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Father–Daughter Bonds: A Comparison of Adolescent Daughters’ Relationships with Resident Biological Fathers and Stepfathers

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Author Note

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Abstract

Objective: To investigate whether the interpersonal dynamics of closeness are different in stepfather–stepdaughter versus father–daughter relationships during adolescence.

Background: Establishing a general process model of the relational factors contributing to greater closeness between fathers and daughters is a preliminary step toward examining variations in such processes.

Method: The data were from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health), a nationally representative sample of adolescents. Respondents were female adolescents who were living with either a biological father ($n = 1,881$) or stepfather ($n = 273$) and reported on the availability and involvement of their (step)fathers, as well as the communication and closeness in their relationship with him.

Results: Involvement and communication were predictors of closeness in both types of relationships, however, communication was a stronger predictor of closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters. For adolescent girls living with a stepfather, greater involvement with their stepfathers was associated with greater closeness to their non-resident biological fathers. The length of the relationship between stepfathers and stepdaughters was not associated with levels of closeness.

Conclusions: Overall, these findings suggest that stepfather–stepdaughter relationships reflect similar interpersonal dynamics as father–daughter relationships but that establishing and maintaining these relationships through meaningful communication may be particularly important for stepfathers and stepdaughters.

Implications: Practitioners working to help stepfamilies build stronger relationships may want to stress that investing in shared activities and maintaining meaningful communication can be particularly important for establishing and maintaining positive relationships between stepfathers and stepdaughters.

Keywords: father involvement, stepfathers, communication, parent–adolescent relationships, remarriage, stepfamilies

According to family systems theory, each dyadic relationship within a family makes an important contribution to individual development (Minuchin, 1985). Parent–child relationships also serve as templates for a child’s future relationships and impact his or her psychological adjustment as adults (Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001). Certainly this is true of adolescent girls’ relationships with their fathers. A daughter’s positive, affirming relationship with her father has been found to be associated with lower rates of adolescent risky sexual behavior, greater marital satisfaction, reduced fear of intimacy, and increased comfort with her own sexuality, as well as to offer protection against adult mental health problems (Ellis, Schlomer, Tilley, & Butler, 2012; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; 2003; Scheffler & Naus, 1999). Having a father in the home has been shown to have a positive impact on a daughter’s psychological well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991; Videon, 2005) and self-esteem and life satisfaction (Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan, & Blair, 1994). Despite the positive impact that strong father–daughter relationships can have on daughters, however, researchers have found that fathers tend to be less interested and involved in the lives of their daughters than in the lives of their sons (Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmar, 1998; Lewis & Lamb, 2003), that fathers and adolescent daughters tend to experience more conflict in their relationship with one another than do fathers and adolescent sons (Ganong, Coleman, Fine, & Martin, 1999), and that many adolescent girls express a desire for a closer relationship with their fathers (Way & Gillman, 2002).

Given the importance of the father–daughter relationship to a daughter’s development, it is imperative to understand the processes that result in her perception of closeness to her father. Establishing and validating a general process model of the factors contributing to greater father–daughter closeness is a preliminary step in examining person-level and dyad-level variations in such processes that have the potential to bridge the gap between generalized research findings and person-specific assessment, intervention, and treatment (Molenaar & Campbell, 2009). A clearer understanding of the processes and relational factors that influence closeness between fathers and their adolescent daughters thus may offer families and practitioners useful guidance in their efforts to strengthen family dynamics and improve the life satisfaction and prospects of adolescent girls.

Whereas most of the available research on fathers’ contribution to their daughters’ development has investigated daughters who reside with their biological fathers, the present study expands that focus to include both resident biological and resident non-biological fathers, in this case stepfathers. Over the past several decades, the number of adolescent girls living with a resident non-biological stepfather or father figure has increased, and research suggests that girls’ relationships with these social fathers are associated with their well-being in distinguishable and important ways (Bzostek, 2008; Marsiglio, 2010; White & Gilbreth, 2001). Given that residential stepfathers generally interact with their stepchildren on a daily basis, they may have as much or more influence on their stepdaughters as those girls’ biological but nonresident fathers. Daily contact, however, does not mean the relationships are necessarily close; in fact, researchers have found that stepfathers and adolescent stepdaughters often have difficulty interacting and often avoid or distance themselves from each other (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Kinniburgh-White, Cartwright, & Seymour, 2010). Girls have a harder time adjusting to stepfathers than do boys, and the presence of a stepfather accounts for greater well-being for boys but not for girls (Amato & Keith, 1991). Adolescent girls have been found to have more conflicts with their stepfathers and to be more likely to treat the stepfather as an intruder (Vuchinich et al., 1991). Nonetheless, researchers have also found that some stepfathers and stepdaughters appear to have developed warm, positive relationships that mimic and have the same positive associations with stepdaughters’ self-esteem and well-being as positive relationships between biological fathers and daughters (Haberstroh, Hayslip, & Essandoh, 2008; Kinniburgh-White et al., 2010). The purpose of this study was to better understand this variation in stepfather–stepdaughter relationships and the interpersonal dynamics that contribute to it.

With some notable exceptions (e.g., Collins, Newman, & McKenry, 1995), much of the research on the intricacies of stepparent–stepchild relationships has been qualitative and focused on the actions that stepparents can take to build positive relationships with their stepchildren (e.g., Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011; Kinniburgh-White et al., 2010). We sought to build on this work by utilizing a micro-level quantitative approach to examine a set of specific interpersonal features of the parent–child relationship, as assessed from adolescent daughters’ perspective, to develop a process model that captures the structure and dynamics of those interpersonal factors in the relationships between fathers and daughters as well as between stepfathers and stepdaughters and thereby offers additional insight into strategies that a father or stepfather could take to improve his relationship with his adolescent daughter or stepdaughter.

Surprisingly little research has examined the role of interpersonal factors in the quality of either father–daughter or stepfather–stepdaughter relationships during adolescence, even though Collins, Newman, and McKenry (1995) found that adolescents’ ratings of the overall quality and emotional tone of communication with their stepparent was

associated with greater subjective well-being, less negative affect, and more positive affect. As a starting point for investigating important interpersonal factors contributing to closeness between fathers and daughters, we turned to publicly available data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health), which conducted in-home interviews with adolescents in Grades 7–12 from a large, nationally representative sample of children living with either a biological father or with a stepfather at the time of data collection, in 1994–1995. The ADD Health study included items assessing closeness between (step)fathers and (step)daughters, as well as several items assessing the interactions between them. Specifically, information regarding father–daughter and stepfather–stepdaughter relationships was gathered via adolescent girls’ responses to a series of questions assessing the availability of their father or stepfather at certain times of the day, specific types of conversations and shared activities that had recently occurred between the girls and their father or stepfather, and the girls’ ratings of the closeness between them, including how much they felt their father or stepfather cared about them.

Conceptual Framework

Lamb’s (2010) conceptualization of father involvement organizes fathers’ roles and influence in their children’s lives into the three general factors of availability, involvement, and responsibility. Using this general framework to inform our conceptualization of father–daughter relationships, and with considerations of the constraints of the ADD Health data, we analyzed the girls’ responses according to four variables: the *availability* and *involvement* of the father and the *communication* and *closeness* between father and daughter. This, we deduced, could provide a glimpse into the interpersonal dynamics of father–daughter relationships and provide a base from which to explore the degree to which these variables may function in similar or different ways in stepfather–stepdaughter relationships. This approach is in line with previous research by King and colleagues (King, Amato, & Lindstrom, 2015; King, Thorsen, & Amato, 2014), who utilized this same public dataset to investigate factors in positive adolescent–parent relationships, although to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first in which a micro-level approach is taken to compare the relations or dynamics among those variables in father–daughter relationships to those in stepfather–stepdaughter relationships.

The first of these variables, the father’s *availability*, refers to the degree to which a father is present in the life of the child (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). Although availability is often assumed from family structure or living arrangement rather than measured directly, a few studies have shown that a father’s availability influences the amount of involvement, communication, or interaction that occurs between a father and daughter and thereby positively impacts father–daughter relationships (MacDonald & Parke, 1984; Snarey, 1993).

Involvement, or the degree to which fathers and adolescent daughters spend time together in shared activities, has also been found to be predictive of a positive father–daughter relationship (Brotherson, Yamamoto, & Acock, 2003). Among other things, father involvement has been linked to adolescents’ academic achievement (Gordon, 2016), lower rates of risky behavior (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, Capps, & Zaff, 2006), and emotional well-being across both adolescence and adulthood (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003).

Both the quantity and quality of the third variable, *communication*, have been shown to be important predictors of relational satisfaction in father–daughter relationships (Dunleavy, Wanzer, Krezmien, & Ruppel, 2011; Punyanunt-Carter, 2005). Previous findings have indicated that communication between fathers and daughters tends to be more limited than communication between mothers and daughters and that daughters tend to receive more positive treatment from their fathers than do sons (Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987), suggesting that differences in communication may be one of the factors that distinguish father–daughter relationships from other relationships within a family system (Russell & Saebel, 1997). Punyanunt-Carter (2005) also found that fathers’ and daughters’ satisfaction with their relationship was greatest when they communicated with one another for pleasure and when both parties engaged in communication maintenance behaviors.

Following previous research, the final variable, *closeness*, was used in the present study as a measure of the quality of father–daughter relationships (Jensen & Shafer, 2013). Closeness between a daughter and her resident biological father or stepfather has been found to be positively associated with the daughter’s self-esteem (Berg, 2003) and to predict lower levels of both internalizing and externalizing behaviors (King, 2006; White & Gilbreth, 2001). Research has also shown that closeness between a father and daughter is positively related to the daughter’s identity development, educational attainment, and future satisfaction with romantic relationships (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Morgan,

Wilcoxon, & Satcher, 2003; Snarey, 1993), and we suspected that closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters offers many of these same benefits, although these outcomes have not yet been tested in stepfather–stepdaughter relationships.

To investigate the dynamics among these variables, we first analyzed availability, involvement, and communication as predictors of closeness in the relationships between resident biological fathers and their daughters and for the relationships between resident stepfathers and their stepdaughters. We then compared the degree to which relations among those variables remained the same or played a more or less prominent role in the closeness between fathers and daughters and between stepfathers and stepdaughters. Based on previous research on the differences between the relationships of daughters with biological fathers and with stepfathers, we decided to investigate whether and how these variables might function differently in father–daughter relationships than in stepfather–stepdaughter relationships.

Given the different contexts in which father–daughter and stepfather–stepdaughter relationships are formed, there are reasons to suspect that relationships between stepdaughters and their resident stepfathers often unfold somewhat differently than the relationships between daughters and their resident biological fathers and thus that examining the impact of certain contextual factors that may influence stepfather–stepdaughter closeness may help explain such differences in their interpersonal dynamics. To assess the impact of contextual factors on closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters, we analyzed the effects of two covariates that we hypothesized might help explain those variations: the length of a stepdaughter’s relationship with her stepfather and the closeness of her relationship with her nonresident biological father. Previous research into stepfather–stepdaughter relationships has found that the quality of those relationships is likely to be affected by a number of external factors, including the length of time the stepfather has been involved in the daughter’s life (Marsiglio, 2004), the quality of the daughter’s relationship with her nonresident biological father, and his level of involvement in her life, although these findings have been inconsistent. Whereas White and Gilbreth (2001) concluded that stepfathers have the most influence on their stepchildren when those children’s relationship with their biological father is detached, King (2006) found that having a close relationship with both the stepfather and biological father was tied to better adolescent outcomes.

Method

Participants

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health; <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/projects/addhealth>) consists of longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample of adolescents in Grades 7–12 from 132 high schools and corresponding feeder middle schools. The complete sample included 20,745 middle school and high school students who were first assessed during the 1994–1995 school year through home interviews and questionnaires completed by the adolescents and a parent or parent figure (Harris et al., 2009). The data used in this study were limited to female adolescents’ reports from this first wave of data collection who were living with either a biological father ($n = 1,881$) or stepfather ($n = 273$). This sample excluded female adolescents who reported that they had never lived with a father or stepfather, as well as those who identified their primary father figure as someone other than a biological father or stepfather, such as an uncle or grandfather. Also excluded were daughters with resident fathers who were disabled, on the presumption that these relationships may have their own unique dynamics.

The age of the girls in this sample ranged from 12 to 21 years, with a median age of 16 years. Race was reported as a binary response (*yes* or *no*), with the following percentage of girls responding in the affirmative: 17.6% for African American, 3.9% for American Indian, 4.7% for Asian, 10.4% for Hispanic, 72.8% for White, and 6.2% for “other.” Of the girls who reported living with a stepfather, 7.3% indicated that they had always lived together, and another 7.7% reported living with their current stepfather for one year or less. About half, 50.2%, had lived with their current stepfathers 2–7 years, and the remaining 19.8% had lived with their current stepfather for more than 7 years (between 8 and 18 years).

Measures

To take advantage of the applicable measures provided by the ADD Health data, we utilized the available items to create composites intended to capture indicators of the constructs of closeness, availability, involvement, and communication. As noted earlier, closeness was used in the present study as a measure of the quality of daughters' relationships with their biological father or stepfather. Adolescents in the study reported how close they felt to their resident father or stepfather (response options ranged from *not at all* [scored as 1] to *extremely close* [5]) and how much they thought their resident father or stepfather cared about them (response options ranged from *not at all* [1] to *very much* [5]). These two items were moderately correlated ($r = .74$) and the mean response score of the two items was used to create a composite score for closeness between daughters and resident fathers or stepfathers. For daughters with resident stepfathers, an additional question rating their closeness to their nonresident biological father was also used to assess the possible impact of closeness to the biological father on the stepfather–stepdaughter relationship.

The availability of the resident father or stepfather was measured by the adolescents' mean response score to three questions: whether their resident father was home when they left for the day, returned home, and went to bed. Each item had response options ranging from *always* (1) to *never* (5).

Involvement and communication were both measured by asking the adolescents to indicate which of a list of things they had done with their father or stepfather in the previous 4 weeks. Involvement was assessed by five shared activities (shopping, sports, attending religious services, going to the movies, and working on a school project together) and communication was assessed by four shared topics of discussion (talking about dating or a party, personal issues, school work and grades, and school matters in general). Involvement and communication responses were coded as binary variables (*yes* [1] or *no* [0]), with composite scores ranging from 0 to 5 for involvement and 0 to 4 for communication.

Although these items from the ADD Health data have been used in a few other published studies (i.e., Cookston & Finlay, 2006; Ream & Savin-Williams, 2005), the specific items used to assess closeness, availability, involvement, and communication provide very limited measures of these constructs and should be considered formative indicators rather than reliable scales (closeness, $\alpha = .75$; availability, $\alpha = .23$; involvement, $\alpha = .45$; and communication, $\alpha = .52$). Correlations between individual items are presented in Table 1.

Results

As a first step in exploring the relations between various aspects of father–daughter and stepfather–stepdaughter relationships, we examined the bivariate correlations of our composite variables: availability, involvement, communication, and closeness (see Table 2). Correlations between availability and the other factors were quite low and generally negative, whereas involvement, communication, and closeness were all moderately and positively correlated.

Next, we examined the mean levels at which daughters reported their resident fathers' or stepfathers' availability, involvement, communication, and closeness (see Table 2). To test for mean differences between the results for resident fathers and stepfathers, an ANOVA was conducted using father type to investigate whether resident biological fathers and stepfathers differed in their reported engagement with and closeness to the respondents. The results indicated no statistical difference between father types on availability, $F(1, 2141) = 2.76, p = .097$, with resident fathers and stepfathers showing nearly equal levels of availability. The findings did indicate, however, a statistically significant difference between father types on involvement, $F(1, 2141) = 23.49, p < .001$. Resident biological fathers were rated as being more involved with their daughters than were stepfathers, although rates of involvement were notably low for both types of fathers. Results also indicated a statistically significant difference between father types on communication, $F(1, 2141) = 8.80, p = .003$, and closeness, $F(1, 2141) = 106.27, p < .001$, with resident biological fathers being rated higher on communication and closeness than were stepfathers.

Although levels of involvement, communication, and closeness differed by father type, we were most interested in investigating the degree to which these variables predicted closeness in father–daughter relationships and stepfather–stepdaughter relationships. Accordingly, two multiple regression analyses were conducted separately, first for

daughters living with their biological fathers and then for daughters living with a stepfather (see Table 3). We then conducted comparisons between the two models, comparing the amount of variance accounted for by the factors in each model and the contribution of each factor to closeness across the two models.

Using resident biological father data only, regression analyses indicated that, taken together, availability, involvement, and communication accounting for 14.9% of the variance in closeness between fathers and daughters, $F(3, 1874) = 110.51, p < .001$. Availability was a statistically significant weak negative predictor of closeness, whereas involvement and communication were statistically significant positive predictors.

Analyzing resident stepfather data only, regression analyses indicated that availability, communication, and involvement together accounted for 21.7% of the variance in closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters, $F(3, 267) = 25.92, p < .001$. Although availability was not a statistically significant predictor of stepfather–stepdaughter closeness, involvement and communication were both significant predictors.

Comparisons of R^2 between the two models using a Fisher r -to- Z transformation indicated no statistical difference in the amount of variance accounted for between the father–daughter model and the stepfather–stepdaughter model, $Z = 1.64, p = .101$. Likewise, a comparison of the beta coefficients for each individual factor across models indicated no difference in the contributions of availability ($Z = -0.26, p = .795$) and involvement ($Z = -1.14, p = .254$) in the two models. However, communication had a statistically higher loading in the stepfather–stepdaughter model than in the resident father–daughter model ($Z = -3.10, p = .002$), suggesting that communication may be more important to closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters than it is to closeness between resident biological fathers and daughters.

To examine whether the quality of stepfather–stepdaughter relationships might also be influenced by other contextual variables measured in the ADD Health data, namely the length of time the stepfather and stepdaughter had lived together and the daughter’s relationship with her nonresidential biological father, we conducted three separate multiple regression analyses using these two external variables and analyzed their contribution to the level of (a) stepfather involvement, (b) communication between stepfathers and stepdaughters, and (c) stepfather–stepdaughter closeness. The results are shown in Table 4.

Taken together, nonresident biological father closeness and length of the stepfather–stepdaughter relationship statistically predicted a minor portion of the variance in stepfather involvement, $R^2 = .05, F(2, 210) = 6.02, p = .003$. A stepdaughter’s closeness with her nonresident biological father weakly but positively predicted stepfather involvement, and the length of the stepfather–stepdaughter relationship was not a statistically significant predictor. Neither of the models predicting stepfather–stepdaughter communication and closeness according to the stepdaughter’s closeness to her nonresident biological father and the length of the stepfather–stepdaughter relationship were statistically significant.

Discussion

Given the documented difficulties (i.e. more conflict, more avoidance, and greater adjustment difficulty) in relationships between fathers and adolescent daughters and variation in the quality of stepfather–stepdaughter relationships (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Haberstroh, Hayslip, & Essandoh, 2008; Kinniburgh-White et al., 2010), we were interested in understanding the interpersonal dynamics that support greater closeness between fathers and daughters and between stepfathers and stepdaughters. Anticipating that stepfather–stepdaughter relationships might resemble father–daughter relationships in several ways, we investigated the internal dynamics of relationships between stepfathers and stepdaughters to understand whether and how they might differ. A major implication of our findings regarding the similarities in the factors shown to influence closeness with both biological fathers and stepfathers is that although stepfather–stepdaughter relationships may be less engaged and somewhat more strained than those with biological fathers, they, too, offer possibilities for the development of close relationships. Specifically, our finding that higher rates of involvement and communication were related to higher levels of closeness in both father–daughter and stepfather–stepdaughter relationships has implications for families and practitioners interested in improving and maintaining those relationships.

Unexpectedly, we found that availability was negatively related to closeness between both fathers and daughters and stepfathers and stepdaughters. Given that our measure of the availability of resident fathers and stepfathers was based on overlap in the times of day that they and the daughters were both at home, it may capture factors such as a father's employment status or work schedule or suggest that closeness may be more related to the quality of interactions during the time available to the dyads than to the amount of time they are both at home, factors over which family members may have little control.

These findings also suggest that communication may play a more prominent role in the closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters than in the closeness between resident biological fathers and daughters. A possible implication of this finding is that stepfathers taking an interest in and extending effort to discuss topics of importance in the lives of their adolescent stepdaughters may indicate a level of investment that is essential to the development and maintenance of closeness between stepfathers and stepdaughters, whereas daughters may take the investment of resident biological fathers more for granted. This interpretation aligns with previous recommendations that stepfathers attempt to build a friendship-type relationship with stepchildren prior to assuming a disciplinary role (Visher & Visher, 1996). The findings of our study, in which most of the girls had lived with their stepfathers for several years, further suggest that an *ongoing* investment in the relationship demonstrated by higher levels of meaningful communication on topics of interest to the stepdaughters is important to maintaining closeness during the adolescent years. Given the demonstrated impact of all types of father–daughter relationships on daughters' development (Marsiglio, 2010; Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001; White & Gilbreth, 2001), these results suggest that practitioners engaged in helping families build stronger relationships may want to stress the importance of spending time with and maintaining communication with adolescent girls—a recommendation, that, while not novel, may bear repeating considering the generally low levels of involvement between fathers and daughters generally (Lewis & Lamb, 2003).

With regard to the available external covariates in stepfather–stepdaughter relationships, we found that that closeness between daughters and nonresident biological fathers was not statistically predictive of closeness between daughters and stepfathers, which is in line with previous research that has found little association between these familial relationships (White & Gilbreth, 2001). In our data, however, stepfathers tended to be somewhat more involved when their stepdaughter and her biological father were close, a finding that aligns with other research demonstrating such a link (Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, & Bridges, 2004) and indicating that the manner in which stepfathers approach their relationships with stepchildren should be viewed as part of a larger family system that is also influenced by the nonresident biological fathers and their relationships with their children (Marsiglio, 2004). Findings regarding the links between children's relationships with their nonresident biological fathers and their relationships with their resident stepfathers are, however, incomplete and largely disparate, and thus more research is needed to understand how a daughter's relationship with her stepfather may be associated with, or even affected by, her relationship with her nonresident biological father.

This present study's findings indicate that a stepfather's involvement with his stepdaughter is negatively associated with the length of their relationship: the longer the stepfather and stepdaughter had lived together, the lower the reported level of involvement between them. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that most adolescents seek greater autonomy and spend less time with their families as they get older (Moretti & Peled, 2004). Another explanation may be that newer stepfathers tend to be more involved with their stepdaughters as they attempt to establish meaningful relationships with them, with that involvement decreasing over time, which would be consistent with previous research showing that stepfathers tend to disengage from their stepchildren over time (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Although we found that the level of involvement between stepfathers and stepdaughters was associated with the length of their relationship, this was not true of closeness, which seemed to be as likely to occur in shorter relationships as in longer ones. Although the trajectories of individual stepfather–stepdaughter relationships are likely quite complex and variable (Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011), these findings appear to have positive implications for the development of close stepfamily relationships, in that they suggest that closeness does not depend on having a lengthy or life-long relationship with the child and can be established and maintained even though the mechanisms of relationship maintenance, such as engaging in shared activities.

Limitations and Future Directions

It should be noted that our examination of the dynamics between adolescent girls and their resident fathers and stepfathers is limited by the nature of the ADD Health data. Despite the database's large and nationally representative sample, the data were collected more than two decades ago and lack many potentially important aspects of father–

daughter relationships, such as warmth, trust, and support for autonomy. Additionally, the limited constructs available in the data were measured by only one or a few items, which does not represent the full range of complexity involved in each construct and limits our ability to draw clear conclusions. Similarly, a high number of stepdaughters in the sample had lived with their stepfather for several years, but given that remarried families have higher rates of divorce (Amato, 2010), the length of these stepfather–stepdaughter relationships may not represent the most typical length of such relationships. Thus caution should be used in interpreting and applying these findings. Nonetheless, the large sample size available in these data provided adequate statistical power for making comparisons between biological fathers and stepfathers and examining a few factors that were found to characterize both father–daughter and stepfather–stepdaughter relationships, thereby providing a valuable contribution to research on the interpersonal dynamics between adolescent girls and their fathers and stepfathers.

Additional research is needed to more comprehensively assess the interpersonal dynamics of father–daughter relationships by measuring a broader range of variables with more precise measures. Developing a more comprehensive model of these relational dynamics from the perspectives of both daughters and (step)fathers would add much-needed specification to the acknowledgement that these relationships are reciprocal and could help identify important factors that may influence the closeness between biological fathers and their daughters and between stepfathers and their stepdaughters. A more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms contributing to closeness would also allow for a more informative comparison between father–daughter and stepfather–stepdaughter relationships and may suggest additional areas for researchers and practitioners to focus on in improving these relationships and child outcomes associated with being raised in a stepfamily.

More research is also needed to understand how contextual and relational factors influence stepfather–stepdaughter relationships and their trajectories over time. Although other research employing this database has focused on this issue (King, Amato & Lindstrom, 2015), replication of its results and those of this study with a more current sample is needed. Such research may shed light on important questions regarding the mechanisms underlying the association between the length of time stepfathers and stepdaughters have been living together and the reduced level of involvement between them.

Ultimately, more studies such as this one are needed to better understand the experiences and relationships between adolescent girls and their resident stepfathers given the growing evidence that healthy father–daughter relationships are associated with positive outcomes. Studies such as this one, and those recommended above, can play an important role in helping families and practitioners understand and support the development of positive bonds between daughters and all types of father figures.

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Table 1
Intercorrelations Between Measurement Items

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Closeness														
1. Close to dad	—													
2. How much he cares	.74**	—												
Availability														
3. At home when I leave	-.10	.03	—											
4. At home when I return	-.01	.02	.24**	—										
5. At home when I go to bed	-.15*	-.14*	-.01	.01	—									
Involvement														
6. Went shopping	.27**	.21**	-.07	-.01	-.06	—								
7. Played a sport	.28**	.21**	.00	.05	-.09	.25**	—							
8. Attended religious service	.20**	.17**	-.06	-.13*	-.01	.17**	.10	—						
9. Went to a movie	.17**	.08	-.08	-.04	.03	.26**	.17**	.15*	—					
10. Worked on a school project	.18**	.11	-.11	-.13*	.02	.15*	.10	.31**	.35**	—				
Communication														
11. Talked about life	.21**	.18**	-.03	.07	-.09	.17**	.09	-.01	.04	.06	—			
12. Discussed a personal problem	.23**	.14*	-.10	.02	-.09	.21**	-.03	.07	.19**	.15*	.22**	—		
13. Talked about school—grades	.28**	.29**	.02	.04	-.02	.09	.14*	.10	.10	.31**	.17**	.10	—	
14. Talked about school—other	.38**	.28**	-.03	-.02	.10	.13*	.21**	.17**	.13*	.33**	.18**	.17**	.58**	—

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

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for the Dimensions of Father–Daughter and Stepfather–Daughter Relationships

Variable	Fathers		Stepfathers		Availability	Involvement	Communication	Closeness
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Availability	2.72	0.90	2.81	0.88	—	-.10**	-.07**	-.13**
Involvement	1.19	1.16	0.83	1.10	-.12*	—	.22**	.31**
Communication	1.47	1.18	1.24	1.19	.02	.33*	—	.28**
Closeness	4.51	0.69	4.03	0.96	-.08	.35**	.41**	—

Note. Intercorrelations for fathers are above the diagonal and for stepfathers are below the diagonal.

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

Table 3
Regression Models Predicting Closeness Between Fathers and Daughters and Stepfathers and Stepdaughters

Variable	Fathers–Daughters $R^2 = .15 (n = 1,878, p < .001).$				Stepfathers–Stepdaughters $R^2 = .23 (n = 271, p < .001).$			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Availability	-.07	.02	-.09	< .001	-.05	.06	-.05	.369
Involvement	.15	.01	.26	< .001	.21	.05	.24	< .001
Communication	.12	.01	.21	< .001	.28	.05	.33	< .001

Table 4
Regression Models Predicting Stepfather–Stepdaughter Relationship Constructs

Variable	Involvement $R^2 = .05 (n = 213, p = .003)$				Communication $R^2 = .01 (n = 213, p = .377)$				Closeness $R^2 = .01 (n = 213, p = .482)$			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Length of stepfather–stepdaughter relationship	-.00	.00	-.12	.067	-.00	.00	-.10	.163	-.00	.00	-.05	.455
Stepdaughter’s closeness to her nonresident biological father	.15	.05	.18	.008	-.01	.06	-.01	.878	.04	.05	.06	.398