Stepfamily Expectations: Expected and Actual Communication between Stepchildren and Stepparents

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Abstract

This study is grounded in Expectancy Violations Theory and examined the relationships among expectations that stepchildren have for stepparent communicative behaviors, expectation violations, stepparent conflict, and stepparent satisfaction. Participants (N = 94) included young adults from stepfamilies who had formed while they were in high school. Analyses revealed that stepchildren experienced significantly more warmth, affection, and discipline behaviors from their stepparents than they had anticipated before getting to know him/her. Stepchildren who negatively perceived stepparent warmth, control, emotional support, and routine behaviors were more likely to report increased stepparent conflict. Stepchildren who positively perceived stepparent warmth, control, affection, emotional support, discipline, and routine behaviors were more likely to report increased stepparent satisfaction. These results indicate that certain stepparent behaviors, and stepchildren's evaluations of the expectation violation for those behaviors, may be associated with stepchildren's reports of stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction. As such, the current study poses suggestions for how stepparents may address stepchildren's expectations for their behavior.

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Stepfamily Expectations: Actual and Perceived Communication between Stepchildren and Stepparents

In 2017, the rate of divorce in married couples throughout the United States was at approximately 50 percent (Hawkins et al., 2017). Further, research indicates that nearly 33% of children in the United States will experience a cohabiting relationship or remarriage of at least one parent before reaching the age of 18 (Papernow, 2013). Thus, the contexts of divorce, remarriage, and blended families are increasingly becoming reality for many children (Jensen, Shafer, & Holmes, 2015). As such, the topic of divorce is now more widely studied than ever within the social science disciplines (Amato, 2010). Additionally, the topics of remarriage and blended families are also growing bodies of research within the social sciences, particularly as they pertain to more negative communicative experiences between blended family members (Coleman & Ganong, 2004).

There is a growing body of research that indicates the role of a stepparent is often a source of tension within a blended family (Bray & Kelly, 1998; Golish, 2003; Jensen, Shafer, & Larson, 2014; Speer & Trees, 2007). This source of tension may be most explicit in navigating communicative behaviors as stepchildren and stepparents adjust to new blended family roles. Specifically, a stepparent's communicative behavior as perceived by a stepchild within a new stepfamily may create complexities in both the stepparent's place within the entire unit and the relational development between stepparent and stepchild (Jensen et al., 2014). To date, increasing amounts of research have been conducted in order to evaluate such relational challenges within stepfamilies. Some of the relational challenges include: discrepancies in perception of stepfamily origin amongst stepfamily members (Kellas et al., 2014), coping with feelings of uncertainty within a blended family context (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003) and developing

new communicative habits to navigate through the transition to a blended family context (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2004).

Much of this research attempts to answer what processes stepfamilies may implement as they create new expectations for each member. Specifically, Coleman, Fine, and Ganong (1998) found that stepparents and stepchildren often hold different perceptions of actual stepparent communicative behavior. The consistency, or lack thereof, in these perceptions was related to the interpersonal adjustment of both the stepparent and stepchild within a blended family. However, stepchildren reported feeling more certain about the perceived enactment of their stepparent's role than the stepparent felt about his or her actual enactment of that role (Coleman et al., 1998). Research also focuses on the types of communicative habits that stepfamilies utilize in order to make sense of their new relationships. For example, Speer and Trees (2007) found that the ambiguity surrounding the expectations for a new stepparent's actual communicative behavior within a stepfamily can compound the ambiguity surrounding a new stepchild's reciprocating communicative behavior. Specifically, stepchildren reported being unsure of how to behave in their new role, and this uncertainty was increased by the stepparent's uncertainty of his or her new role. However, a stepchild's feelings of uncertainty were reduced when a stepparent's role was given more clarity, typically through a stepparent's enacted communicative behaviors. For example, stepchildren who perceived their stepparents to engage in more warmth behaviors and connection-seeking behaviors consequently reported increased clarity in their roles within the blended family. This resulted in stepchildren acting with more certainty, and often reciprocating the positive behaviors that were being enacted by their stepparents. As stepchildren reported higher perceptions of role clarity for the own role within a blended family, they also reported higher levels family satisfaction (Speer & Trees, 2007). Thus,

it is important for stepfamilies to establish effective communicative strategies for managing uncertainty surrounding new expectations for perceived communicative behavior to help promote clear expectations for actual communicative behavior and increased family satisfaction (Coleman et al., 2004).

Expectancy violations theory (EVT) is a particularly relevant theory to help explain the occurrences identified in the Speer and Trees (2007) study. EVT guides researchers in assessing how preconceived expectations influence our communicative habits (White, 2015). As previously discussed, it is apparent that many stepfamilies implement some sort of communicative habit in order to navigate through the myriad of complexities that arise. Additionally, it is apparent that many stepfamily members develop expectations for perceived communicative behaviors that clash with the actual functioning of their new stepfamily, which often leads to increased stress (Bray & Kelly, 1998). Further research is needed to explore what contributes to the discrepancy between communicative behavior expectations and actual communicative behavior as perceived by stepchildren during interactions with their stepparents, and how this influences their evaluation of the stepparent and subsequent interactions with said stepparent. Thus, the primary purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of stepchildren's relationships with stepparents by exploring the expectations that stepchildren have for stepparent behavior and the implications of evaluations of actual stepparent behavior on relational outcomes with a stepchild. A goal of this study is to contribute knowledge that aids in the transitional process of stepchildren as they adjust to a new stepfamily.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Theoretical Perspective

Expectancy violations theory. Expectancy violations theory (EVT) posits that we have expectations for all interactions with others, and these expectations shape how we make sense of and respond to the situations that transpire from said interactions (White, 2015). The use of expectations in the sense-making process of interacting with others is a habitual process throughout all communication (Burgoon, LePoire, & Rosenthal, 1995). Within the blended family context, stepparents and stepchildren implement expectations for the new roles that each will assume (Bray & Kelly, 1998). EVT assists in developing and subsequently predicting interactional patterns between communicators (White, 2015). Thus, expectations that are conceived prior to an interaction play an integral part in the application of EVT (Burgoon et al., 1995). These pre-interaction expectancies are central to the theory as they are often met with behavior or communicative exchanges that deviate from them. For example, stepparents and stepchildren may experience dissonance between expectations of communication within their blended family roles and actual communication within their blended family roles (Coleman et al., 2004). EVT allows for an assessment of these deviations and the ways in which perceivers respond communicatively to such violations of their expectations. Further, EVT evaluates expectancy violations and responses to them across a wide variety of communicative exchanges and contexts (White, 2015). Jensen, Shafer, and Larson (2014) found that unrealistic expectations that stepparents hold toward stepchildren, such as complete obedience or respect comparable to that of a biological child, often results in poorer communicative exchanges between the stepparent and stepchild. As such, the current study will focus on the application of EVT to the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Specifically, the current study will examine how

stepchildren evaluate communicative behaviors from a stepparent and how they meet or differentiate from their expectations for communicative behaviors.

Expectancy. "'Expectancy' in the communication sense denotes an enduring pattern of anticipated behavior" (Burgoon, 1993, p. 31). The expectancies that we apply to our interactions may be specific in that they are relevant to the context, or they may be more generally applied to our conceptions of a particular person's usual behavior (Burgoon, 1978). This premise of EVT claims that perceivers apply expectations of communicative behavior to targets within any given interaction. These communicative expectations are often rooted in culturally specific social norms as well as the knowledge that perceivers have of their targets. This specific knowledge is commonly acquired through personal experience or observations of others (Burgoon et al., 1995). For example, stepparents may expect obedience from their stepchildren in accordance with previously developed expectations of biological family structure and functioning. However, these generalized expectations from an incomparable basis often create interpersonal struggles, such as frustration or tension between a stepparent and stepchild (Jensen et al., 2014). Since the information that aids in the development of our expectations is typically sourced in social norms, it is often considered advantageous to avoid violating expectations and consequently avoid violating said social norms (Burgoon, 1978). Alternatively, Burgoon (1978) asserts that violations of social norms can be positive in specific instances, particularly when considering the influences of the contributors to expectations. While deviant from expected parental behavior, it may be beneficial for stepparents to avoid active involvement in the disciplining of their stepchildren by opting for a more supportive role (Jensen et al., 2014)

EVT acknowledges the impact of expectations on the interpretation and response to various communicative exchanges across contexts, particularly in interpersonal communication (White,

2015). These expectancies are often rooted in a perceiver's knowledge of the target, or within culturally specific social norms (Burgoon et al., 1995). EVT purports that these direct, or indirect, experiences contribute to the development of expectations for behavior. For example, a stepchild may form an expectation for communicative behaviors from a stepparent based on accumulated interactions with him or her. Expectations may also be based on assumptions about a potential relationship with the stepparent according to the current relationship with a nonresidential biological parent (Kellas et al., 2014). Thus, expectations can be predictive or prescriptive in nature. Predictive expectancies are representative of perceivers' preconceived outcomes of an interaction. Prescriptive expectancies are conceived according to what perceiver's hope to occur within a particular interaction (Burgoon, 1993). Both predictive expectancies and prescriptive expectancies are influenced by a communicator (the target), the relationship, and the context. Communicator characteristics that influence expectations are inclusive of features that are relevant to the interaction, such as gender, age, personality type and communicative behaviors. Relationship factors that shape the development of expectations include the extent of familiarity between a perceiver and target as well as status difference, if any. The interactional context involves over-arching components that influence preconceived expectations in that the environment or setting may dictate how a perceiver and target should communicate. Specifically, the range of formality within the setting or the type of task that is of interest may guide the interaction (Burgoon, 1993). A stepparent may employ a different communicative approach in a disciplinary interaction with a stepchild than in a first impression interaction with said stepchild. However, both interactions contain unique expectations based on previous experiences within each context. EVT posits that preconceived expectations and the contributions to them help to shape how we make sense of interactions with others. EVT also

addresses how we respond when our expectations are violated during an interaction (Burgoon, 1993).

When perceiver expectations are violated by a target during an interaction, the perceiver is forced to make sense of this new outcome (Burgoon, 1993). While many communicative exchanges occur in accordance with perceivers' expectations, targets commonly violate these expectations in some way. The consequence of this violation is determined by a target's behavior that is considered a violation to the perceiver's expectation as well as how the target communicates this violation (Burgoon et al., 1995). In order to evaluate this consequence, a perceiver must shift his or her attention toward the meaning of the behavior that violated the expectation (Burgoon, 1993). Communicative behavior is assessed according to its explicit and symbolic meaning or its implicit relational meaning. Thus, a perceiver associates his or her own interpretations of the target's behavior in order to construct the appropriate evaluation of the violation. The evaluations that a perceiver applies to the deviant behavior of a target may stem from the explicit or implicit evaluation, or they may be moderated by characteristics of the target (Burgoon et al., 1995). For example, a stepchild may apply a negative evaluation to a stepparent's involvement in a disciplinary interaction as this behavior is unexpected based on what the stepchild considers appropriate behavior from the stepparent. The stepparent's established pattern of behavior with the stepchild may preside over this negative evaluation, either by exacerbating it or improving it. The present study is designed to examine this further.

Violation valence. As attention is directed toward the violation of a preconceived expectation, a perceiver also assigns appraisals to determine the meaning of the deviant behavior (Burgoon, 1993). Subsequently, a perceiver applies a positive or negative evaluation to the violation as part of the sense-making process. The resulting evaluation is referred to as violation

valence which carries meaning in the following evaluation of the target and context in which the violation occurred. Such evaluations may be facilitated according to the clarity of the deviant behavior that explicitly relates to a social meaning for the perceiver and perceiver's relationship with the target. However, this social meaning and deviant behavior are not always clearly related. EVT makes predictions for instances in which both the deviant behavior and social meaning are more explicit in nature (Burgoon, 1993). For example, a stepchild may expect that a stepparent does not verbally demand obedience. However, said stepparent may enact this type of communicative behavior which is directly deviant to the stepchild's expectations for interactions. Consequently, the stepchild may associate a more negative social meaning to this expectation violation, such as the perception that a stepparent is prioritizing control over bonding.

EVT allows for predictions of the impact that violations of expectations can have on the outcome of an interaction (Burgoon et al., 1995). Specifically, EVT predicts that those behaviors which are deemed as deviant from expectations and receive negative evaluations from a perceiver will result in more negative interaction outcomes than a behavior that meets expectations (Burgoon, 1993). For example, as a stepchild applies a negative evaluation to a stepparent's perceived over-involvement in a disciplinary action, a violation of the stepchild's expectations for communicative behavior from a stepparent, the dyad may experience additional interpersonal tension (Jensen et al., 2014). Further, behaviors that violate expectations are also premised to result in a perceiver's heightened arousal toward their implicit meaning (Burgoon et al., 1995). Alternately, EVT predicts that deviant behaviors that receive more positive evaluations generally result in more positive interaction outcomes than behaviors that meet expectations (Burgoon, 1993). Thus, the evaluation, or valence, of a violation regulates whether

social norms should be accommodated to avoid an expectancy violation, or whether social norms should be violated. In other words, violation valence is highly influential of the outcome of the expectation violation (Burgoon, 1993). As such, the current study will address evaluations of stepparent communicative behaviors.

EVT posits that communicators weigh the reward value when considering whether or not to violate an expectation in an interaction. A perceiver's evaluation of an expectancy violation depends on his or her appraisal of positive or negative components toward the violation. This process is particularly salient when a violation is more ambiguous in meaning (Burgoon, 1993). However, EVT also includes predictions on the evaluations that a perceiver may apply toward a target, and the consequences of these evaluations on the interaction outcome (White, 2015). In particular, EVT addresses how a perceiver may respond to a target who has committed an expectancy violation, and the factors that contribute to this response (White, 2015).

Target valence. While the violation valence that is applied to a perceiver's evaluation of a target's expectancy violation is largely influential to his or her response to the violation, a perceiver's response also involves target valence (Burgoon et al., 1995). Target valence is a perceiver's general evaluation of a target at a particular time. This evaluation includes a target's: physical appearance, credibility, personality, gender, and communicative style. However, target valence is biased by a perceiver's desired outcome of the interaction as well as over-arching social norms (Burgoon et al., 1995). For example, a female stepchild may apply a negative valence toward a male stepparent as she perceives his involvement with her mother as an intrusion on their relationship (Coleman et al., 2004).Generally, EVT predicts that a perceiver's response to an expectancy violation within any given interaction is influenced by both violation valence and target valence (Burgoon et al., 1995).

Communication Expectations within Stepfamilies

Expected and actual communicative behaviors. Many stepfamilies, regardless of perceived cohesiveness, report various difficulties in the initial stages of development (Golish, 2003). These difficulties might include the unclear communicative expectations of the new stepparent within the stepfamily unit (Golish, 2003). Adults within stepfamilies seem to consider the enacted stepparent role differently than do the children (Fine, 1996). Parents and stepparents report that they are more likely to discuss expectations for the stepparent's actual communicative behaviors within the stepfamily amongst themselves as opposed to including the stepchildren in the conversation (Fine et al., 1998). Subsequently, stepchildren commonly report uncertainty in how to respond to a new stepparent and his or her communicative habits (Speer & Trees, 2007).

For example, Fine, Kurdek, and Hennigan (1992) found that adolescents reported more ambiguity surrounding their stepparent's actual communicative behavior than their biological parents' actual communicative behavior. Further, this ambiguity applies to expectations for how a stepparent should interact with stepchildren as opposed to how he or she actually is behaving (Fine et al., 1992). The degree of relationship adjustment among stepfamily members is associated with perceptions of communicative clarity as reported between the parent-stepparent dyad and the stepparent-stepchild dyad (Fine et al., 1998). However, expectations for the stepparent's actual communicative behavior are often deemed ambiguous, and they typically differ within each stepfamily (Fine et al., 1998).

Stepfamilies often create unrealistic expectations of each member within the formative years which can lead to increased stress (Bray & Kelly, 1998). For example, as stepchildren are navigating the new roles in a blended family, they may engage in avoidance behaviors in

response to the ambiguity in expectations (Golish, 2003). Stepparents who expect an immediate nuclear family experience may be faced with avoidance behaviors of their stepchildren, which creates tension within the dyad (Bray & Kelly, 1998). However, the consistency in perceptions of a stepparent's actual role enactment within a stepfamily is more closely associated to relationship adjustment within that family than that of consistency in perceptions of the stepparent's perceived role enactment (Fine et al., 1998). Purportedly, the actual behavior of a stepparent has immediate impact on the stepfamily in daily life, so it is more integral to relational development between the stepfamily members (Fine et al., 1998). As such, Fine et al.'s (1998) study ultimately indicates that stepchildren may be more responsive to the actual behavior that they observe from a stepparent than the clarity of the stepparent role.

Many stepfamilies struggle with varying levels of desire to relationally communicate with one another, particularly between stepparents and stepchildren (Coleman et al., 2004). Research generally supports the notion that stepparents are more communicatively distant with their stepchildren in response to unclear expectations for their behavior (Fine, 1996). Stepparent roles are commonly perceived as distinct from a parental role which creates vague expectations for communicative behaviors with stepchildren and broad expectations for actual communicative behaviors with stepchildren (Giles, 1984). This can be compounded by a biological parent's unclear communication about what is expected, and a strong reaction from both a biological parent and stepchildren to the stepparent's actual communicative behavior (Fine, 1996). Ultimately, there is no common report between a parent, stepparent, and stepchild with regard to how the stepparent should and does function within a particular stepfamily (Fine et al., 1998). Minuchin (1988) posits that families who are adjusting to a change in structure often desire to maintain what is familiar and only change the necessary components. Many families will seek

out new communicative habits that are deemed appropriate for the established family structure and coping mechanisms. As such, expectations for stepparents may vary according to the unique components of each situation (Minuchin, 1988). The current study will further these findings in order to evaluate more specific reports that stepchildren may provide with regards to evaluations of the expected and actual communication used by a stepparent within their stepfamily.

It is clear that parents, stepparents, and stepchildren all have different perceptions and expectations of their new communicative behaviors in a stepfamily (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1988). Stepchildren commonly report that they expect their stepparents to act as a friend toward them as opposed to acting as a parent. Specifically, stepchildren prefer less involvement from their stepparents when discussing rules or providing their opinions on discipline (Kinniburgh-White, Cartwright, & Seymour, 2010). Discipline may be considered as the attempts of a stepparent to impose parental authority (i.e., setting rules to be followed) over a stepchild (Schrodt, 2006). Stepchildren commonly report that they would primarily prefer a biological custodial parent to engage in disciplinary behavior with them, as opposed to the stepparent (Moore & Cartwright, 2008). Speer and Trees (2007) found that stepchildren reported the desire for stepparents to engage in more complementary control behavior patterns so as to avoid being inappropriately disciplinary. In other words, if stepparents are going to engage in disciplinary actions with stepchildren, stepchildren expect that it be in accordance with a biological custodial parent's involvement (Moore & Cartwright, 2008). Stepparents who are deemed to be more cooperative in defining their role are perceived to be more flexible and age-appropriate in their interactions with a stepchild (Golish, 2003). Further, stepchildren desire for their stepparents to engage in mutual exchanges of affection with them (Speer & Trees, 2007). Overall, stepchildren expect their stepparents to engage in more affection-seeking behaviors and engage less in control

behaviors in order to attain a higher level of intimacy (Speer & Trees, 2007).

Stepchildren report expecting more instrumental support from their stepparents, however, they are appreciative when stepparents engage in more affectionate behavior (i.e., warmth and consideration) as well (Kinniburgh-White et al., 2010). However, stepparents may be cautious in providing any type of support to their stepchildren due to the ambiguity surrounding expectations for their actual communicative behavior (Fine et al., 1998). Stepchildren who report increased perceptions of displayed warmth from a stepparent also report increased role clarity (Speer & Trees, 2007). These stepchildren are also more willing to reciprocate this behavior because there is less ambiguity surrounding their reaction to the new stepparent (Speer & Trees, 2007).

This sensemaking process may be interrupted in that stepchildren frequently report that the ambiguity surrounding their stepparent's role within the new stepfamily leads them to avoid their stepparent (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003). Further, the ambiguity surrounding their own role within a new stepfamily can lead to avoidance behaviors (Speer & Trees, 2007). Stepchildren report avoiding discussions about transitions in family relationships rather than engaging in disagreements with their biological parents (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003). As stepchildren report increased feelings of uncertainty, they are more likely to avoid engaging in family discussions to clarify the ambiguity. Stepchildren are more likely to engage in avoidance to cope with their uncertainty three or more years after the formation of the stepfamily. Avoidance may simply be due to the passing of the adjustment period, and each of the family members are exploring new communicative strategies with one another (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003). This supposition indicates that additional research is needed in order to help stepfamily members, particularly stepchildren and their new stepparents, adjust to new communicative styles with more effective communicative skills.

Communicative ambiguity surrounding a stepparent's actual role creates a space for discrepancy between a stepchild's expectations of communicative behaviors from a stepparent and the reported actual role enactment of a stepparent. Importantly, stepchildren have very different perceptions of the stepparent role than do the parent and stepparent (Fine et al., 1998). However, the stepchild's reports of expected role behavior and actual role behavior of a stepparent revealed more discrepancies (Fine et al., 1998). This difference in perception extends to the discrepancy between the perceived enacted role of a stepparent and the actual enacted role of a stepparent (Fine et al., 1998). Additionally, the ambiguity of a stepparent's enacted communicative behavior may be associated with a stepchild's reports of parenting efficacy (Fine et al., 1992). McManus and Nussbaum (2011) found that the use of ambiguous communicative behaviors often resulted in the assumption that a parent or stepparent was lacking in communicative ability. Stepchildren are very influential in this actual enactment of the stepparent role as they contribute and react to it in numerous ways (Speer & Trees, 2007). Ultimately, both the stepparent's behavior and the stepchild's behavior in interactions contribute to the stepparent's role (Speer & Trees, 2007). As such, the current study will investigate the degree to which stepparents may violate their stepchild's expectations for actual behavior and the extent to which this violation impacts stepparent outcomes (i.e., stepparent satisfaction and stepparent conflict).

It is important to consider that a stepparent's behavior can aid in defining their new role with a stepchild (Speer & Trees, 2007). This behavior can also reduce a stepchild's feelings of uncertainty in regards to his or her behavior in response to a stepparent (Speer & Trees, 2007). Notably, reducing the ambiguity surrounding a new stepparent's role toward a stepchild can help the stepchild adjust and relate to the stepparent (Speer & Trees, 2007). As such, the current

study hopes to provide information for parents and new stepparents in regards to which communicative behaviors are expected from stepchildren, particularly which behaviors are most influential in a stepchild's perception of stepparent outcomes. The current study posits:

H_1: There will be a significant difference between stepchildren's expectations for stepparent communicative behaviors and a stepparent's actual communicative behaviors.

Stepchildren hold expectations for how they would like a stepparent to behave which may be discrepant from the actual communicative behavior of a stepparent within their blended family unit (Speer & Trees, 2007). Communicative ambiguity surrounding a stepparent's actual role enactment may influence two aspects of stepparent outcomes: stepparent satisfaction and stepparent conflict.

Stepparent outcomes.

Family satisfaction. Speer and Trees (2007) found that stepchildren's interactions with a stepparent and the communicative strategies implemented to manage the stepparent's communicative ambiguity is associated with the stepchild's perception of family relationship quality. Thus, the degree of consistency across stepfamily members' perceptions of the stepparent role, and how it is enacted within that particular stepfamily, is positively associated with relationship adjustment across interpersonal components (i.e., reported satisfaction with stepparent) (Fine et al., 1998). As stepchildren report increased clarity in regards to their own communicative behaviors and for their stepparent, they also report higher levels of family satisfaction during adolescence (Speer & Trees, 2007). As noted above, stepchildren reciprocate perceived affection-seeking behaviors from their stepparents which ultimately contributes to higher levels of family satisfaction (Speer & Trees, 2007).

Open communication between stepfamily members is important to reduce ambiguity

surrounding expected communicative behaviors (Fine, 1996). As stepchildren perceive that they are able to openly discuss their opinions with a parent and stepparent, they report higher feelings of family satisfaction (Price, Bush, & Price, 2017). Stepchildren who are more certain about new stepfamily communicative habits and engage in connection-seeking behaviors report higher levels of family satisfaction (Speer & Trees, 2007). Further, as stepchildren feel more secure about their stepparent's actual behavior within the stepfamily, they also feel more secure about their own actual behavior. As a result, they report more frequently engaging in connection-seeking behaviors with their stepparent (Speer & Trees, 2007). As stepfamilies struggle to adjust to the different communicative strategies of new stepparents, it is advantageous to utilize open communication between family members (Fine et al., 1998). In particular, it may be beneficial to develop habitual communicative behaviors by identifying behavioral trends with the stepparent (Fine et al., 1998).

Stepparent conflict. The uncertainty in expectations for disciplinary, open, and affectionate communicative behaviors from a stepparent can lead to conflict between family members (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1988). While conflict itself may not be problematic for family adjustment, the inability to address and overcome it may be. Further, as a family struggles to resolve their conflicts that arise from discrepant expectancies, members may also negatively contribute to the overall functioning of the family (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1988).

However, stepfamily members who expect to function as an original nuclear family (e.g., stepparents disciplining in similar forms to the biological parent) harbor unrealistic goals that can lead to more negative relational impacts (Bray & Kelly, 1998). For example, stepfamilies who attempt to recreate nuclear families and delegate roles accordingly typically experience more frustration (Coleman et al., 2004). Stepchildren often act against stepparents who are perceived

to be overbearing in their parenting role (Golish, 2003). Stepparents commonly receive more negative feedback from their stepchildren in disciplinary exchanges as they do not impose the same authority as a biological parent (Golish, 2003).

Stepfamilies who are able to successfully manage the difficulty of a new stepparent's communicative behaviors within the unit employ open and direct communication to clarify expectations for communicative habits and relationship maintenance to aid the development of new dyadic relationships (Golish, 2003). Stepfamilies may implement these communicative strategies in order to clarify what is expected of new stepparents according to their already established boundaries (Golish, 2003). Further, developed stepfamilies implement communicative patterns according to a stepparent's opinion of his or her appropriate role in combination with a custodial parent's guidance of that role (Coleman et al., 2004). Notably, stepfamilies who engage in these types of behaviors are less likely to form unrealistic expectations of one another, such as forming instant relational bonds (Golish, 2003). McManus and Nussbaum (2011) found that stepfamilies who struggled to incorporate these types of effective communicative strategies for one another often reported more intensified stressors (i.e., financial issues or stepparent disputes) which disrupted the process of settling into a routine.

The current study posits:

H_2: The violation valence of a stepparent's actual communicative behavior will be associated with a stepchild's perception of stepparent outcomes (i.e., stepparent satisfaction and stepparent conflict).

Thus, stepchild expectations and stepparent communication behaviors may influence family outcomes within the blended family context (Bray & Kelly, 1998). However, it is unclear about how the valence a stepchild applies to stepparent communicative behaviors may influence

relationship communication between the dyad. Further, ambiguity remains about why the valence a stepchild may apply to a stepparent's expectancy violation impacts the subsequent relationship. The current study posits:

H_3: The expectancy violation valence will moderate the relationship between the degree of violation of actual stepparent communicative behaviors and stepparent outcomes (i.e., stepparent satisfaction and stepparent conflict).

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

The sample included 94 young adults from who had been a part of a blended family for at least one year in the Midwestern region of the United States. Participants comprised of 58 females and 35 males with a mean age of 20.21 (*SD*=2.396). Approximately 79% of participants identified their ethnicity as white/Caucasian. Roughly 56.4% of participants reported having a male stepparent, while 39.4% of participants reported having a female stepparent. Near 57.4% reported their mother while 8% reported their father as their primary caregiver throughout childhood. Notably, 28% of participants reported that they split their time evenly between biological parents. On average, participants reported being age 17 at the creation of their blended family (*SD*=2.75, age range: 15 years). Additionally, participants reported having lived with their stepparent for 3.14 years on average (*SD*=3.02, time range: 20 years). When asked about the quality of the relationship between their stepparent and nonresidential parent during the first year following their stepparent's marriage to their residential parent, participants responded terrible (7.4%), poor (16%), average (29.8%), good (16%), excellent (7.4%), and unknown (7.4%). Additionally, 16% of participants reported that their stepparent and nonresidential parent do not currently have a relationship. When asked about the quality of the communication between their stepparent and nonresidential parent, participants responded terrible (9.6%), poor (10.6%), average (22.3%), good (17%), excellent (10.6%), or unknown (7.4%). Notably, 21.3% of participants reported that their stepparent and nonresidential parent do not currently communicate.

Measures

Communicative behaviors. Expected and actual communicative behaviors of stepparents

as perceived by stepchildren were assessed using two measurements. First, participants completed a modified version of the Step Parent Behavior Inventory (SPBI) as developed by Fine, Coleman, and Ganong (1998). The SPBI is comprised of 18 items, 9 of which comprised a warmth subscale and 9 items that made up a control subscale. Participants completed the 18-item measure twice. First, for the *expected* section, participants were asked to report their agreement on the communication behaviors they thought a stepparent should engage in. Items were scored using a Likert-type scale from 1 through 7, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree, with higher scores reflecting more stepchildren expected more of specific stepparent behaviors. A sample item relating to the warmth dimension is, "I feel that a stepparent good should try to spend time with their stepchild."A sample item relating to the control dimension is, "I feel that a good stepparent should set rules that a stepchild must follow."

In the *actual* section, stepchildren were asked to report how often their stepparent actually engages in the warmth and control communicative behaviors, using a Likert-type scale from 1 through 7, where 1=Never and 7=Almost Always, with higher scores reflecting greater frequency of stepparent enactment of each behavior. A sample item relating to the warmth subscale is, "My stepparent tries to spend time with me." A sample item relating to the control subscale is, "My stepparent sets rules that I must follow." Cronbach's alphas for stepchildren and the *expected* and *actual* warmth subscales were .97 and .91, respectively. Cronbach's alphas for stepchildren and the *expected* and *actual* control subscales were .95 and .72 respectively.

A modified version of the Family Communication Standards Instrument (FCSI) by Caughlin (2003) was the second measurement used to assess *expected* and *actual* communicative behaviors of stepparents as perceived by stepchildren. The FCSI consists of 41 items that encompass 10 subscales of communicative behaviors. This study utilized four of the ten

subscales of communicative behaviors which consisted of 15 items. The first subscale, expression of affection, referred to family members' shows of affection toward one another. For example, "I expect my stepparent to hug me." Next, emotional/instrumental support concerned a stepparent's show of social support to a stepchild. "I expect my stepparent be available for me to count on no matter what" was an item pertaining to expectations of emotional support. Discipline involved the extent to which rules and consequences are implemented by a stepparent. A sample item relating to the discipline subscale is, "I expect that my stepparent have clear rules for me."The final subscale, regular routine interaction, encompassed the efforts that a stepparent made to spend time with a stepchild. An item representing the regular routine interaction subscale was, "I expect my stepparent to set aside certain times to talk with me."

Stepchildren were asked the 15 items twice. First, they were asked to report their agreement on the aforementioned items and whether they thought a stepparent should engage in them using a Likert-type scale from 1 through 7, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree, with higher scores reflecting more expectations for expected stepparent behaviors. The subscales for stepchildren's expectations for stepparent behavior before getting to know their stepparent were reliable with Cronbach's alphas of: .95 (affection), .96 (emotional support), .95 (discipline), and .92 (regular routine interaction). Participants were then asked to complete the items again, but reported on the extent to how often their stepparent actually engages in the communication behaviors. These items were measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 through 7, where 1=Never and 7=Almost Always, with higher scores reflecting greater frequency of stepparent enactment of each behavior. Cronbach's alphas for the subscales according to actual stepparent behavior indicated their reliability: .88 (affection), .96 (emotional support), .95 (discipline), and .86 (regular routine interaction).

Stepchildren were asked two follow up questions to each of the 15 items. The first follow up question was to examine whether a stepchild believed that his/her stepparent's actual behavior met the behavior expectation or violated the behavior expectation. This item was measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 through 7, where 1=Very Much Below Expectation and 7=Very Much Above Expectation, with higher scores reflecting perceptions that expectations for behavior were met. For example, "To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation?" The second follow up question was to assess a stepchild's evaluation of a stepparent's behavior. This item was measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 through 3, where 1=Negative Evaluation and 3=Positive Evaluation, with higher scores reflecting evaluations for behavior were regarded positively. A sample item relating to the second follow up question includes, "Did you view this behavior as negative, neutral, or positive?"

To ensure that the follow up questions were both measured using appropriate numerical values, both subscales were later recoded. A recode was necessary to reflect that a negative value represented an unsatisfied expectation as well as a negative evaluation of a stepparent behavior. As such, the recode also reflected that a positive value represented a met expectation as well as a positive evaluation of a stepparent behavior. The first follow-up question regarding the satisfaction of an expectation of the violation of an expectation was later recoded into a Likert-type scale from -3 through 3, where -3=Very Much Below Expectation and 3= Very Much Above Expectation, with higher scores reflecting perceptions that expectations for behavior were met. This subscale was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .94. The second follow-up question relating to a stepchild's evaluation of actual stepparent behavior was later recoded into a Likert-type scale from -1 through 1, where -1=Negative Evaluation, 0=Neutral Evaluation, and 1=Positive evaluation, with higher scores reflecting evaluations for behavior

were regarded positively. This subscale was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

Stepparent satisfaction. Stepparent satisfaction as perceived by stepchildren and relating to their stepparent were measured using a modified version of the Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS) as developed by Olson & Wilson (1989). The FSS scale consists of 10 items. Each item evaluated general satisfaction according to various reports of interpersonal dimensions. Sample items include, "The degree of closeness between my stepparent and I," and "The quality of communication between my stepparent and I."Stepchildren were asked to report their level of satisfaction using a Likert-type scale from 1 through 7, where 1=Very Dissatisfied and 7=Extremely Satisfied with a higher scores indicating greater satisfaction with his or her relationship with a stepparent. Cronbach's alpha for the stepparent satisfaction scale was .96.

Stepparent conflict. Perceived stepparent conflict between stepchildren and stepparents were measured using the Family Environment Conflict Scale by Moos and Moos (1974). This study utilized the 8-item conflict subsection in order to assess stepchildren's perceptions of conflict with a stepparent. Sample items include, "My stepparent and I fight a lot," and "My stepparent rarely becomes openly angry with me."Stepchildren were asked to report how often they perceive these interactions to occur based on a Likert-type scale from 1 through 7, where 1=Never and 7=Almost Always with higher scores reflecting greater perceived conflict with a stepparent. This subscale had an alpha reliability of .86.

Procedures

In order to participate in this study, participants had to be at least 18 years old and have a stepparent join their family while they were in high school. Participants were recruited in one of two ways. First, participants were recruited from a Communication Studies class at a large, Midwestern university through an online basic course research participation site. Second, if

students were unable or did not want to participate themselves, they were asked to refer someone else who was eligible to participate. Students were offered a small amount of extra credit toward their course grade if they were eligible and wanted to participate in the study, or if they referred someone to the study to complete it on their behalf. If students referred someone, they were asked to provide the person's name and a working email address. All participants were sent an email that contained a short description of the study and a secure link to access the online survey.

Proposed Analyses

Hypothesis 1 posited that stepchildren's expectations for communicative behaviors from stepparents would differ from their stepparent's actual communicative behaviors. A paired-samples *t*-test was used to determine if there were significant differences. The paired-samples *t*-test was run by using the SPSS program.

Hypothesis 2 examined the relationships among stepparent's actual communicative behaviors and family outcomes (i.e., stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction). Pearson's product-moment correlations were run to determine the relationships between stepparent enacted communicative behaviors and stepparent outcomes. The correlations were analyzed by using the SPSS program.

Hypothesis 3 asked whether violation valence moderated the relationship between a stepparent's actual communicative behaviors and family outcomes. A simple moderation model with bootstrapping techniques was used to determine whether violation valence moderated the relationships between the various communicative behaviors and family outcomes. Moderation analyses were utilized because I was interested in testing whether the effect of communicative behaviors on family outcomes depended on a stepchild's valence of the violation. In moderation analyses, bootstrapping identifies the conditional effect of one variable on another variable

(Hayes, 2013). These conditional effects generate regression coefficients that reflect the strength of the predictor variable on the relationship between two other variables. Twelve bootstrapped moderation analyses were conducted using the SPSS and PROCESS macro programs (Hayes, 2013). Using PROCESS, bias-corrected bootstrapping was implemented to generate 95% confidence intervals (Hayes, 2013).

Chapter 3: Results

The first hypothesis examined the difference between stepchildren's expectations of stepparent's communicative behaviors and their stepparent's actual communicative behaviors. As shown in Table 1, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the difference between stepchildren's expectations of a stepparent's communicative behaviors and their stepparent's actual communicative behaviors. Stepchildren's expectations for warmth behaviors from a stepparent before getting to know them (M = 4.08, SD = 1.42) were significantly less than their reports oftheiractual stepparent's warmth behaviors (M = 4.32, SD = 1.13), $t(87) = -2.24$, $p < .05$. Stepchildren's expectations for control behaviors from a stepparent before getting to know them (M = 3.57, SD = 1.45) were not significantly different than their perceptions of their actual stepparent's control behaviors (M = 3.75, SD = .91), $t(92) = -1.37$, *ns*. Stepchildren's expectations for affection behaviors from their stepparent before getting to know them (M = 2.84, SD = 1.63) were significantly less than their experience of their actual stepparent's affection behaviors (M = 3.13, SD = 1.52), $t(92) = -2.16$, $p < .05$. Stepchildren's expectations for emotional support behaviors from a stepparent (M = 4.34, SD = 1.57) did not significantly differ from their exposure to their actual stepparent's emotional support behaviors (M = 4.37, SD = 1.56), $t(92) = -.16$, *ns*. Prior to getting to know their stepparent, stepchildren's expectations for discipline behaviors from a stepparent (M = 2.96, SD = 1.51) were significantly less than their observations of their actual stepparent's discipline behaviors (M = 3.32, SD = 1.33), $t(90) = -2.76$, $p < .01$. Finally, stepchildren's expectations for routine behaviors from a stepparent before getting to know them (M = 3.52, SD = 1.45) were not significantly different than their actual stepparent's routine behaviors (M = 3.68, SD = 1.48), $t(92) = -1.06$, *ns*.

Also reported in Table 1 are stepchildren's reports of violation valence for stepparent communicative behaviors. Specifically, warmth (M = .41, SD = .45), control (M = .29, SD = .42), affection (M = .28, SD = .5), emotional support (M = .42, SD = .62), discipline (M = .2, SD = .41), and routine (M = .24, SD = .6) behaviors were moderately, and positively, in violation of stepchildren's expectations for each.

Hypothesis 1 was partially supported with three significant differences reported between warmth, affection, and discipline. Specifically, the significant relationships included the differences in expectations for warmth behaviors, affection behaviors, and discipline behaviors and how each of these behaviors were actually enacted by a stepparent. Stepchildren reported significantly more warmth behaviors, affection behaviors, and discipline behaviors from their stepparent than initially expected. The non-significant relationships included the differences in expectations for control behaviors, emotional support behaviors, and routine behaviors and how each of these behaviors were actually enacted by a stepparent. As such, stepchildren reported no significant difference in the control behaviors, emotional support behaviors, and routine behaviors from their stepparent than they had initially expected. However, violation valences for all communicative behaviors were, on average, reported as positive and moderately violating for each stepparent behavior expectation, showing further support for hypothesis one.

The second hypothesis posited that the expectation violation valence of a stepparent's actual communicative behavior would be significantly associated with stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction. The relationships between the expectation violation valence of a stepparent's actual communicative behaviors and stepparent conflict were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. As shown in Table 2, there was a strong, negative correlation between the expectation violation valence of stepparent warmth behavior

and stepparent conflict, r = -.56, n = 68, p< .01. There was a moderate, negative correlation between the expectation violation valence of stepparent control behavior and stepparent conflict, r= -.46, n = 72, p< .01. There was no significant association between the expectation violation valence of stepparent affection behavior and stepparent conflict, r = -.19, n = 73, *ns*. The relationship between the expectation violation valence of emotional support behavior and stepparent conflict was significant, r = -.46, n = 73, p< .01. Analyses revealed no significant correlation between the expectation violation valence of discipline behavior and stepparent conflict, r = -.17, n = 73, *ns*. There was a moderate, negative correlation between the expectation violation valence of routine behavior and stepparent conflict, r = -.39, n = 72, p< .01. Significant correlations were found between expectation violation valences for warmth behaviors, control behaviors, emotional support behaviors, routine behaviors, and stepparent conflict as reported by the stepchild. As stepchildren perceived their stepparents' warmth behaviors, control behaviors, emotional support behaviors, and routine behaviors in a negative way, they were more likely to perceive greater stepparent conflict.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were also used to assess the relationship between the expectation violation valence of stepparent's actual communicative behavior and stepparent satisfaction. As shown in Table 2, there was a strong, positive correlation between the expectation violation valence of warmth behavior and stepparent satisfaction, r = .73, n = 66, p< .01. A moderate, positive correlation was found between the expectation violation valence of control behavior and stepparent satisfaction, r = .48, n = 71, p< .01. The expectation violation valence of affection behavior and stepparent satisfaction were correlated moderately which was significant, r = .37, n = 72, p< .01. There was a strong, positive correlation between the expectation violation valence of emotional support behavior and stepparent satisfaction, r = .72,

$n = 72$, $p < .01$. The moderate, positive relationship between the expectation violation valence of discipline behavior and stepparent satisfaction was significant, $r = .26$, $n = 72$, $p < .05$. Analyses indicated a strong, positive correlation between the expectation violation valence of routine behavior and stepparent satisfaction, $r = .56$, $n = 71$, $p < .01$. Significant relationships included the associations between warmth behaviors, control behaviors, affection behaviors, emotional support behaviors, discipline behaviors, routine behaviors, and perceived stepparent satisfaction as reported by the stepchild. To the extent that stepchildren perceived their stepparent's warmth behaviors, control behaviors, affection behaviors, emotional support behaviors, discipline behaviors, and routine behaviors as positive, they were more likely to report satisfaction with their stepparent. Generally, hypothesis 2 received strong support with 10 (out of 12) significant associations reported between the violation valence of actual stepparent behaviors and stepparent outcomes (i.e., stepparent satisfaction and stepparent conflict).

Hypothesis 3 posited that the expectation violation valence would moderate the relationship between expectations for stepparent behavior and stepparent outcomes (i.e., stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction). All moderation analyses were run using PROCESS in SPSS. First, six models were tested to assess the relationship between expectations for stepparent behaviors and stepparent conflict as moderated by the expectation violation valence as reported by the stepchild. Unstandardized beta coefficients were reported for each model. As shown in Table 3, the results of the first regression to test whether the association between expectations for warmth behaviors and stepparent conflict depended on the expectation violation valence indicated the model explained 32% of the variance ($R^2 = .32$, $F(3, 63) = 9.73$, $p < .01$). While no significant interaction was found, it was found that the violation valence for warmth expectation ($b = -1.41$, $p < .01$) significantly predicted stepparent conflict. The

regression model assessing whether violation valence moderated the relationship between expectations for control behaviors and stepparent conflict was significant and the predictors explained 24% of the variance (R^2 = .24, F(3, 66) = 7.17, p< .01).Specifically, the violation valence for control expectation (b = -1.43, p< .01) significantly predicted stepparent conflict independent of the expectation for control behaviors. The next regression model assessed whether violation valence moderated the relationship between expectations for affection behaviors and stepparent conflict. The model was nonsignificant (R^2 = .05, F(3, 69) = 1.14, *ns*). The fourth regression model testing whether the association between expectations for emotional support behaviors and stepparent conflict was moderated by the violation valence was significant and the predictors explained 22% of the variance (R^2 = .22, F(3, 69) = 6.62, p< .01). While there was no indication of a significant interaction, the violation valence for emotional support expectation (b = -.95, p< .01) significantly and negatively predicted stepparent conflict. Next, the moderating effect of violation valence on the relationship between expectations for discipline behaviors and stepparent conflict was examined. The model was nonsignificant (R^2 = .07, F(3, 68) = 1.63, *ns*). Finally, while there was no significant moderating effect, the sixth regression model was significant (R^2 = .17, F(3, 68) = 4.68, p< .01) and expectations for routine behaviors and violation valence were found to explain 17% of the variance in stepparent conflict. Specifically, the violation valence for routine expectation (b = -.81, p< .01) significantly predicted stepparent conflict. In sum, the models indicated that the negative violation valences for warmth, control, emotional support, and routine significantly predicted increased perceptions of stepparent conflict as reported by the stepchild.

Six additional moderation analyses were run using PROCESS to assess the relationship between expectations for stepparent behaviors and stepparent satisfaction as moderated by the

expectation violation valence as reported by the stepchild. As shown in Table 4, the results of the first regression model assessing whether violation valence moderated the relationship between expectations for warmth behaviors and stepparent satisfaction was significant and explained about 60% of the variance (R^2 = .60, F(3, 61) = 29.99, p< .01). While no significant interaction was found, both the expectation for warmth behaviors (b = .59, p< .01) and the violation valence of warmth expectation (b = 1.81, p< .01) significantly predicted stepparent satisfaction. The regression model testing whether violation valence moderated the relationship between expectations for control behaviors and stepparent satisfaction was significant and the predictors explained 25% of the variance (R^2 = .25, F(3, 66) = 7.44, p< .01). In particular, the violation valence for control expectation (b = 1.69, p< .01) significantly predicted stepparent satisfaction, yet no significant interaction with the expectation for control behaviors was indicated. Next, the moderating effect of violation valence on expectations for affection behaviors and stepparent satisfaction was assessed. The regression model was significant and the predictors explained 19% of the variance (R^2 = .19, F(3, 68) = 5.42, p< .01). Despite no indication of a significant interaction, the model indicated that both expectations for affection behaviors (b = .51, p< .05) and expectation violation valence (b = .83, p< .05) significantly predicted stepparent satisfaction. A fourth regression model tested whether violation valence moderated the association between expectations for emotional support behaviors and stepparent satisfaction. The model was significant and the predictors explained 54% of the variance (R^2 = .54, F(3, 68) = 27.23, p< .01). Specifically, the violation valence of emotional support expectation (b = 1.25, p< .01) significantly predicted stepparent satisfaction, but the violation valence did not significantly interact with the expectation for emotional support behavior. The results of the fifth regression model assessing whether violation valence moderated the

relationship between expectations for discipline behaviors and stepparent satisfaction was nonsignificant (R^2 = .07, F(3, 67) = 1.60, *ns*).Finally, the moderating effect of the violation valence on the relationship between expectations for routine behaviors and stepparent satisfaction was tested. The regression model was significant and the predictors explained 36% of the variance (R^2 = .36, F(3, 67) = 12.44, p< .01). While no significant interaction was found, the violation valence for routine expectation (b = 1.01, p< .01) significantly predicted stepparent conflict. In sum, the models indicated that the positive violation valences for warmth, control, affection, emotional support, discipline, and routine behaviors were significantly associated with increased perceptions of stepparent satisfaction as reported by the stepchild. Further, the expectations for warmth behaviors and affection behaviors were significantly associated with higher perceptions of stepparent satisfaction as reported by the stepchild.

Hypothesis three was not supported as there were no significant moderating effects. However, there were uniform main effects for violation valences and both outcome variables, excluding the effects of the violation valences of affection and discipline on stepparent conflict. Further, both the main effects of violation valence and behavioral expectations for warmth and affection were significant predictors of stepparent satisfaction.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The primary goal of this research was to examine the ways in which a stepchild's expectations for communicative behavior of a stepparent, and the violation valence of said expectations, were associated with stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction. Three hypotheses were posited regarding: the discrepancy between stepchildren's expectations for stepparent behavior and actual stepparent behavior (H_1), the association between the expectation violation valence of a behavior and stepparent outcomes (i.e., stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction) (H_2), and the moderating effects of expectation violation valences on the relationship between stepchildren's expectations for stepparent behavior and stepparent outcomes (H_3). Hypothesis 1 received partial support, while hypothesis 2 received strong support. Hypothesis 3 received no support. The following discussion section elaborates on these findings, the limitations, and suggests future directions for research.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis explored the extent to which stepchildren's reports of actual behavior from their stepparent were discrepant from the initial expectations for those behaviors. Results revealed that stepchildren reported their stepparents to engage in greater amounts of warmth behaviors, affection behaviors, and discipline behaviors than initially expected. The findings of the present study indicate that stepchildren's preconceived notions about stepparent behavior may lead them to expect less of particular types of behaviors from their stepparent when interacting with him or her, namely warmth, affection, and discipline behaviors. As such, these results highlight the extent to which stepchildren's expectations for stepparent behavior may vary across time and behavior type.

Fine, Coleman, and Ganong (1998) reported a similar finding in that stepchildren often

reported greater actual behaviors from their stepparent than they thought they should which typically violated a boundary for parenting expectations. Although the present study did not include stepparent's perceptions of behavioral expectations from their stepchild, the results do provide similar support to the supposition that stepchildren's expectations for different stepparent behaviors are often met with significantly different enacted stepparent behaviors. Further, these results highlight an important variable to consider in the process, the development of the relationship between a stepchild and stepparent. It appears as though there is something worth noting about the discrepancy between expectations for stepparent behavior before getting to know a stepparent and how a stepparent actually enacts those behaviors that may occupy a mediating role in determining stepchildren's responses to actual stepparent behavior.

The results also indicate that stepchildren are generally reporting more positive violation valences of their stepparent's behavior. Notably, the mean violation valence score of emotional support behavior was the largest, while the mean violation valence score of discipline behavior was the smallest. Thus, the emotional support behaviors that stepchildren received from their stepparents are indicated as the largest expectation violation, while the discipline behaviors that stepchildren received were the least violating of expectations. It is important to note that all communicative behaviors were positively valenced despite some having more negative connotations (e.g., discipline or control). This implies that stepchildren might perceive *any* behavior that is enacted more than what is expected as positive and contributing to overall stepparent-stepchild relationship quality (i.e., conflict and satisfaction).

These results extend the findings of Fine et al. (1998) in that stepchildren's expectations for particular stepparent behaviors are often different than a stepparent's actual behavior. As such, the violation of those expectations becomes an inherent component within the development

of the stepparent-stepchild relationship (Fine et al., 1998). Thus, it is important that stepparents and parents acknowledge stepchildren's preconceived expectations for a stepparent's communicative behavior. Stepparents and parents would be well advised to be responsive to these expectations by providing opportunities for open family discussion with their children/stepchildren to address their expectations. Stepchildren would also benefit to remain open to these family discussions. Open family dialogue may combat the more negative relational effects (increased stress, frustration, and ambiguity) of excluding stepchildren from discussions about a stepparent's role in a stepfamily (Fine et al., 1998) by allowing stepchildren to express their expectations and allowing stepparents to address the expectations of their stepchild.

Hypothesis 2

Having explored stepchildren's expectations for stepparent behavior before getting to know them and expectations for stepparent behavior after getting to know them, attention was then given to the association between a violation valence of actual stepparent behavior and reports of stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction (H_2). Results yielded that stepchildren's positive violation valences for warmth behaviors, control behaviors, emotional support behaviors, and routine behaviors were significantly associated with perceptions of less stepparent conflict. Additionally, positive violation valences for warmth behaviors, control behaviors, affection behaviors, emotional support behaviors, discipline behaviors, and routine behaviors were associated with perceptions of greater stepparent satisfaction.

Previous researchers have documented the implications of stepchildren's evaluations of actual stepparent behavior and outcomes of the stepparent-stepchild relationship, such as: stepchildren's perceptions of a stepparent's increased affection-seeking behaviors and decreased

control behaviors to attain more relational intimacy (Speer & Trees, 2007), a stepparent's disciplinary behaviors as violations of stepchildren's expectations for that type of behavior and reports of relational frustration (Coleman et al., 2004), and open communication to reduce ambiguity surrounding actual stepparent behavior to promote increased relational satisfaction (Golish, 2003). When combined with previous research, the results of this study support the general notion that a stepparent's behavior that negatively violates a stepchild's expectation for that type of behavior typically results in more negative relational outcomes. The current study emphasizes that stepchildren's reports of conflict with a stepparent are associated with a stepparent's behaviors of warmth, control, emotional support, and routine. Further, the results of this study verify that those four behaviors as well as affection and discipline are associated with stepchildren's reports of satisfaction with a stepparent.

This study supports prior findings with regard to the relational outcomes resulting from actual stepparent behavior while offering more specific associations between types of behavior that elicit reports of conflict and satisfaction according to their contextually-deemed valence. Stepchildren and stepparents may be unaware of their differences in expectations for specific types of behaviors, however a lack of understanding about these expectations may have implications for stepchildren's eventual reports of stepparent satisfaction and stepparent conflict. Further, violations of expectations for particular types of stepparent behavior are more strongly linked than others to these stepparent outcomes. As such, these findings may provide structure for parents and stepparents who attempt to implement more open dialogue with their children/stepchildren about expectations for a stepparent's communicative behaviors.

Hypothesis 3

The final purpose of this investigation was to explore the extent to which reports of

stepparent conflict and reports of stepparent satisfaction varied according to stepchildren's expectations of stepparent behavior as moderated by the expectation violation valence of stepparent behavior (H_3). Generally, results of the moderation analyses indicated that the interaction between stepchild's expectations for stepparent behavior and the subsequent evaluation of that behavior (i.e., alignment or discrepant with expectations) did not significantly predict reports of conflict with a stepparent or reports of satisfaction with a stepparent. In other words, a stepchild's evaluation of a stepparent's communicative behavior did not influence the strength of the relationship between a stepchild's expectations for stepparent behavior and reports of stepparent conflict or satisfaction. However, the violation valence of 10 different communicative behaviors from a stepparent did significantly predict stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction, indicating that a stepchild's evaluation of stepparent behavior according to preconceived expectations is a significant factor in the relationship. In particular, the violation valence of warmth, control, emotional support, and routine behaviors significantly predicted reports of stepparent conflict. Further, the violation valence of warmth, control, affection, emotional support, discipline, and routine behaviors significantly predicted reports of stepparent satisfaction. As reported above, this may have positive ramifications or negative ramifications for reports of stepparent outcomes. For example, stepchildren who negatively evaluated warmth, control, emotional support, and routine behaviors from their stepparent reported perceptions of increased conflict with said stepparent. Alternatively, stepchildren who positively evaluated warmth, control, affection, emotional support, discipline, and routine behaviors from their stepparent reported perceptions of increased satisfaction with said stepparent. While the full moderation analysis model did not yield significant results, the results of this research warrant further thought as they advance our understanding of the ways in which expectations for

stepparent behavior, and subsequent evaluation of that behavior according to those expectations, implicate stepparent outcomes within the stepparent-stepchild dyad.

In general, the results suggest that the extent to which a stepparent's behavior is deemed a positive violation of expectations holds implications for stepchildren's reports of satisfaction with a stepparent. Specifically, positive expectation violation valences of stepparent behavior (i.e., warmth, control, affection, emotional support, discipline, and routine) are more likely to elicit higher ratings of satisfaction with a stepparent. This is in support of Golish's (2003) findings in which stepchildren reported increased satisfaction with a stepparent as they deemed him or her to be more accommodating toward behavioral expectations. Results of the current study further these findings by specifying types of behaviors that, when positively violated, contribute to stepchildren's feelings of satisfaction with a stepparent.

Alternatively, negative expectation violation valences of stepparent behavior (i.e., warmth, control, emotional support, and routine) are more likely to elicit increased reports of conflict with a stepparent. Notably, effects of the violation valence of both affection behaviors and discipline behaviors did not significantly predict stepchildren's reports of conflict with a stepparent. Generally, these findings deviate from the research of Bray and Kelly (1998) that stepchildren negatively respond to their stepparents when it is perceived that they are implementing more discipline behaviors than said stepchildren think appropriate given their relationship (i.e., not a biological parent). Current findings further this idea by specifying types of behaviors that, when negatively violated, contribute to stepchildren's perceptions of conflict with a stepparent that are not related to violations of expectations for discipline behaviors.

As noted by Coleman and Ganong (1998), expectations for stepparent behavior within stepfamilies is often a source of tension and communicative ambiguity which can contribute to

more negative relational outcomes. However, it was left unclear as to what specific types of stepparent behaviors, and expectations for them, were negatively influencing the relational outcomes. The results of the present study provide some evidence to suggest that expectations for stepparent behaviors of warmth, affection, and discipline may set a precedent for interactions that are particularly vulnerable to being evaluated negatively by stepchildren. As such, the open family dialogue as suggested above may provide a useful channel for stepparents to address stepchildren's expectations for these specific types of behaviors.

Collectively, the results of this study provide two theoretical implications worth noting. First, while the interactions of the moderation analyses did not yield significant results, the effects are worth noting. In particular, the effect of the expectation violation valences for particular behaviors were significant which indicates that stepchildren's evaluations of certain behaviors may implicate relational outcomes (i.e., stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction). Thus, the results extend expectancy violations theory by highlighting the importance of stepchildren's evaluations of stepparent behavior as a predictor of reports of stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction. To the extent that expectancy violations theory accounts for individual and dyadic processes in these interactions, it becomes a useful tool for broadening the understanding of how various behaviors within the stepparent-stepchild dyad are evaluated, and thus related, to relational outcomes (i.e., stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction).

Second, the results of this study point to the applicability and scope of expectancy violations theory. Although this theory is not a family theory per se, it was able to provide some insight into the stepchild-stepparent family relationship. Further, it examined a core theoretical concept, expectations, and was able to move the literature toward an enhanced understanding of

changes in expectations for specific behaviors of stepparents throughout the relational process. Specifically, expectations for stepparent behaviors of warmth, affection, and discipline before getting to know them were significantly different than expectations for the same stepparent behaviors after getting to know them. Notably, stepchildren's expectations for warmth behaviors, affection behaviors, and discipline behaviors from their stepparent were less than what they actually received from said stepparent. Thus, the present study successfully applied expectancy violations theory to understand how stepchildren's expectations for stepparent behavior prior to meeting him/her may have eventual impacts on the stepparent-stepchild relationship, specifically stepchildren's perceptions of stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction.

Limitations and Direction for Future Study

Given the contributions of this research, the results should be carefully interpreted with acknowledgement of the limitations within the study. The greatest limitation to the study involves the sample size. While many efforts were made to gather a large sample of stepchildren, the present sample provides only enough statistical power to detect small to moderate effect sizes. Perhaps a larger sample size could detect significant moderating effects of violation valence on expectations for stepparent behavior and relational outcomes (i.e., stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction) according to their respective expectation violation valences. Further, the inclusion of just stepchildren reporting their expectations for stepparent behavior and evaluations of it provides only a small piece of the entire context for relational outcomes in the stepparent-stepchild dyad. As such, this limited inclusion presents an incomplete understanding of factors that contribute to expectations of stepparent behavior and evaluations of those behaviors. Future research could include the expectations for behavior and

evaluations of said behavior of biological parents and stepparents.

A second limitation for consideration involves the method for data collection. Specifically, the design of the survey created confusion for some participants which resulted in a significant loss of data. Two follow up questions that addressed the expectation violation of a behavior and the violation valence of said behavior were formatted such that they were a part of the same scale and side by side. Approximately 20 participants did not respond to the second follow up question, presumably due to not seeing the second question embedded in the same scale as the first follow up question. With only 93 participants in the entire sample, this data loss was significant. Future methods may improve the structure of the survey by more clearly separating those follow up questions to ensure higher response quality.

Further research may explore the effects of relational development (i.e., biological parent influence, aging, adjustment) on the discrepancy between expectations for warmth, affection, and discipline before getting to know a stepparent and expectations for those behaviors after meeting a stepparent. For example, Schrodt and Braithwaite (2010) have documented stepchildren's feelings of adjustment given the nature of communication shared between their biological parents. One interesting extension of this research would be to explore how co-parental communication shared between biological parents may influence stepchildren's expectations for stepparent behavior during the adjustment process. Likewise, expectancy violations analyses of expectations for other blended family members (i.e., residential stepparent, residential biological parent, and nonresidential parent) may further theoretical explanations of key preconceived notions that impede relational satisfaction in blended families. In particular, Afifi (2003) has explored the effects of triangulation and their contribution to stepchildren feeling caught between their biological parents and stepparent. This research may provide a foundation upon which

research could extend the understanding of how such triangulation constructs stepchildren's particular behavioral expectations for stepparents.

Finally, participants in this study were young-adult college students at the time they completed the survey. An additional consideration for future research should be the age of participants. For example, the mean age of participants was 20 years old. Future research may examine whether the age of participants would relate to reports of low expectations for stepparent behavior when experiencing a stepparent entering their family during high school. Through these types of investigations, family scholars can further specify the expectation creation process that may be addressed to promote more healthy blended family communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study enhances our current understanding of stepfamily communication and family relationship outcomes. The results were similar to Fine, Coleman, and Ganong's (1998) study in that stepchildren reported a difference in their initial expectations for stepparent behavior and the experience of their stepparent's actual behavior. As an extension of this previous research, the current study found that specific expectations for particular types of behavior, and the evaluation of those enacted behaviors, were significantly associated with reports of stepparent conflict and stepparent satisfaction. As such, the results suggest that stepfamily members may benefit from creating an opportunity for open dialogue in which expectations for stepparent behavior may be addressed by stepchildren.

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Table 1

Descriptives for Paired-Samples t-test of Expectations for Stepparent Behavior and Actual Stepparent Behavior and Descriptives for Violation Valence of Actual Stepparent Behavior

	Expectation for Stepparent Behavior *M* (*SD*)	Actual Stepparent Behavior *M* (*SD*)	*t*-test	Expectation Violation of Stepparent Behavior *M* (*SD*)
Warmth Behavior	4.08 (1.42)	4.32(1.13)	-2.24*	.41(.45)
Control Behavior	3.57 (1.45)	3.75 (.91)	-1.37	.29(.42)
Affection Behavior	2.84 (1.63)	3.13 (1.52)	-2.16*	.28(.50)
Emotional Support Behavior	4.34 (1.57)	4.37 (1.56)	-.16	.42(.62)
Discipline Behavior	2.96 (1.51)	3.32 (1.33)	-2.76**	.20(.41)
Routine Behavior	3.52 (1.45)	3.68 (1.48)	-1.06	.24(.60)

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Correlations Among Actual Behavior Valence and Stepparent Conflict

	Warmth Valence	Control Valence	Affection Valence	Emotional Support Valence	Discipline Valence	Routine Valence
Stepparent Conflict	-.56*	-.46*	-.19	-.46*	-.17	-.39*
Stepparent Satisfaction	.73**	.48**	.37**	.72**	.26*	.56**

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. All valence items measured on a scale of -1, 0, +1.

Table 3

Linear Model of Predictors for Stepparent Conflict

	b	SE b	*t*
Constant	2.72	.13	20.33
Warmth Expectation	.01	.18	.09
Warmth Violation Valence	-1.41	.34	-.414**
Warmth Expectation*Valence	.14	.24	.57
R^2	.32		
Constant	2.71	.13	21.45**
Control Expectation	.09	.22	.42
Control Violation Valence	-1.43	.31	-4.63**
Control Expectation*Valence	.07	.60	.12
R^2	.24		
Constant	2.75	.14	19.41**
Affection Expectation	-.17	.20	-.84
Affection Violation Valence	-.34	.29	-1.15
Affection Expectation*Valence	-.004	.24	-.02
R^2	.05		
Constant	2.69	.15	18.30**
Emotional Support Expectation	.01	.14	.69
Emotional Support Violation Valence	-.95	.31	-3.02**
Emotional Support Expectation*Valence	.09	.15	.65
R^2	.22		
Constant	2.72	.14	19.63**
Discipline Expectation	.29	.23	1.22
Discipline Violation Valence	-.53	.36	-1.48
Discipline Expectation*Valence	-.17	.39	-.44
R^2	.07		
Constant	2.67	.15	18.31**
Routine Expectation	.14	.18	.76
Routine Violation Valence	-.81	.27	-3.002**
Routine Expectation*Valence	.18	.20	.92
R^2	.17		

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. b = unstandardized regression coefficients. All variables mean-centered.

Table 4
Linear Model of Predictors for Stepparent Satisfaction

	b	SE b	*t*
Constant	4.79	.13	37.85**
Warmth Expectation	.59	.19	3.15**
Warmth Violation Valence	1.81	.31	5.77**
Warmth Expectation*Valence	.25	.26	.99
R^2	.60		
Constant	4.86	.16	30.73**
Control Expectation	.26	.27	.96
Control Violation Valence	1.69	.38	4.44**
Control Expectation*Valence	-.16	.71	-.23
R^2	.25		
Constant	4.79	.16	29.57**
Affection Expectation	.51	.23	2.17*
Affection Violation Valence	.83	.33	2.49*
Affection Expectation*Valence	.33	.27	1.21
R^2	.19		
Constant	4.91	.14	34.45**
Emotional Support Expectation	.21	.14	1.51
Emotional Support Violation Valence	1.25	.29	4.17**
Emotional Support Expectation*Valence	-.16	.14	-1.12
R^2	.54		
Constant	4.87	.17	28.32**
Discipline Expectation	-.009	.30	-.03
Discipline Violation Valence	.92	.45	2.06*
Discipline Expectation*Valence	.07	.51	.14
R^2	.07		
Constant	4.92	.16	30.15**
Routine Expectation	.28	.22	1.30
Routine Violation Valence	1.007	.29	3.44**
Routine Expectation*Valence	-.24	.25	-.96
R^2	.36		

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. b = unstandardized regression coefficients. All variables mean-centered.

Appendix A

Survey

Instructions: Think about before your biological parent married your stepparent. What kinds of expectations did you have for your stepparent's behavior? Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the scale.

Before my stepparent married my biological parent, I expected him/her to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Ask how my day went.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hug me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Do fun activities with me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Compliment me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to spend time with me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Help me with my homework.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Give me advice.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Help me figure out how to solve conflicts with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfort me when I am upset.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Make sure that I do all of my homework.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Ask me how I am doing in school.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Set rules for me to follow.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Enforce rules that my biological parent has set for me to follow.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Discipline me when rules are not followed.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to make sure that I do not make the wrong kind of friends.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Before my stepparent married my biological parent, I expected him/her to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Hug me a lot.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Often say things like "I love you" to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Be very affectionate with me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Show love to me physically, like hugging.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Before my stepparent married my biological parent, I expected him/her to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Be available for me to count on no matter what.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Let me know they would help me get through hard times.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Be supportive of me whatever the situation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Help me when I need it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Before my stepparent married my biological parent, I expected him/her to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Have clear rules for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Know that there were serious consequences for breaking family rules.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have many family rules for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Understand that there would be swift punishment for violating family rules.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Before my stepparent married my biological parent, I expected him/her to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Do things with me even if it was more efficient to split up and work separately.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Set aside certain times to talk with me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Meet regularly with me to discuss things.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Instructions: When answering the following statements, please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the scale. Please refer to the actual behavior enacted by your stepparent during the first year following his/her marriage to your biological parent. You will be asked two follow-up questions after each statement regarding your stepparent's actual behaviors. When answering these questions, please refer to your responses to each behavior during the first year following your stepparent's marriage to your biological parent.

My stepparent asked me how my day went.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she asked you how your day went?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent hugged me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she hugged you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent did fun activities with me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she did fun activities with you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent complimented me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she complimented you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent tried to spend time with me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she tried to spend time with you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent helped me with my homework.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she helped you with your homework?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent gave me advice.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she gave you advice?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent helped me to figure out conflicts with others.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she helped you to figure out conflicts with others?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent comforted me when I was upset.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she comforted you when you were upset?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent made sure that I did all of my homework.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she made sure that you did all of your homework?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent asked how I was doing in school.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she asked you how you were doing in school?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent set rules that I had to follow.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she set rules that you had to follow?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent enforced rules that my biological parent had set for me to follow.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she enforced rules that your biological parent had set for you to follow?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent disciplined me when rules were not followed.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she disciplined you when rules were not followed?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent tried to make sure that I did not make the wrong kind of friends.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she tried to make sure that you did not make the wrong kind of friends?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent hugged me a lot.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she hugged you a lot?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent often said things like "I love you" to me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she said things like "I love you" to you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent was very affectionate with me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she was affectionate with you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent showed his/her love to me through physical means like hugging.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she showed love to you through hugging?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent was available for me to count on no matter what.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she was available for you to count on no matter what?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent let me know that he/she would help me get through hard times.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she let you know that he/she would help you get through hard times?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent was supportive of me whatever the situation.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she was supportive of you whatever the situation?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent helped me when I needed it.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she helped you when you needed it?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent set clear rules for me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she set clear rules for you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent knew that there were serious consequences for breaking family rules.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she knew that there were serious consequences for breaking family rules?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent had many family rules for me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she had many family rules for you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent understood that there would be swift punishment for violating family rules.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she understood that there would be swift punishment for violating family rules?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent did things with me even if it might have been more efficient to split up and do things separately.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she did things with you even if it would have been more efficient to split up and do things separately?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent set aside certain times to talk with me.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she set aside certain times to talk with you?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent met regularly with me to discuss things.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

To what extent did your stepparent meet your expectation regarding whether or not he/she met regularly with you to discuss things?							Did you view this behavior as positive, negative, or neutral in your relationship with your stepparent?		
Very much below expectation	Moderately below expectation	Slightly below expectation	My stepparent's behavior met my expectation exactly	Slightly above expectation	Moderately above expectation	Very much above expectation	Negative	Neutral	Positive
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Instructions: Please read the following statements and indicate your level of satisfaction on each item as it pertained to your relationship with your stepparent during the first year following his/her marriage to your biological parent using the following scale.

Reflecting back to the first year that your biological parent was married to your stepparent, how satisfied were you with:

	Extremely dissatisfied	Moderately dissatisfied	Slightly dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Slightly satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Extremely satisfied
The degree of closeness between you and your stepparent.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your stepparent's ability to cope with stress.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your stepparent's ability to be flexible.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your stepparent's ability to share positive experiences.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The quality of communication between you and your stepparent.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your stepparent's ability to resolve conflicts.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of time you and your stepparent spent together.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The way your stepparent discussed problems with you.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The fairness of your stepparent's criticism.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your stepparent's concern for you.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Instructions: Please read the following statements and indicate whether you agree or disagree on each statement as it pertained to your relationship with your stepparent during the first year following his/her marriage to your biological parent.

Reflecting back to the first year that your biological parent was married to your stepparent:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My stepparent and I fought a lot.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My stepparent and I sometimes became so angry with one another that we threw things.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My stepparent and I often criticized each other.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If there was a disagreement between my stepparent and I, we tried hard to smooth things over and keep the peace.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My stepparent and I rarely became openly angry with one another.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My stepparent and I hardly ever lost our tempers with one another.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

My stepparent and I believed you didn't get anywhere by raising your voice.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My stepparent and I often tried to one-up or out-do each other.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○