article should be included, the article was read in its entirety to determine if it addressed adolescents in stepfamilies. Consequently, some articles were deemed inappropriate for inclusion in the content analysis after reading the entire article. An article by Breivik and Olweus (2006), "Adolescent's Adjustment in Four Post-Divorce Family Structures: Single Mother, Stepfather, Joint Physical Custody and Single Father Families" is an example of an article whose title and abstract appeared appropriate for inclusion in the content analysis. However, after reading the entire article, it was determined that the article was not on the topic of adolescents in stepfamilies although it contained the terms: adolescents and stepfather.

The total number of articles in each journal was recorded including the number of articles containing the desired content (Table 1). The number of articles from each

journal, published in the timeframe 2003 to 2013, was recorded to provide the baseline to obtain percentages and frequencies of the articles which were on the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. The total number of articles in *Family Process* observed from its table of contents was 372; however none addressed the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. *Family Relations* contained no articles among the 547 articles viewed. The *Journal of Marriage and Family* published three articles (0.31%) among the 964 total number of published articles. The *American Journal of Family Therapy* contained no articles out of the total 330 articles observed. The *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* did not have any articles out of a total of 424 articles. The *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* published nine (2.30%) out of the 392 articles written. The *Journal of Family Psychology* contained one (0.11%) out of the 950 articles published. The *Journal of Research on Adolescence* did not have any articles out of a total of 439 articles published within the time period (2003 to 2013). The journal, *Adolescence* from 2003 to 2009 contained no articles out of the 364 articles published. This journal ceased publication in 2009. The *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* published no articles addressing the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies, among the 1,000 total number of published articles. Likewise, the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* did not have any articles out of a total of 631 articles. There were a total of 6,413 articles published in the delimited timeframe and journals, viewed by the researcher. The researcher found 13 (0.20%) articles addressing adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies.

Table 1

Numbers and Percentages of Articles on the Topic of Adolescents' Interpersonal Relationships in Stepfamilies from 2003 to 2013

Journal	Numbers of Articles	Numbers of Articles on Adolescents' Interpersonal Relationships in Stepfamilies	Percentages
<i>Adolescence</i>	364	0	0%
<i>American Journal of Family Therapy</i>	330	0	0%
<i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i>	631	0	0%
<i>Family Process</i>	372	0	0%
<i>Family Relations</i>	547	0	0%
<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	392	9	2.295%
<i>Journal of Family Psychology</i>	950	1	0.105%
<i>Journal of Marital and Family Therapy</i>	424	0	0%
<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>	964	3	0.311%
<i>Journal of Research on Adolescence</i>	439	0	0%
<i>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</i>	1000	0	0%
Total	6413	13	0.202%

Data from Coding Worksheet

The coding worksheet yielded information about the author's disciplines and the principal investigator compiled a list of the disciplines of authors who contributed to the published articles (Table 2). Of the 21 authors who published articles on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies, psychology/other psychotherapy generated eight authors of different articles; family studies and human development generated four authors of the same article; sociology generated four authors of different articles; human development and family science generated two authors of the same article; child development and family relations as well as consumer and family sciences generated two authors of the same article; and education and counseling psychology generated one author of a different article.

Table 2
Discipline of Authors Publishing Articles on Adolescents' Interpersonal Relationships in Stepfamilies from the Eleven Journals

Discipline	Number of Authors
Human Development and Family Science	2*
Child Development and Family Relations	1
Consumer and Family Sciences	1
Family Studies and Human Development	4*
Education and Counseling Psychology	1
Psychology/Other Psychotherapy	8**
Sociology	4***

Note: *authors of the same article, **4 authors of the same article, 4 authors of different articles, ***2 authors of the same articles, 2 authors of different articles.

Most of the authors participated in academia and some authors participated in clinical practice. The 13 articles selected were categorized as research articles. Of the 13 selected articles, 11 articles utilized quantitative methodology while two articles utilized qualitative approaches to research.

Table 3

Titles and Themes Present in Articles on Adolescents' Interpersonal Relationships in Stepfamilies

Articles	Title	Journal	Themes Present
King (2006)	The antecedents and consequences of adolescents' relationships with stepfathers and nonresident fathers	<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>	Social capital Bonding
King (2007)	When children have two mothers: Relationships with nonresident mothers, stepmothers, and fathers	<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>	Social capital Bonding
King (2009)	Stepfamily formation: Implications for adolescent ties to mothers, nonresident fathers, and stepfathers	<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>	Bonding Adjustment to Change
Berg (2003)	The effects of perceived closeness to custodial parents, stepparents and nonresident parents on adolescent self-esteem	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Social capital Bonding
Gosselin (2010)	Individual and family factors related to psychosocial adjustment in stepmother families with adolescents	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Boundary/Role Ambiguity Adjustment to Change

(continued)

Gosselin & David (2007)	Risk and resilience factors linked with the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents, stepparents and biological parents	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Adjustment to Change
Henry, Nichols, Robinson, & Neal (2005)	Parent and stepparent support and psychological control in remarried families and adolescent empathic concern	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Boundary/Role Ambiguity Social capital
Koerner, Rankin, Kenyon, & Korn (2004)	Mothers re-partnering after divorce: Diverging perceptions of mothers and adolescents	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Boundary/Role Ambiguity Adjustment
Leake (2007)	Personal, familial, and systemic factors associated with family belonging for stepfamily adolescents	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Bonding
Stoll, Arnaut, Fromme, & Felker-Thayer J. A. (2005)	Adolescents in stepfamilies: A qualitative analysis	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Boundary/Role Bonding Loss/Pain Adjustment
Willetts, & Maroules (2004)	Does Remarriage Matter? The well-being of adolescents living with cohabiting versus remarried mothers.	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Boundary/Role Ambiguity Social capital
Willetts, & Maroules (2005)	Parental reports of adolescent well-being: Does marital status matter?	<i>Journal of Divorce and Remarriage</i>	Boundary/Role Ambiguity Bonding Adjustment
Gunnoe & Hetherington (2004)	Stepchildren's perceptions of noncustodial mothers and noncustodial fathers: differences in Socioemotional involvement and associations with adolescent adjustment problems.	<i>Journal of Family Psychology</i>	Bonding Adjustment to Change

Qualitative Content Analysis

The principal investigator read and analyzed each article focusing on the primary research questions, “What has been written in selected scholarly journals about adolescents’ interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies from 2003 to 2013 (*Family Process, Family Relations, Journal of Marriage and Family, American Journal of Family Therapy, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, Journal of Family Psychology, Journal of Research on Adolescence, Adolescence, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, and American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*)?” Articles which included any of the following terms: adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, and blended family in combination with stepfamily were read in detail and coded by content under the predetermined categories of theory, training, clinical practice, research, and academia. The following five themes emerged after five rounds of the coding process by three separate investigators: boundary and role ambiguity, social capital, bonding, loss and pain, and adjustment to change.

Table 4

Themes and Key Concepts Found in Thirteen Scholarly Articles on the Topic of Adolescent Interpersonal Relationships in Stepfamilies

Boundary and role ambiguity	Role change, boundaries
Social capital	Parental involvement, parenting style
Bonding	Adolescent ties/closeness to biological and stepparents, belonging
Loss and pain	Custody arrangements, parent-child alliance, relationship quality
Adjustment to change	Loss of biological family, acceptance of change, wellbeing, stress levels, powerlessness, lack of voice

Boundary and Role Ambiguity

Although stepfamilies differ in many ways from the traditional biological nuclear family, they are often compared to traditional biological families and these expectations are likely to lead to misunderstanding and strain for healthy stepfamily relationship (Stoll, Arnaut, Fromme, & Felker-Thayer, 2005). An article which discussed stepfamilies with adolescents had the following excerpt which illustrates the theme of boundary and role ambiguity:

Boundary ambiguity refers to the agreement between members of a particular family about who does or does not belong in the family. It is also conceptually linked to role ambiguity, which refers to the agreement between the members of a

family on the definition of each member's role in the family. When roles of family members are ambiguous, it usually creates dissatisfaction and conflict in the family.... In stepmother families, a relatively higher level of boundary and role ambiguity is to be expected, as members need to coordinate their membership to more than one household, and because their roles are less scripted (especially that of stepmother) than those of nuclear family... There is also more boundary ambiguity in stepmother families than in stepfather families because nonresidential mothers tend to be more present in the lives of their children than nonresidential fathers. (Gosselin, 2010, p. 118)

The presence of a stepparent may also create role ambiguity for nonresident biological parents who may feel discouraged from being actively involved in the lives of their children because they may feel rejected or displaced by the stepparent. Role ambiguity is a factor which can adversely affect adolescents' interpersonal relationships in cohabiting and married stepfamilies. An article by Willets and Maroules (2005) on parental reports on adolescent well-being in both cohabiting and married stepfamilies elaborated on role ambiguity as illustrated in the following text:

Similar to remarriage, cohabitation is an "incomplete institution" (Cherlin, 1978, cited in Willets & Maroules, 2005, p. 134) because the social roles and responsibilities of cohabiting partners (as with married spouses) are not well defined (Nock, 1995, cited in Willets & Maroules, 2005, p. 134). Furthermore, the lack of a legal tie between the cohabiting partners may exacerbate further the

ambiguity of step-family relationships, reducing the well-being of children in cohabiting stepfamilies as a result. (Willems & Maroules, 2005, p. 134)

Henry, Nichols, Robinson, and Neal (2005) elaborated on role ambiguity utilizing symbolic interaction theory in the following text:

Within symbolic interaction theory, individuals are seen as responding to their perceptions of family interactions rather than to actual family dynamics. Thus, adolescents within remarried family households respond to their perceptions of their parent and stepparent. A family integration challenge for remarried family households with adolescents is establishing clear roles for parents and stepparents... Due to lack of clear norms about stepparent roles, each remarried family household faces the challenge of defining when and how stepparents are to engage in appropriate “parent behaviors” (p. 30 & 31).

Stepfamily relationships are different from traditional family relationships because of the tendency for stepfamily members to have different networks of extended families from previous relationships. This is noted in the following excerpt from an article written by Stoll et al. (2005) citing a 1990 article from Keshet:

“Although there is recognition that stepfamilies intrinsically are different from biological families, historically there has been an overemphasis on what stepfamilies are not, with the expectation that stepfamilies should embrace traditional family roles, behaviors and patterns” (Stoll et al., 2005, p. 178).

(Stoll et al., 2005) elaborated on role ambiguity in stepfamilies: “The complexity and effect of role structures, family life cycle influences, and development transitions are important variables frequently ignored or misunderstood in stepfamily research, creating difficulties in developing authentic role expectations and predictability in stepfamily functioning” (p. 178). The authors elaborated further on role ambiguity and cultural and/or societal expectations of stepfamilies:

Cultural expectations that stepfamilies should model traditional, intact family roles, behaviors and feelings have created misunderstanding and added strains for stepfamilies. Adolescents in this study did not appear to be laden with preconceived expectations for a traditional family. Indirectly, however, they did become victims of the parents’ or stepparents’ need to perform as a traditional family, adding stress to the adolescents’ existence. (p.187 & 188)

For example, stepparents may not be very welcoming of the nonresidents’ parents’ ongoing involvement with the mother and this might lead to stepparents acting as substitute parents and “...faulty expectations have resulted from this perspective, with stepfamily members experiencing adjustment difficulties, feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and discouragement” (Fine, Kurdek, & Henningen, 1992, cited in Stoll et al., 2005, p. 178). Based on their results, Stoll et al. highlighted that “...the overriding task in stepfamily development is to recognize that the stepfamily is not a nuclear family; attempts to function as nuclear families are likely to fail” (p. 188).

In another article, Koerner, Rankin, Kenyon, and Korn (2004) also elaborated on the effects of boundary and role ambiguity:

Many adolescents also have difficulty in accepting and trusting their mothers' new partner.... Similarly, although remarriage brings positive changes to mothers' lives, studies indicated that coping with the transformed family situation and the renegotiation of roles and relationships sometimes brings psychological costs to mothers. In addition, the quality of mother-adolescent relationships seems to deteriorate at least in the initial post-remarriage period... There are many reasons why a mother's re-partnering would be challenging and difficult for the individuals involved, for the mother-adolescent relationship, and for the new partner-adolescent relationship. One set of reasons stems from the fact that re-partnering, like divorce, inevitably entails shifts in boundaries of intimacy and power. (p. 26)

Stepfamily development can lead to confusion about family memberships and roles and in their article, Willet and Maroules (2004) reported that "...stress models postulate that adolescent well-being is lower in stepfamilies due to additional stresses placed on children in these families. These stresses include... ill-defined rights and responsibilities of step-family members that make interaction more problematic" (Coleman et al., 2000, cited in Willetts & Maroules, 2004, p. 118).

In another article, adolescents identified feelings of powerlessness which "...were associated with the development of new family rules, differing values in the new family,

and unequal enforcement of discipline among the stepsiblings (Stoll et al., p. 183). This is illustrated in the following quote from a focus group:

“Somehow, he’ll try to take the place of my father by telling me what to do, and I’ll get mad at him and say, like, ‘You’re not my father’ and stuff...” (Stoll et al., p.184).

Confusion around the change in power structure, of being excluded from decision making, and issues of divided loyalties surfaced as a source of distress. Adolescents expressed not wanting anyone to mistake their stepparent for their parent:

“I always want to say, ‘He’s not my real dad,’ but I don’t.” (Stoll et al., 2005, p. 184).

Boundaries and roles in stepfamilies affect stepfamily relationships and healthy stepfamily development. The following excerpt from the article by Stoll et al. (2005), exemplifies this:

Three interviewees commented on the friendship and support that they enjoyed from their stepparent as an advantage of being in a stepfamily. These relationships shared some common aspects that differed from the experience of other interviewees with less successful stepparent relationships. The positive relationship was more like a friendship than a parental relationship. Most participants did not want the stepparent to try to replace the non-custodial biological parent and, if this occurred, it seemed to sabotage the stepparent/adolescent relationship. Feeling respected and knowing that the

stepparent cared about the adolescent were repeatedly noted as qualities that contributed to a positive connection. Time was emphasized as a necessary component: “Go slowly, and ease into the stepparent role,” advised one participant. (Stoll et al, 2005, p. 184)

Social Capital

Social capital encompasses parental involvement and parenting styles, important factors associated with adolescent outcome in stepfamilies. The wellbeing of adolescents in stepfamilies is impacted by social capital and this is illustrated by the following excerpts:

“Parental involvement may be conceptualized as one aspect of James Coleman’s (1990) social capital theory, which focuses on the transmission of resources (such as time and energy) that parents invest in their children” (Coleman, 1990, cited in Willets & Maroules, 2004, p. 118). Elaborating further on the theme of social capital, these authors stated:

Parents who invest more social capital into their children are more likely to have non-delinquent youth. In terms of family structure stepparents were found to interact less with their stepchildren and devote fewer resources to them (instead, devoting resources to their relationships with their new spouse/partner and their own biological children). As a result, the higher levels of social capital transmitted from parents to their children in intact families foster their children’s well-being more effectively than do lower levels of social capital transmitted from

a biological parent and stepparent to adolescents living in cohabiting or married step-families. (Willems & Maroules, 2004, p. 118)

The authors further elaborate on the theme of social capital and the association with parenting styles in the following text:

Parenting style refers to the quality of the emotional bond between the parents and children (another aspect of James Coleman's [1990] social capital theory), as well as the extent to which parents are supportive of and/or strict with their children. Adolescents with strong emotional attachments to their parents are more likely to exhibit high levels of well-being ... again because the relationship between a stepparent and stepchild typically is weaker than that between a biologically-related parent and child, and because stepparents invest fewer resources in stepchildren, social capital theory predicts that the well-being of adolescents in step-families is lower than that of adolescents in intact families. (Coleman et al., cited in Willems & Maroules, 2004, p. 118)

The following also illustrate the theme of social capital:

The results of the research that has been conducted suggest that the well-being of children in cohabiting unions is somewhat lower than that of children in remarriages...for example, the children of a cohabiting stepfather feel emotionally less close to that parent than do children of a married father, and also express less acceptance of the cohabiting stepfather's authority. (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996, cited in Willems & Maroules, 2004, p. 119)

In their study, the authors reported that "...cohabiting stepfathers spend less time with their stepchildren in organized children's activities outside of the home than do married stepfathers" (p. 119) and they make the following suggestion:

Parental involvement and parenting style are critical to understanding whether and why children of cohabiting step-families fare worse than do children of married step-families... the lack of a legal bond between the cohabiting mother and her partner will cause additional stresses for adolescents, and will result in less parental involvement and a more detached parenting style. (p. 120)

In addition, the theme of social capital is used to illustrate the positive effects of parental involvement and the quality of parenting on adolescents' well-being. In this article, Willetts and Maroules (2004) assessed parenting style by using "...adolescents report on the quality of the relationship they have with their mother and with their stepfather (cohabiting or remarried)" (p. 123) and they reported as follows:

Furthermore, we found that parental involvement and parenting style (both a test of Coleman's [1990] social capital theory) were strongly predictive of adolescent well-being. More specifically, frequent participation in activities as a family (an indicator of parental involvement) was associated with higher levels of well-being on all three measures. Also, a positive relationship with the mother (an indicator of parenting style) reduced participation in delinquent activities, whereas high levels of maternal monitoring and support (indicators of parenting style) reduced behavioral/emotional problems. A good relationship with a stepfather (an

indicator of parenting style) resulted in a positive influence over adolescents in terms of substance abuse and behavioral/emotional problems. (p. 129)

An article by Henry, Nichols, Robinson, and Neal (2005) also illustrated the theme of social capital and its association with parenting style and they stated that “...parent behaviors marked by high support and low psychological control provide a foundation that affords greater consistency in shared meanings that emerge from both parent-adolescent and stepparent-adolescent interactions” (p. 41). Henry and colleagues also highlighted the effects of parent support on adolescent behavior in the following quote:

Families with adolescents, including remarried families, face the challenge of promoting the development of adolescent social competence or the abilities to function effectively in relationships with others...adolescents who perceive greater parent support behaviors tend to report greater empathic concern. (p. 30)

In the article by King (2006) the author asserted that “...high levels of social capital foster the transfer of parents’ human, financial, and other types of resources to children” (p. 911) and in another article, this author noted that “...a good marriage may encourage fathers to support the stepmother-child relationship, may grant stepmothers authority to take on parental roles, and may make both parents more available to respond to children’s needs” (King, 2007, p. 1180).

An article which discussed adolescents' relationships to both nonresident fathers and stepfathers also illustrates the theme of social capital. The author's findings are as follows:

...25% of U.S. adolescents who have both a stepfather and nonresident father enjoy close relationships with both of them. Almost as many (24%), however, report being close to neither father. The most common situation is one where adolescents report being close only to the stepfather (35%); only 16% of adolescents report being close only to the nonresident father. Thus, although it is certainly possible to have close bonds with two fathers, the majority of U.S. adolescents are not in this situation... certainly, the social capital inherent in parent-child relationships does not appear to accrue to children in these families. Girls and older adolescents are more at risk of being in such a family system. Conversely, adolescents with close ties to both fathers tend to also enjoy close ties to their mother and to live with mothers who report being happily married to the stepfather. The high social capital in such families bodes well for children. Boys and younger adolescents are overrepresented in this family system. (King, 2006, p. 924)

The author went further to highlight some factors responsible for the development of social capital in the following text:

It appears that coresiding with children and being available on an everyday basis make it easier for the social capital inherent in the stepfather-child relationship to

be realized when stepfathers are able to develop close bonds with their stepchildren. Living in separate households may not only make it more difficult for nonresident fathers to maintain effective bonds with their children; even when they do, the social capital inherent in this relationships is less easily realized in terms of its association with adolescent outcomes. (p. 925)

According to the author, "...resident fathers have the advantages of both biology and residence on their side in fostering the transmission of social capital" (King, 2007, p. 1181). Another article which discussed the effects of adolescents' closeness to parental figures (custodial, step and nonresident) on adolescents' self-esteem had this text that illustrates the theme of social capital:

Mothers tend to have better communication skills and feel more close to their children... since lack of communication can be perceived as disinterest by the adolescent, it is not surprising to find that the parent who tends to communicate more with the adolescent has a greater impact on their self-esteem. (Berg, 2003, p.84)

Willets and Maroules (2004) further elaborated on the theme of social capital and identified policy issues and stepfamily relationships in cohabiting or remarried stepfamilies in the following excerpts:

These results suggest that a reevaluation of work-family policy that redefines cohabiting and married stepparents as legitimate parents is necessary. Policies such as flex-time should be institutionalized to make it easier for all families to

emotionally support their children. With flex-time, (step)parents will be better able to attend events (such as Boy/Girl Scouts or sporting events) that are important to their children, and the parent-child interaction in turn increases the well-being of these adolescents. Although some companies have instituted flex-time policies, because cohabitation and remarriage are “incomplete institutions” (Cherlin, 1978), it is questionable that the parents in these families enjoy the benefits of this policy. (p.130)

Bonding

The parent-child bond is an important aspect of the parent-child relationship associated with the wellbeing of adolescents in stepfamilies. Bonding permeated multiple levels of all the categories in different articles. In an article by King (2007), the author focused on parent-child bond “... because it is a particularly salient dimension of the parent-child relationship that is associated with better outcomes for children” (p. 1179). Bonding is pertinent to creating a sense of belonging in stepfamilies because “...satisfying the need to belong is crucial to the identity formation of adolescents...” (Leake, 2007, p. 135).

In the article by Leake, the theme of bonding is described in the following excerpt:

Feeling a sense of belonging, feeling that one is cared for, accepted, understood, and fits in with some group or system, is essential to the construction of a sense of

identity, an important developmental task for people generally, and for adolescents in particular. (Erikson, 1964, cited in Leake, 2007, p. 136)

Bonding is also identified as a basic human need which involves "... hunger for contact, for intimacy, for belonging... and threatened maladjustment and more severe pathology.... When these needs remained unmet" (Maslow, 1970, cited in Leake, 2007, p. 138). The family is where people first experience a sense of belonging and "...for many the feeling of belonging within the family may seem natural, while for families in transition such as stepfamilies, developing the feeling of belonging may be a more difficult, but necessary task" (Visher & Visher, 2000, cited in Leake, 2007, p. 136). It is reported that family belonging is important in healthy stepfamily development because it serves as a protective factor, for adolescents, from risky behaviors, but surprisingly, research is lacking on family belonging and adolescents in stepfamilies (Leake, 2007).

Developing a sense of belonging may be challenging for adolescents during family transitions because it is a time when they have difficulty adapting to living in stepfamilies, as illustrated in the following text:

These difficulties have been attributed to the divergence between the developmental level of the adolescent, who is attempting to individuate and develop an identity separate from the family, and the developmental level of the stepfamily, which particularly in early years, tends to urge more closeness and greater belonging. (Bray, 2001, cited in Leake, 2007, p. 137)

Other factors associated with establishing close bonds and developing family belonging in stepfamilies, are illustrated in the following excerpt:

Individual characteristics such as age and gender of the adolescent, familial relationships such as between adolescent and resident parents and adolescent and non-resident parents may have interwoven effects on one another and on the adolescent's feelings of family belonging. (Leake, 2007, p. 139)

An article by King (2006) which discussed adolescents' relations to their stepfathers and nonresident fathers had this text that illustrates the theme of bonding:

High-quality relationships may be particularly important for child well-being because stepfathers and nonresident biological fathers who have close bonds with children can be more effective in monitoring, communicating with, and teaching children, thereby allowing the social capital inherent in the father-child relationship to be realized. (p. 911)

King also identified different variables that are connected with the formation of close ties to stepfathers and nonresident fathers which may be associated with better outcomes for adolescent in stepfamilies. These include "...parental education, family income, race, immigrant status, adolescent's age and gender, whether the adolescent was born in marriage, time since separation, mother-child closeness, mother-stepfather marital quality, and contact with nonresident father" (p. 916).

Mothers may play crucial roles in engendering stepfather-stepchild relationships because "...closeness to mothers and a happy mother-stepfather relationship stand out as important factors associated with adolescents having close ties to stepfathers" (p. 925).

King associated bonding with developmental factors and according to this author, "...father involvement and parent-child closeness tend to decline during adolescence for both non-resident fathers and stepfathers as adolescents increasingly desire greater autonomy and spend more time with peers, in extracurricular activities, and some in after-school employment" (p. 912). In terms of stepfather-child relationships, the author stated that "...adolescence is thought to be a difficult time to form a new stepfamily and an attachment to stepfather, indicating that the development of ties to stepfathers may differ for younger children" (p. 965). Consequently, this developmental issue might place older adolescents at risk of not having close relationships with either the stepfather or nonresident father.

King suggested that better child outcomes are associated with good relationships with both stepfathers and nonresident fathers. The following excerpt highlights further the theme of bonding:

For stepfathers, coresiding with children and being available on an everyday basis may foster the transmission of the stepfather's resources when they are able to develop close bonds with their stepchildren. Thus, children with close ties only to a stepfather or to both fathers will benefit equally in terms of having fewer internalizing and externalizing problems, and being less likely to receive failing

grades, compared to children who are close only to the nonresident father or to neither father. (p. 915)

In another article, King (2009) examined how adolescents' ties to mothers and nonresident fathers may be influenced by the entrance of a stepfather, and how the development of stepfather-stepchild ties may be influenced by prior ties which adolescents had with biological parents before the entrance of stepfathers. The author found that:

Stepfamily formation had little consequence for adolescent-nonresident father ties. Adolescent-mother closeness, however, declined when cohabiting, but not married, stepfathers entered the household. Close ties to married stepfathers were more likely to develop when adolescents were closer to their mothers before stepfather entry. Prior ties to nonresident fathers were unrelated to stepfather-stepchild ties. (p. 954)

Given that the bond between mothers and adolescents tends to facilitate the development of strong ties between adolescents and stepfathers, there is a need for a clearer understanding and identification of the mechanisms implicated in weakening adolescent-mother ties following the entrance of a cohabiting stepfather (King, 2009).

In another article, the theme of bonding is also linked to adolescent wellbeing. The authors asserted that "...adolescents who enjoy strong emotional bonds to their parents (which may be operationalized as a lack of conflict between the parent and the adolescent) exhibit higher levels of well-being than do those with weak emotional bonds.

(Willems & Maroules, 2005, p. 132) and the authors noted that "...a weaker bond results in less parental influence over the adolescent, which may result in parental reports of lower levels of adolescent psychological well-being and poorer attitudes toward school (p. 135); and "...the quality of parenting, rather than parental marital status, is important for adolescent well-being-at least in terms of parental evaluations. (p. 145)

Some mechanisms underlying the development of close ties between adolescents and parents in stepfamilies were examined and in another article, the authors reported that bonding in stepfamilies is negatively impacted by having little or no contact with non-custodial parent, a factor that can cause poor quality of relationship between adolescents and the stepparent (Stoll et al, 2005). These authors identified that "...having the noncustodial parent might help to dispel idealization on the part of the adolescent given that the stepparent is vulnerable for comparison with the idealized image of the non-custodial parent, ultimately making the reality of the stepparent much harder to accept" (Stoll, et al, 2005, p. 187); and "...not having visitations with the noncustodial parent was typically associated with difficulties in the adolescent's acceptance of the stepparent" (p. 182).

However, Gunnoe and Hetherington (2004) found that noncustodial parents may have negative effects on bonding between adolescents and their stepparents because "... NC (noncustodial) mothers are less willing than NC fathers to be 'replaced' by a stepparent and contribute more negative interference to residential stepfamily relations" (p. 555).

The following is an excerpt from an article King (2007) had written about adolescents' relationships with nonresident mothers, stepmothers, and fathers, citing a text from a 2004 book by Marsiglio:

There is no inherent reason why being close to one mother should make it difficult to be close to the other mother, especially if both mothers make a good faith effort and support each other's ties to the child. (p. 1179)

Commenting further on bonding and adolescent relationships with stepmothers and nonresident mothers, King acknowledged that "...both mothers face different challenges (e.g., entering family vs. nonresidence) and can rely on different resources (e.g., daily availability vs. early attachment) to form bonds with children that in the end lead to similar levels of closeness" (King, 2007, p. 1179) and "...coresidence and daily interaction may foster the transmission of a stepmother's resources when she is able to develop close bonds with her stepchildren" (p. 1181). King also found that "...close ties to resident stepmothers do not result in better outcomes for adolescents despite the fact that adolescents report being closer on average to resident stepmothers than to nonresident biological mothers who maintain contact with their children" (p. 1190).

King also reported that "...an adolescent's closeness to the resident biological father is significantly associated with fewer internalizing and externalizing problems... Of all the parent-child ties considered, this relationship has the strongest association with adolescent well-being" (King, 2007, p. 1187); the author also found that "...close relationships with both resident fathers and nonresident mothers are associated with

better adolescent outcomes, with ties to resident fathers being particularly consequential” (p. 1190). The author concluded that “...the models in this study assume that parent-child closeness affects adolescent outcomes, but it is also possible that the adolescent’s behavior affects the parent-child relationship such that children who exhibit fewer problem behaviors more easily elicit the warmth and supportiveness of their parents” (p. 1190).

King (2006) further elaborated on bonding and factors associated with adolescents’ relationships with both nonresident fathers and stepfathers in the following excerpt from the article:

Of greatest concern are the one quarter of adolescents who lack close ties to either father. These adolescents exhibit the most externalizing and internalizing problems and are most likely to have received failing grades in school....Results further reveal that these adolescents are characterized by a family system with weaker ties between its members. That is, these adolescents tend to be less close to all their parents, including their mothers, they have less frequent contact with their nonresident fathers, and their mothers and stepfathers are in less happy marriages. Despite having three parents, the weak ties between family members may put these adolescents at most risk for poor outcomes. (p. 924)

King found that adolescents differ greatly in developing close relationships with one or both of their fathers and when they do, they tend to benefit from these relationships. The author also reported that close relationships with both stepfathers and

nonresident biological fathers were associated with better adolescent outcomes, noting that adolescents' ties to stepfathers appeared to be more influential than ties to nonresident fathers.

In this article, demographic factors associated with bonding were highlighted in the following excerpt:

Adolescents who are close to both stepfathers and nonresident fathers are most likely to be male, younger, to be closest to their mothers, and to be in families where mothers and stepfathers are in the happiest marriages. Adolescents who are close to neither father are more likely to be female and to be older, are most likely to have been born outside of marriage, and are least likely to have either college-educated nonresident fathers, report the lowest levels of closeness to their mothers, and are in families where mothers and stepfathers are among the least happily married couples. It appears that forming close bonds to stepfathers and nonresident fathers is difficult when children face other disadvantages (e.g., having less educated parents or being born outside of marriage) or when other family relationships (e.g., mother-child) are weaker. (King, 2006, 919)

Leake (2007) elaborated on bonding and "...found no significant difference in level of family belonging between adolescents who were in stepfather families and those in stepmother families... Most extant research was conducted with stepfather families because of their prevalence, and the differences found in earlier and later research could

be accounted for by the emergence of more research on stepmother families, with the advent of more joint custody arrangements following divorce” (p.147).

Berg (2003) examined the influences of adolescents’ closeness to parental figures (i.e., custodial, step and nonresident parents) on adolescents’ self-esteem. Berg reported that adolescents’ self-esteem was predicted by their closeness to resident fathers and the resident stepmothers. The author identified that bonding helps to reduce problem behavior in adolescents. The following is an excerpt from Berg’s article citing a 2001 article from White and Gilberth:

When adolescents reported a strong affective bond with their stepfather and mother, reports of internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors were significantly lower. (Berg, 2003, p. 71)

In their article, Stoll et al. (2005) further elaborated on the theme of bonding and adolescents relationships in stepfamilies. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from a focus group:

Three interviewees commented on the friendship and support that they enjoyed from their stepparent as an advantage of being in a stepfamily. These relationships shared some common aspects that differed from the experience of other interviewees with less successful stepparent relationships. The positive relationship was more like a friendship than a parental relationship. Most participants did not want the stepparent to try to replace the non-custodial biological parent and, if this occurred, it seemed to sabotage the

stepparent/adolescent relationship. Feeling respected by the stepparent and knowing that the stepparent cared about the adolescent, were repeatedly noted as qualities that contributed to a positive connection. Time was emphasized as a necessary component: “Go slowly, and ease into the stepparent role”, advised one participant. (p. 184)

Although adolescents in this study appeared to have a feeling of belonging, it is reported that they also did not want to compromise their ties to the nonresident parent or previous extended family as highlighted in the following text:

Holidays were enriched by the larger stepfamily and there were more gifts and more ‘family-like experience’. Thus, increased material resources, a bigger house, and more gifts on holidays were appreciated. Adolescents were also clear that they wanted to maintain relationships with their previous extended family, and they resented their parents’ lack of concern for this. (p. 184)

In the article by King (2009), the author suggested that bonding in stepfamilies may be associated with the individual child characteristics and concluded that “...neither this study nor prior research can rule out the possibility of child effects playing a significant role here. It may be that positive child characteristics (e.g., having a warm personality) contribute to the quality of all the child’s relationships” (p. 964).

Loss and Pain

Healthy stepfamily formation is influenced by various factors including the nature of relationships in the stepfamilies, and the overall quality of life of family members,

including their stress and anxiety levels. The theme of loss and pain was illustrated in one article by Stoll et al, 2005 which explored the lived experiences of adolescents in stepfamilies. The following text illustrates the theme of pain and loss:

The remarriage and stepfamily formation phase was generally experienced negatively, with concerns over powerlessness and lack of voice as well as disruption resulting from changes in living space, relationships, rules, and expectations. Adolescents felt excluded and resentful about reduced intimacy with their biological custodial parent. (Stoll, et al., 2005, p. 177)

The following excerpt is part of the authors' report of a focus group interview of adolescents in stepfamilies:

This stage engendered much distress for the adolescents, as evidenced in three additional subthemes: losses in relationships, privacy and space, resulting in sadness, resentment and anger; powerlessness in their tumultuous lives; and confusion and feelings of being overwhelmed by all the changes...Repeatedly mentioned were losses of intimacy and quality of time spent with the custodial parent. A typical response was:

- “There was kind of a space - because she had someone else to talk to about all this stuff. I guess I got kind of jealous of him [stepfather], because before they got married, I had all this time with my mom” (p. 183).

The authors highlighted some of the losses felt by adolescents experiencing family transitions in the texts:

Relocating to a new home and incurring losses of a former home, friends, extended family, school, and time with the noncustodial parent left the adolescent with a sense of resentment and loss. Examples were:

- “If I could change something, I’d still want to be in the same school, and have the same friends.”
- “I’d like to be closer to my dad” (p. 183).

According to the authors, the focus group participants “...agreed that the resultant distancing from their extended biological family caused by the stepfamily formation was painful. In particular, the fact that biological parents did not understand the importance of those connections was an additional source of pain” (p. 183). More losses were reported in the following excerpt:

Also noted among participants was the loss in personal space and privacy; not only was it often more crowded, but stepparents and stepsiblings were seen to encroach on the personal boundaries of the adolescent as follows:

- “It was my stepsister’s house and we had to share the room and it was really bad because she doesn’t like the same things that I like.”
- “My mom used to let us do a lot more. And he, (stepfather), just like, I don’t know, I feel like a clam in a real tight area...a really tight area, I feel restricted” (p. 183).

The theme of loss and pain permeated the authors' report on the adolescents' experience of the remarriage and stepfamily formation as illustrated in the following excerpt:

... sadness/resentment about the experienced losses, powerlessness in the face of life altering events, confusion about and feeling overwhelmed by the many changes, hopefulness and appreciation about some of the changes, and finding various methods of coping with the changes. (p. 181)

The authors described the experiences of adolescents with a range of reactions and emotions. The dominant reaction was resignation to the disruptions caused by these family transitions and other participants "...resisted expressing emotion about the demise of their biological family, appearing instead to suppress those feelings" (p. 186).

This article by Stoll et al. continued to elaborate on the theme of loss and pain using repetitive themes from the focus group interview in the following text:

Responses revealed clear, repetitive themes and subthemes that contributed to the adolescents' wellbeing, as well as to their distress. Across the time-line from divorce through the formation of the stepfamily and early adaptations, adolescents evidenced a major, overarching theme about their experience: coping with losses resulting from the stepfamily formation. It was a stressful process for all, but relatively less so for some, and that difference typically hinged on the quality of the adolescent's relationship with the stepparent. (p. 186)

On the contrary, the authors highlighted individual differences in the ways adolescents experienced family transitions and they reported that "...an encouraging aspect of the result was the clear expression of hope and optimism that underlay obvious signs of distress and struggle" (p. 188). The authors also noted that "...an attitude of acceptance, focusing on the positives, and an ability to be flexible were important assets for the happier interviewees" (p. 187).

The pain and loss felt by adolescents in the focus group interview, negatively affected the quality of their relationships with parents in stepfamilies. Findings were reported in the following text:

Rarely did participants discuss their relationship with their noncustodial parent.

Results also revealed that adolescents who had little or no contact with their noncustodial biological parent (including deceased parent) had a much poorer quality relationship with their stepparent than did those who saw their absent parent regularly...without having the noncustodial biological parent available to dispel idealization on the part of the adolescent, the stepparent is vulnerable for comparison with the idealized image of the non-custodial parent, ultimately making the reality of the stepparent much harder to accept. (P.187)

Adjustment to Change

As a theme, adjustment to change also permeated multiple levels of each of the categories. It was found in relationships between adolescents and their biological parents, including custodial parent and non-residents parents, and with stepparents and

stepsiblings. Willets and Maroules (2005) wrote about the adjustment to change and adolescent well-being in stepfamilies. The following excerpt from their article illustrates adjustment issue in adolescents in stepfamilies:

According to stress model theories, adolescent well-being is lower in stepfamilies due to additional stresses placed on children in these families, which include changes in residence, adjusting to new household members, cumulative changes in the custodial parent's relationship status, conflict between divorced parents, economic stress, and ill-defined rights and responsibilities of stepfamily members that make interaction more problematic. (p. 132)

An article by Gunnoe and Hetherington (2004) reported factors that affect the adjustment and well-being of adolescents in stepfamilies. These authors reported that adolescents who maintained frequent contact with their non-custodial mothers had better adjustment and greater perceived social support. They found that "...many adolescents living in stepfamilies do maintain enduring ties with their NC (noncustodial) parents, and that the quality of these relationships predicts adolescent adjustment" (p. 561).

An article by Gosselin (2010) elaborated on adjustment to change to reflect the movement of adolescents, parents and stepparents through the different stages of family transition as exemplified in the following quote:

As the sociodemographic landscape evolves to include more diversity in family forms, so do the challenges faced by those who form and grow up in these family

units... stepfamily adjustment, both initially and over time, has become an important area of interest for family psychologists. (p. 108-109)

In this article, Gosselin reported that "...family members experience the stepfamily differently and ...these differences in perceptions can influence adjustment" (p.110). The author also identified the effect of boundary issues in stepfamily relationships:

In other forms of stepfamily households, boundary ambiguity was a problem linked to both family conflict and adjustment problems in children. The results here suggest that it might also impact stepparents' own level of adjustment and the quality of the relationship with their stepchildren, at least in stepmother families. (p. 119)

The author sought to create better understanding of factors that influence family member's adjustment in stepmother families as illustrated in the following passage:

First, each stepfamily member adjustment is the result of both factors shared by all respondents (such as the quality of communication, the presence of conflict and custody arrangements) and factors unique to their position in the stepfamily (role and boundary ambiguity, triangulations, psychological distress). Second, stepfamily members' adjustment is not only predicted by their own perception of their family situation, but also by other stepfamily member's perceptions, highlighting the role of reciprocity and bidirectional effects. Third, communication is central to all stepfamily relationships and is linked to almost

every aspect of stepfamily members' psychosocial adjustment. Fourth, stepmother-stepchild relationships are influenced both by the perception and behavior of the members involved in this dyad, but also by external factors, such as custody arrangements and support from biological father. (p. 120-121)

Different articles discussed effects of remarriage and stepfamily formation on adolescents and according to Koerner and colleagues, "...many adolescents experience adjustment difficulties in the form of internalizing symptoms, externalizing behavior problems, and/or problems in school performance" (Koerner, Rankin, Kenyon, & Korn, 2004, p. 26).

Adolescents in stepfamilies experience adjustment issues as they are expected to act like their counterparts in traditional biological nuclear families, even though stepfamilies are different in many aspects from the traditional biological nuclear families. Society expects them to adopt traditional family roles, behaviors, and patterns although stepfamilies are different from traditional families.

Adolescents are reported to have the most difficulty with adjustment among stepfamily members and this is partly attributed to "...the inherent developmental challenges of adolescence, combined with the complexities of divorce and remarriage, and intensified by the distress imposed by the lack of cultural understanding of these issues, leaves the adolescent in a stepfamily at risk" (Stoll, et al., 2005, p. 178).

On a positive note, the authors also identified coping strategies associated with positive adjustment in stepfamilies in the following excerpt:

Although there were obvious themes of distress and struggle for the adolescent in the newly formed stepfamily, there were also some signs of resiliency and strategies for coping.... A number of qualities reflected resilience and an ability to cope with the stressors of the new stepfamily: attitude, flexibility, and participation in outside activities surfaced as major factors in the adolescents' adjustment. (p. 184)

The authors reported that "...adolescents who expressed an accepting, positive attitude to making the stepfamily work is indicative that a positive perspective and flexible attitude is necessary for adjustment in stepfamilies," for example:

- "I try to find things in common with him [stepfather]."
- "You have to be adaptable. You have to change your attitude" (Stoll, et al., 2005, p. 184).

A few adolescents identified the positive qualities of the relationships they have established with their stepparents; the following excerpt from the article is one example:

- "He's kind of a friend. I feel ... he really cares about me and has respect for me which makes me feel really good about our relationship ... And I trust him a lot." (p. 185).

In another article, this theme of adjustment to change was also identified in other relationships in the stepfamily:

The entrance of married and cohabiting stepfathers may have similar effects on biological parent-child ties. Both situations can introduce stress and require family adjustments as well as bringing benefits in terms of improved economic resources or parenting support. (King, 2009, p. 957)

Gosellin and David (2007) elaborated on adjustment to change as a theme and they stated that "...the level of adjustment to the stepfamily could be predicted by both parents' and stepparents' own level of adjustment ... each respondent's level of adjustment is influenced by how well the other members of the stepfamily are coping" (p. 39).

These authors reported the result of the survey on adolescents, stepparents and biological parents in their examination of the effects of individual, interpersonal and systemic factors in each member's psychosocial adjustment in the following text:

The quality of communication between stepparents and stepchildren is linked to the exclusion of the stepparent and problems within that relationship.... communication is an important variable linked with both the quality of interpersonal relationships between stepfamily members and with their level of adjustment to the stepfamily. (p. 39)

Gosselin and David (2007) also expanded and clarified their understanding of the processes linked with stepfamily member's adjustment during adolescence as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Strong parent-child alliances play an important role in stepparents' adjustment and in the development of positive stepparent-stepchild relationships... the type of custody and the type of stepfamily (stepfather or stepmother) children live in can influence their adjustment and the development of a positive relationship with their stepparent.... Stepparent-stepchild relationships are characterized by both intimacy and distance, openness and avoidance, which influence their perception and their adjustment to the stepfamily. (p. 49)

In the article by Stoll et al. (2005), the authors identified different things that may help adolescent adjustment and interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. They reported adolescents' views in the following passage:

The adolescents had strong feelings about what really mattered to them in the stepfamily formation process and those aspects of the family and/or the present situation that they missed, resented, or wanted changed. Overwhelmingly adolescents expressed the need for time to adapt to the changes in their households, they wanted to be consulted and informed; they wanted their parent to communicate in advance with them about plans for changes, and they wanted to be considered in the decision-making process. Most desired some occasional time alone with their biological parent and time alone with their stepparent. They

wanted their parents to recognize the difficulties they incurred in the family changes. They yearned to be understood and treated with patience. (p. 184)

Summary

This chapter discussed the results from the content analysis, which included both quantitative and qualitative components. This research project was a descriptive analysis for the purpose of ascertaining what has been written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies in all issues of the eleven scholarly journals: *Family Process*, *Family Relations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Journal of Research on Adolescent*, *Adolescence*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* from 2003 to 2013. The principal investigator read these articles five times and they were read by two colleagues trained in qualitative research in order to be coded for emerging concepts and themes.

The quantitative component compared the total number of articles written in the specified years, with the number of articles on the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies, including the disciplines of the authors of the articles, as well as the category (theory, training, clinical practice, research, or academia) the articles described. The majority of the articles were contained in *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* with a prevalence of 2.295%. Psychology/other psychotherapy generated the most articles on adolescents' interpersonal relationship in stepfamilies.

The qualitative component included all articles containing any of the following terms: adolescents, divorce, remarriage, stepparent, stepfather, stepmother, stepsibling, and blended family in combination with stepfamily. Five themes: role ambiguity, social capital, bonding, loss and pain, and adjustment to change, were yielded in the qualitative component of this content analysis. These articles demonstrated how the quality of adolescent's relationship with biological parents, stepparents, and other members of the stepfamily including the extended family members will help or obstruct successful stepfamily formation.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of this inquiry pertaining to family therapy and the need for extensive research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. Findings are related to present implications for family therapists and recommendation for further research. Limitations of this study are also discussed.

Review of literature indicated that there is an increase in the number of children who are experiencing various family transitions, including new parenting figures, due to high rates of divorce, remarriage, cohabitation and non-marital childbearing. Given that divorce and dissolution of cohabiting relationships often lead to re-partnering through remarriage or cohabitation with new partners, the number of stepfamilies in the United States will continue to rise, and more adolescents will experience a married or cohabiting stepfamily as they grow up. Consequently, this trend has "...contributed to nonresident fathering and stepfathering becoming two increasingly common types of fathering experiences" (King, 2006, p. 910).

In seeking to find out how well family therapy, family studies, and child development journals are attending to the topic of adolescents in stepfamilies, the journals selected and reviewed for this inquiry are leading journals in their fields, however, although there are many studies on stepfamilies, they are mainly focused on the

deficit model of stepfamilies and often comparing stepfamilies with other family structures, such as single parent or traditional nuclear families. This is illustrated as follows:

Much research has been conducted where results unfavorably compared the outcomes for stepchildren with those of adolescents who live in other types of families. Some researchers even have discussed the need to limit the number of stepfamilies formed (Popenoe, 1994) but the truth is that the stepfamily, as a family structure, has existed for centuries (Coontz, 1995) and shows no signs of disappearing in the future. (Leake, 2007, p. 151)

Consequently, there is an ongoing need to better understand adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies and the impact on their well-being and their development due to challenges faced by both the children and adults involved in the new family structure. Adjusting to these changes may not always be easy for adolescents and this experience may lead to internalizing symptoms, externalizing behaviors or problems in school performance (King, 2006).

It is important to understand factors that affect the quality of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies as well as how stepfamily formation affects adolescents' relationships with their parents (i.e., resident and nonresident biological parent and resident and nonresident stepparent).

The research findings revealed five themes:

1. Boundary and Role Ambiguity
2. Social Capital
3. Bonding
4. Loss and Pain
5. Adjustment to Change.

Extant research indicates that cultural and/or societal expectations suggest that stepfamilies should model traditional family roles, patterns, and behaviors (Gunnore & Hetherington, 2004; Stoll et al., 2005). However, such expectations are bound to create role ambiguity for those in stepfamilies and attempts to function as traditional nuclear families are marred with challenges because stepfamilies are different. Parents in stepfamilies are faced with the arduous task to address this issue including identifying effects of embracing traditional nuclear family roles, patterns and behavior on successful stepfamily development. Children may feel divided loyalty between resident biological parents and nonresident biological parents and uncertain who to regard as having parental rights and responsibility (King, 2007). As divorced parents share custody of the children, there is a tendency for boundary ambiguity which invariably may lead to conflict in the family as well as adjustment problems. Consistent with the literature review, Hetherington (1999a) asserts that there is a need to redefine the new relationships in stepfamilies and that this involves redefinition of external boundaries relating to who is a member of the stepfamily system and who is not. On a similar vein, Crosbie-Burnett

(1989), added that this requires a redefinition of internal boundaries that involve rules, roles, alliances, and membership within the new family system.

Parental alliance is crucial in healthy stepfamily development because it helps to prevent loss of social capital associated with the departure of the biological parent from a household. In their study, Willetts and Maroules (2004) found that parental involvement and parenting style determine adolescents' positive or negative outcomes in stepfamilies. As indicated in the review of literature, this is supported by results of the study by Skopin, Newman, and Mckenry (1993) who found that agreement between the stepfather and mother regarding raising the adolescent predicted relationship quality in stepfamilies. When stepparents are actively involved and sufficiently invested in the lives of adolescents in stepfamilies, it helps to reduce internalizing and externalizing problems, including failing grades. In addition, when there is more adequate monitoring, teaching, and communication, it allows the social capital essential in the parent-child and/or stepparent-child relationship to be attained. Therefore, engaging in authoritative parenting practices including showing interest and/or talking about adolescents' problems as well as setting limits are important for adolescent wellbeing in stepfamilies.

Families that have established close ties between members tend to have adolescents with better outcomes and the social capital essential in parent-child relationships appears to develop in adolescents in these families. Adolescents in these families tend to be close to their mothers and to have mothers who also report happy marriage to the stepfathers. Conversely, adolescents who live in families where there are

weak ties among family members tend to have poorer outcomes, including more internalizing and externalizing behaviors and failing grades. Parents in these families are less devoted to their children and there is low social capital inherent in such families (Willems & Maroules, 2004; King, 2007).

When stepparents are available on a daily basis for adolescents, it fosters the transmission of the stepparents' resources and helps the development of close bonds with adolescents in stepfamilies. Consequently, adolescents who have close ties to stepparents will exhibit fewer internalizing and externalizing problems as well as better grades at school and will have better outcomes in stepfamilies.

Remarried stepparents and cohabiting stepparents can bring added benefits to stepfamilies when family members develop close ties to one another which will improve their sense of belonging to the stepfamily. When stepparents are involved in the transmission of social capital it may lead to not only reduction in family stress, but improved economic resources and parenting support. As parenting figures, stepparents can provide increased monitoring and supervision of children, including social support to the resident biological parents, a move that will enhance the resident parents' parenting ability (King, 2009). There is a positive link between that quality of parents' marriage and parent-child relationships. Marital quality can enhance close ties to both stepparent and resident parents and this in turn results in parental involvement in adolescents' lives, an approach that will most likely lead to positive outcomes in adolescents.

When there are close bonds between the adolescents and stepfathers and also nonresident biological fathers, the parents are more involved in the lives of the adolescents. Thus, closeness is an important aspect of the father-child relationship that is associated with better outcomes for children and three things associated with adolescent positive or negative wellbeing are internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and failing grades (King, 2006). High quality relationships between adolescents and both fathers (i.e., stepfathers and nonresident fathers) are very important for adolescent wellbeing.

Close ties to stepparents and nonresidential parents are factors that promote adolescent wellbeing in stepfamilies. Closeness to both stepfathers and nonresidential fathers is important because it not only transmits needed economic, parental, and community resources necessary to adolescents' healthy development, it also provides adolescents opportunities of having male role models in their lives. However, it may also be challenging for children to maintain close ties to nonresident parents due to distance and this may result in adolescents maintaining close bonds, instead, with the stepfather, who is available as opposed to nonresident biological father who lives miles away.

Closeness to stepfather or nonresident father and parental involvement may decline during adolescence because this is a time when adolescents increasingly need more independence and spend more time with peers, are more engaged in extracurricular activities, and may spend more time in after school activities and/or employment (Leake, 2007). However, they are also faced with the challenge of developing close relationships

within the stepfamily unit and this invariably may place adolescents at risk of not being close to either their stepfathers or their nonresident fathers.

Closeness to mothers accounts for adolescents' ties to both stepfathers and nonresident biological fathers; and frequent contact with nonresident biological father can predict a close tie to the nonresident father, a relationship that improves the wellbeing of adolescents in stepfamilies. When mothers have a positive relationship with the nonresident biological father, it may improve bonds between adolescents and their nonresident biological fathers, however, frequent conflict between the latter and mothers may weaken such closeness. Therefore, engaging in cooperative coparenting is an important factor for adolescents in stepfamilies to maintain close ties to their nonresident fathers because living in separate households can be difficult for nonresident biological fathers to maintain close bonds and to monitor their children's daily activities.

Adolescents who are close to both stepfathers and nonresident fathers appear to be in families where mothers and stepfathers marriages are described as happiest, whereas adolescents who do not have close bonds to either stepfathers or nonresident fathers are in families where mothers and stepfathers are among married couples with low levels of marital happiness.

Frequent contact with the nonresident father or nonresident mother enhances the maintenance of close ties to children in stepfamilies. There is a tendency for closeness to decline the longer the child lives apart from the nonresident parent. Furthermore, positive mother-child bonds are crucial for child wellbeing and the finding that mother-adolescent

ties may be weakened when there is a cohabiting stepfather as opposed to a remarried stepfather is a cause for concern. Therefore, further study is needed in this area to explore factors implicated in the development of ties between adolescents and cohabiting fathers and stepfathers.

In sum, adolescents in stepfamilies differ in how they relate to all their parents, including resident or nonresident stepparents, resident and nonresident biological parents. They appear to benefit from having close ties to their parents and close relationships with each of their parents are associated with better adolescent outcomes.

Parental relationship dissolution including divorce and remarriage are factors that lead to loss of relationships with biological parents and can cause pain to children in these families. In addition, the children involved may respond differently to painful experiences by resignation or suppression of their feelings in the face of their powerlessness over the loss of their biological families as they are faced with family transitions. Findings of this study were supported by the result of Brown's (2006) study on parental marital and cohabiting transitions on adolescent delinquency, which indicated that adolescents who experienced family transitions reported decreased wellbeing compared to their counterparts in intact families.

Family transitions including remarried stepfamilies and cohabiting stepfamilies result in loss of the traditional family and can introduce stressful experiences that can lead to adjustment issues in adolescents in stepfamilies (Stoll et al., 2005). Although it is recognized that stepfamilies are different from traditional nuclear families, there is an

expectation that stepfamilies should behave as their counterparts in traditional nuclear families by adopting traditional patterns, roles, and behaviors. Such expectations invariably lead to difficulties in adjustment, frustration, feelings of inadequacy and discouragement. Adolescence may be a challenging time for stepfamily formation, including establishing an attachment to a stepfather because adolescents are likely to be adjusting to the entrance of a remarried stepfather or cohabiting stepfather, and at the same time dealing with their own need for autonomy and independence. Previous studies have found that developmental transitions may be mostly challenging for adolescents in divorced or remarried families (Bray, 1999; Hetherington, Stanley, & Anderson, 1981). Thus, adolescents in stepfamilies are faced with balancing the need for autonomy and the need to develop close ties with the stepfamily systems. It is argued that adolescents in stepfamilies have unique challenges related to maintaining positive levels of wellbeing (Brown, 2006; Crosbie-Burnett, 1989).

Family members' experience of the stepfamily is different and these differences in perception in turn can influence family member's adjustment (Gosselin, 2010). Different levels of stress experienced by individual members in the stepfamily might affect their ability to communicate effectively, to deal with their differences, and to adjust to the stepfamily.

Limitations

The limitations of this inquiry are based upon the scope of the investigation conducted and the limitations are:

1. This study analyzed only peer reviewed articles published in specific journals to ascertain what has been written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies in the journals *Family Process*, *Family Relations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *Adolescence*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* from 2003 to 2013. More information may have been added to the data for the content analysis, from articles published prior to the specific period (2003 to 2013), had a longer time period been considered. In addition, this may have resulted in different data for analysis as well as influenced the results of the research project.
2. This research is limited in its exclusion of journals from other fields such as social work, education, and other helping professions which work with stepfamilies to make significant input to their health and well-being.
3. The inclusion of other journals might have included more articles on the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies which may, in turn, have yielded different data for analysis.

4. The eleven scholarly journals selected for this research project were chosen because they are widely circulated, they are considered to be a quality sample and outstanding in their fields. However, of the eleven selected journals, only three of these journals contained articles on the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. Thus, more research still needs to be done regarding adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies.

Conclusions

In ascertaining what has been written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies, this study focused on eleven scholarly journals relevant to family therapy. A content analysis was conducted and the conclusion of this inquiry indicates a need for more research on this population.

Based on the analysis of what has been written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies, here are the conclusions:

1. Review of literature indicates that research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies is still in its infancy and there is a lot of opportunity for research and publications on healthy stepfamily formation and relationships.
2. As the number of adolescents in stepfamilies continues to increase, there is a growing need for more literature on working with this population as they experience individual adjustment issues.

3. Information about stepfamily relationships and development of close ties among family members is missing in current research. The review of literature presented in chapter II of this study indicated that extant research tends to compare children in stepfamilies with their counterparts in traditional nuclear families based on a deficit model of the stepfamily.
4. Also, current research has not extensively explored how closeness to biological parents may influence the development of strong bonds to new cohabiting or remarried stepfathers, even though it is argued that close bonds between adolescents and their parents promotes positive outcomes in adolescents in stepfamilies (King, 2006).
5. There is a cause for concern that very little is written on differences among those living in cohabiting stepfamilies versus married stepfamilies even though there is an increase in the number of cohabiting stepfamilies and evidence suggests that children in cohabiting stepfamilies report lower wellbeing (Willetts & Maroules, 2004).
6. There are societal and cultural expectations that stepfamilies should embrace traditional nuclear family roles, however, stepfamilies are unique and different from never-divorced first families. There is a need for more research on stepfamily relationships in order to provide evidence-based practice for family therapists to enable them to better address issues such as boundary and role ambiguity in healthy stepfamily relationships.

Implications

Literature supports the benefits of pursuing research in adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies because it provides better understanding of the processes of healthy stepfamily development. Therefore, "...instead of degrading, disparaging, and discouraging stepfamily members, researchers, educators, and therapists working with stepfamilies should look to discover new ways to value and nurture individuals within the contexts of their stepfamilies" (Leake, 2007, p. 151).

The results of this study present several implications for family therapists in their work with adolescents and other members of the stepfamily systems. The results of this inquiry also have implications for adolescents and parents, including other stepfamily members, as well as researchers in the provision of the framework upon which to practice and to guide the direction of research. Based on the findings of this study, the following implications are given:

1. Demographic trends suggest that the number of stepfamilies continues to increase following divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation and there is an increase in the number of adolescents experiencing these family transitions. Consequently, it is pertinent that family therapists are up to date with the current trends, and are well equipped with clear understanding as they engage stepfamily members who are negotiating challenges associated with family transitions.
2. As indicated by the few articles found in this study, not much has been written in the field of family therapy about how to work with stepfamilies. Therefore, family

therapists may find themselves out of touch with current issues and trends on the topic of adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies.

3. Stepfamilies are faced with societal and cultural pressure to model traditional nuclear family roles. Therefore, it is pertinent that parents in this family structure understand that the stepfamily is different from a traditional family and to function as such may be counterproductive to the development of healthy stepfamily relationships.
4. Given that adolescents in stepfamilies make up a significant proportion of individuals affected by family transitions, there is a need for more empirical research to focus on adolescents' perception of family belonging in stepfamilies and factors and/or processes that influence their sense of belonging because "...positive and healthy stepfamilies can only enrich society in general, and the individuals involved in particular" (Leake, 2007, p. 149).
5. Given that research is driven by issues on trend, there is a need for change in policy, to make funding for in depth research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies a priority. Numerous researchers are calling for more empirical research in this area because it affects a substantial number of American children (Leake, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Research

Empirical research in the family therapy field in regard to adolescent interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies is lacking. There is a lot of opportunity for

research in this area to provide better understanding and knowledge of processes involved in stepfamily relationships. Lacking in empirical research is information about the impact of a stepfamily on the adolescent and "...this is of particular concern because research indicates that adolescents in stepfamilies have more difficulties emotionally, behaviorally, and educationally than their counterparts in nuclear families" (Stoll et al, 2005, p. 178). Therefore, it is timely for the recognition of challenges faced during stepfamily formation and for professional publications to focus attention on the implications for family members in stepfamilies.

1. It is recommended that research be conducted on treatment outcomes by family therapists who work with stepfamilies.
2. Future study should consider whether adolescents' relationships will differ for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics because there are few studies that examine racial and ethnic differences in stepfamily relationships and results tend to be inconsistent. The process of migration and intergenerational clash may be implicated in the relationships in stepfamilies.
3. There is the need to conduct intervention studies utilizing different theoretical frameworks, including family systems perspectives, to better understand the stepfamily phenomenon and to provide guidance on the best model to use to work effectively with stepfamilies.

4. Further studies are needed to examine different relationships, involving stepparents, nonresident biological parents, stepsiblings, as well as effects of age and gender in order to gain better understanding of how these relationships impact children's development and wellbeing.
5. Researchers need to examine stepmother families and the development and maintenance of individual adjustment because they tend to be underrepresented in research, particularly those involving adolescents (Gosselin, 2010). Also, research should address children's adjustment, not only as they live with their mother and stepfather, but also as they live with remarried fathers and stepmother households.
6. Although research indicates that many stepfathers are disengaged from their stepchildren, there are studies that suggest that many of them have close bonds to their stepchildren (King, 2006). More research is needed in this area to ascertain factors that help in the development of close bonds. Knowing factors which strengthen or weaken these relationships will provide the much needed awareness for family therapists who treat this population.
7. Longitudinal studies are needed to better understand if time in the stepfamily has a role to play in adjustment of family members in stepfamilies, including custody arrangements and relationships in stepfamilies.
8. Qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to examine the well-being of adolescents who reside in cohabiting stepfamilies versus their counterparts in

married stepfamilies because differences in their wellbeing have been reported and more people are reported to be choosing cohabitation following the death of a spouse or a divorce instead of remarriage (Willems & Maroules, 2005).

Summary

The goal of this study was to ascertain what has been written about adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies. Evidence indicates that research on adolescents' interpersonal relationships in stepfamilies is sparse and this area is rich with opportunities for learning. This chapter presented a discussion about the results, conclusions, limitations, implications and recommendations for future research.

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Developmental Psychology, 27(2), 314-320.

APPENDIX A
Coding Worksheet

CODING WORKSHEET

Name of Journal _____

Article Citation _____

Author(s) _____

Professional Affiliations: _____

Discipline:

Family Therapy _____ Other (specify) _____

Categories for Coding:

Theory _____ Training _____ Clinical Practice _____

Research _____ Academia _____

Other _____

Research Methodology:

Qualitative _____ Quantitative _____ Mixed Method _____ Expert Opinion _____

Participants:

Adolescents _____ Others _____

Description of Subjects:

Gender: Male ____ Female ____ Number _____ Ethnicity _____

Location of Study (if it is a research article) _____

Key Words and/ or phrases and emergent themes or topics:

Narrative Notes:

APPENDIX B

Articles for Qualitative Analysis

ARTICLES FOR QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Journal of Marriage and Family

King, V. (2006). The antecedents and consequences of adolescents' relationships with stepfathers and nonresident fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 910-928.

King, V. (2007). When children have two mothers: Relationships with nonresident mothers, stepmothers, and fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 1178-1193.

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Journal of Divorce and Remarriage

Berg, E. C. (2003). The effects of perceived closeness to custodial parents, stepparents and nonresident parents on adolescent self-esteem. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 40(1/2), 86.

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Journal of Family Psychology

Gunnoe, M. L., & Hetherington, M. E. (2004). Stepchildren's perceptions of noncustodial mothers and noncustodial fathers: Differences in socioemotional involvement and associations with adolescent adjustment problems. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(4), 555-563.