The Negative Effect of Living in a Stepparent Family on College Graduation: Searching for an Explanation*

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Abstract

This paper uses data from National Education Longitudinal Study to consider the effect of living in a stepparent family on the log-odds of college graduation. We find that children who lived with a stepparent in eighth grade not only have a lower log-odds of college graduation than children who lived with two biological parents, but they also do worse than children who lived with a mother only, once family income and parental education were controlled. *Some* of the difference between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with two biological parents is explained by the control variables, but a large part remains unexplained even after controls are taken into account. *Very little* of the difference, once family income and parental education were controlled, between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only is explained by the control variables. In the conclusion of the article we offer some potential explanations for why the likelihood of college graduation is negatively affected by residence in a stepparent home.

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Research on the impact of family structure on child outcomes is plentiful. Scholars have investigated, among other things, the extent to which family structure influences the academic, psychological, and/or behavioral outcomes of children (see Sun 2003; Thomson 1994; White and DeBlassie 1992; Zill 1994), the rate of parental investment in children (Hofferth and Anderson 2003), the amount of parental monitoring of children (Fisher et al. 2003), perceptions of closeness between adults and children (Sturgess et al. 2001), and the economic stability experienced by children both in their youth and after they reach adulthood (McLanahan 1985; McLanahan and Booth 1989).

We contribute to this literature by focusing on the relationship between family structure and one particular educational outcome – college graduation. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), we find that children who lived with a stepparent in eighth grade not only have a lower log-odds of college graduation than children who lived with two biological parents, but they also do worse than children who lived with a mother only, once family income and parental education were controlled. *Some* of the difference between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with two biological parents is explained by the control variables, but a large part remains unexplained even after controls are taken into account. *Very little* of the difference, once family income and parental education were controlled, between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only is explained by the control variables. In the conclusion of the article we offer some potential explanations for why the likelihood of college graduation is negatively affected by residence in a stepparent home.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the course of the last 30 years, divorce and non-marital childbearing have increased in the United States (Parnell et al. 1994; Seltzer 2000). One outcome of these changes has been an increase in the proportion of children living with only their mother at some point during childhood (Rindfuss and Jones 1991). Perhaps not surprisingly, these changes, coupled with the sharp rise in single-mother homes, have precipitated a great deal of research exploring the short- and long-term effects of family structure, especially single parenthood, on the well-being of children. Research finds, for instance, that children who are reared by single mothers lead more financially insecure lives in both childhood and adulthood (McLanahan 1985), are subject to more general life stresses, such as home and school moves (McLanahan 1983; Speare and Goldscheider 1987), and are more likely to experience early childbearing and/or nonmarital births (Bumpass and McLanahan 1989) than are children who are raised with both biological parents.

Moreover, research that is specific to the educational outcomes of children links single-parent homes to higher high school dropout rates (Coleman 1988; Wojtkiewicz 1993), lower overall levels of educational attainment (McLanahan and Booth 1989; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994), lower grade point averages and poorer attendance records (Astone and McLanahan 1991), and lower academic achievement scores (Thomson et al. 1992) than is true of children reared in two-parent homes. Attempts to discern the factors contributing to these differences have considered a variety of influences, including lower levels of social capital available to children of single parents (Coleman 1988) and less effective parenting when only one parent is present in the household (Thomson et al. 1992; Astone and McLanahan 1991). More than anything else, however, research finds that family income is a key variable accounting for the educational disadvantages experienced by children in single-parent – and especially single-mother – households (Thomson et al. 1994). In fact, up to 50 percent of the lower educational achievement of

children in single-parent homes has been attributed to low family income (Astone and McLanahan 1994).

The strong and consistent link between family income, single parenthood, and educational achievement has spawned related research on the relationship between family income, living in a stepparent home, and educational achievement. Initially, researchers asked if, given the presence of two potential income earners, children living with stepparents would fair as well as children living with two biological parents. On the face of it there seemed to be reason to assume that would be the case – if much of the negative effect of single parenthood was a consequence of financial instability stemming from a single (typically female) income earner, then it stood to reason that children in stepparent homes should do as well as children living with both biological parents. This, however, has not been found to be the case. Instead, study after study reveals that children who live with stepparents are as educationally disadvantaged as those who live with a single parent (see Astone and McLanahan 1991; Brooks-Gunn 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Thomson et al. 1992; Wojtkiewicz 1993; Zill 1994).

The question, then, is why? Scholars have offered a number of answers to this question. Astone and McLanahan (1994) suggest that at least part of the answer lies in the high number of residential and school disruptions that children in stepfamilies (and single-parent families) experience. According to their research, up to 30 percent of the difference in educational attainment between children living with stepparents and children living with two biological parents can be explained by differences in residential mobility. Moreover, they also suggest that relationship differences are at issue – parents in stepfamilies are generally less involved with their children and the children's schoolwork and hold lower overall educational aspirations for their children than do parents in two biological parent homes (Astone and McLanahan 1991). Relatedly, Zill (1994) claims that lower educational achievement in stepfamilies may be due to lower levels of parental

involvement and the residual effects of the marital conflict the children likely witnessed between their now-divorced biological parents. Zill also notes that while children in stepfamilies have more "resources" than children in single-parent homes (in the form of two adults in the household and higher levels of family income), they are, nonetheless, likely to be disadvantaged in terms of the number of siblings in the household with whom they must compete for those resources.

While it is likely true that each of these factors (residential moves, parental involvement and educational aspirations, and number of siblings) contributes to the continued educational disadvantages faced by children in stepfamilies, as of yet research has not considered their effects simultaneously. That is, we do not know, cumulatively, how much of the disadvantage they account for. In this article we, therefore, consider each of these factors, along with a number of other variables, in tandem in order to assess the degree to which they account for the educational disadvantages experienced by children in stepparent homes.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

We begin by estimating a baseline model that assesses only the relationship between family structure and likelihood of college graduation. We then estimate progressively larger models by adding sets of control variables. The control variables were chosen on the basis of previous scholarly attempts to account for the disadvantages children in stepfamilies experience relative to children in two-parent, biological families.

The first set of variables, designed to capture family socioeconomic status, includes family income and parental education. We begin with these control variables because of the consistent and strong effect that family socioeconomic status has been shown to have on children's educational outcomes.

The second set of variables, which taps into general demographic

characteristics within the family, includes race/ethnicity, gender, the number of siblings, and the number of family transitions (measured by number of school changes during high school). Previous research on the effects of race/ethnicity and gender finds that non-Hispanic whites have higher chances of college graduation than African Americans and that females have higher chances than males (see Baker and Velez 1996). To the degree that these variables are related to family structure, controlling for them might explain the effects of family structure on college graduation. In regard to siblings, we expect that children in stepfamilies will have more siblings than children in mother-only or two biological parent families, given that each remarried adult has the potential to bring children from their previous marriage into the new union. Since those with more siblings have lower chances of college graduation (Steelman and Powell 1989), we expect the number of siblings to be a disadvantage for children in stepparent families compared to children in other family types. Relatedly, we expect that children in stepfamilies will have more school changes than children in other groups and that school changes will be a relative disadvantage with respect to college graduation (see generally Sandefur et al. 1992; Tucker et al. 1998).

The third set of variables, designed to tap into educational expectations, includes the respondent's educational expectations, his or her parents' expectations, and the likelihood of receiving financial support for higher education from his or her parents. Parental readiness to contribute to college expenses is measured by whether the parent believed there was a way to get money for college and whether money had been saved for college.

The fourth set of variables measures the educational achievements of the student-respondent by considering school engagement as well as the respondent's grades and test scores in eighth grade. School engagement is measured as the number of times respondent missed school, was late, or was without his or her homework in the previous four weeks. Previous research suggests that school engagement, grades, and test scores depend upon parental

education, family income, race/ethnicity, and gender (Johnson et al. 2001; Pong 1997). Given this is the case, we enter the educational achievement variables *after* family socioeconomic status and demographics have been accounted for. Because previous research has consistently found children in stepfamilies do as poorly as children living with single parents, our general expectation is that children in stepfamilies will be disadvantaged on education variables relative to children in two-parent, biological families, but similarly situated to children in mother-only families.

DATA

The study uses data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). Data were collected in 1988 from a sample of 25,000 eighth-graders with follow-ups in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. In this analysis, the independent variables, with one exception, are measured in 1988 when the respondents were in eighth grade. Number of school changes is measured in 1992 using data from respondents in school and from those who dropped out. The dependent variable is measured in 2000 when most respondents were eight years out of high school. The sample is restricted to those who participated in the 1988, 1992, and 2000 waves of the survey resulting in a sample size of 11,277.

VARIABLES

Table 1 describes the variables in the analysis. The dependent variable is whether the respondent had received a bachelor's degree by 2000. Given that the last wave of NELS used in this study was in 2000, those respondents who received their bachelor's degree at a later date were counted as not graduating college. Thus, the college graduation variable in our analysis captures whether graduation occurred within about eight years of the normal time for high school graduation.

[Table 1 about here]

The independent variable of interest is family structure in 1988. This is a cross-sectional measure that captures whether the respondent was living with two biological parents, a biological parent and stepparent, a mother only, a father only, or in some other arrangement at the time of the eighth grade survey. While we would prefer to measure family structure with measures that capture variation in exposure to different family types and the number of changes, there is no information on family type experiences before 1988.

The key task in this analysis is to examine the degree to which various control variables explain the negative effect of living in a stepparent family on college graduation. The control variables used in this analysis are listed in Table 1 along with the definition of how each variable is measured.

ANALYSIS

The NELS data is clustered at the school level. In order to take into account the clustering aspect of the sample design, we use Huber-White methods for variance estimation in our regressions.

The first logistic regression model in Table 2 shows that without controlling for other variables, children who lived with two biological parents in eighth grade had higher log-odds of graduating college than those who lived with a stepparent. While there is no significant difference in this model between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only, this difference is significant in later models. Neither in this model, nor in any of the others, is the difference between those living with a stepparent and biological parent and those living with a father only statistically significant. Therefore, we do not discuss the coefficient for father-only families in the remainder of the paper. In analyses not shown, we check for significant difference between children who lived with a mother and stepfather and children who lived with a father and stepmother. There is no significant difference between these two groups, therefore, we combine them

into one category throughout the analysis.

[Table 2 about here]

The second model in Table 2 adds family income as reported by a parent. The difference in the log-odds of college graduation between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with two biological parents decreases slightly when family income is added. On the other hand, the difference in college graduation between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only increases noticeably and becomes significant when family income is controlled. Children who lived with a stepparent had an advantage in income over children who lived with a mother only and once that advantage is controlled, children in mother-only family are significantly more likely to graduate college than children in stepparent families. The third model in Table 2 includes parental education. Similar to the findings for family income, the difference between those who lived in stepparent families and those who lived in two biological parent families decreases slightly, compared to the first model, while the difference between those who lived with a stepparent versus a mother only increases and becomes significant.

The fourth model in Table 2 includes both family income and parental education at the same time. The difference between children who lived with a stepparent and children who lived with two biological parents decreases 11 percent when family income and parental education are controlled but the bulk of the difference found in the first model remains. On the other hand, the difference between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only triples, going from .198 to .601, and becomes statistically significant. In short, controlling for family socioeconomic status decreases the educational differences between children in stepfamilies and two biological parent families, but it increases the difference between children in stepfamilies and single mother families, such that children raised by a mother only are more likely to graduate college.

Having accounted for the effect of family socioeconomic status, the

remainder of the analysis considers the individual and cumulative effects of thirteen other variables on the likelihood of college graduation for children in stepparent families relative to children in mother-only or two biological parent families. Thus, the latter four models in Table 2 control for race/ethnicity, gender, siblings, and school changes, respectively. The advantage in the log-odds of college graduation that children in two biological parent families have relative to children in stepfamilies decreases once siblings and school changes are added. Children in stepfamilies are more likely to have more siblings and to have experienced more school changes than children in two biological parent families; when these disadvantages are controlled, the difference in college graduation between children in these two types of families decreases noticeably.

Controlling for race/ethnicity and gender actually increases the difference in the log-odds of college graduation between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only. Children in mother-only families are more likely to be male and in a disadvantaged minority group, groups that graduate at lower rates, so when these variables are controlled, the coefficient for children who lived with a mother only increases. On the other hand, children who lived in mother-only families have fewer siblings than those who lived in stepparent families; when number of siblings is controlled, the gap in the log-odds of college graduation between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only decreases. The coefficient for mother only families does not change very much when the number school changes is controlled.

[Table 3 about here]

The first model in Table 3 includes the first six control variables. Compared to the model where only family income and parental education are controlled, the coefficient for those who lived with two biological parents drops from 1.068 to .873, a decrease of 18 percent. The coefficient for the mother-only variable decreases from .601 to .576 with the addition of the four

additional control variables, a decrease of four percent. The change for the mother-only coefficient is not as great as the change for the two biological parents coefficient because race/ethnicity and gender work in one direction and siblings in the other for the mother-only coefficient.

The other models in Table 3 include controls for respondent and parental educational expectations as well as parental financial support for college. Children who lived with two biological parents have somewhat higher educational expectations than children who lived with a stepparent, and when this advantage is controlled, the gap between the two groups decreases. Parental expectations work in the same manner. When controlling for whether the respondent's parents believe there is a way to get money for college, the difference between children in stepfamilies and children in two biological parent families increases. Parents in stepparent families are somewhat less pessimistic about the likelihood of getting money for college than are parents in two biological parent families. Whether the respondent's parents have saved for college does little to explain the difference between children in stepparent families and children in two biological parent families. Given the modest influence of these variables, the disadvantage in the log-odds of college graduation for children who lived with a stepparent relative to those who lived with two biological parents decreases only 3 percent when they are controlled.

These four variables, however, do a better job of explaining the difference between those who lived with a stepparent and those who lived with a mother only. Of these four variables, parental expectations is a particularly strong explanatory factor. The results indicate that parents of children in mother-only families have higher educational expectations than parents of children in stepparent families. The gap in college graduation between children in mother-only families and those in stepparent families decreases noticeably when parental expectations are controlled. Respondent expectations work in the same manner, although to a lesser extent.

Controlling for whether the respondent's parents have saved money for college or whether they believe there is a way to get money for college does little to explain the difference. Overall, these four variables explain nineteen percent of the difference between children in mother-only families and those in stepparent families.

[Table 4 about here]

Table 4 shows the results for the last five control variables. When test scores are controlled, the difference between children who lived with a stepparent and children who lived with a mother only increases. The difference also increases when grades are controlled, but to a lesser extent. It appears that, with other variables controlled, children who lived with a stepparent have higher test scores and grades than do children who lived with a mother only. It also appears that children who lived with a stepparent missed school less, were late for school fewer times, and came to school without homework less often than children in mother-only families. Overall, children from stepparent families are relatively advantaged on the five control variables added in Table 4, so when these variables are controlled, the difference between children in stepfamilies and mother-only families actually increases by 14 percent.

Grades and test scores work in opposite directions when considering the difference in college graduation between those in stepparent families and two biological parent families. The difference increases when test scores are controlled but decreases when grades are controlled. On the other hand, children in stepparent families appear to be somewhat disadvantaged on the variables for missed school, times late, and being without homework because when these variables are controlled the difference between children in stepfamilies and two biological parent families decreases. When all five control variables in Table 4 are included in the regression, the difference in college graduation between those in stepparent families and those in two biological parent families decreases by four percent.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ours is not the first study to examine the effect of family structure on educational outcomes (see Astone and McLanahan 1991; McLanahan and Booth 1989; Thomson et al. 1992; Wojtkiewicz 1993). Moreover, ours is not the first to find that once family income is controlled, children living in stepparent homes not only fare worse than children living in two biological parent homes, but they also fare as badly as, or worse than, children living with single parents (Brooks-Gunn 1994; Zill 1994). Previous scholars have speculated that much of the negative effect of living with a stepparent stems from the number of residential moves and school disruptions these children likely face (Astone and McLanahan 1994), the lower educational aspirations that parents in stepfamilies generally hold for their children (Astone and McLanahan 1991), or the tendency for such families to have higher numbers of children, thereby necessitating the "spreading" of resources (including time and money) (Zill 1994).

In this research we endeavor to assess the cumulative effect of these factors – that is, we consider the extent to which they can, when considered in tandem, explain the lower likelihood of college graduation among children raised in stepparent homes relative to their counterparts in single parent and two biological parent homes. We find that family socioeconomic status and family demographics – particularly the number of siblings one has and the number of school transitions one has made – account for the largest percentage of the existing educational differences between children raised in stepfamilies and children raised in two biological parent families. Together, these two sets of variables account for 29 percent of the initial difference between these two family types. Since in total our analysis accounts for 32 percent of the initial difference, socioeconomic status and family demographics were the strongest explanatory factors.

With respect to the difference between children in stepfamilies and

mother-only families, we find that once family socioeconomic status is controlled, those in stepfamilies are less likely to graduate college. Explorations of variables that might reduce this difference suggest that single mothers have higher educational expectations for their children (controlling for these expectations decreases the difference between children in stepfamilies and mother-only families), but these same children have more problems with missing school, being tardy, and failing to complete their homework than is true of children in stepfamilies (controlling for these, thus, increases the difference). In total, the difference in college graduation among those in stepfamilies and those in mother-only families decreases 11 percent when controls are added.

What is most noteworthy about our findings is the amount of difference left *unexplained*. Some 68 percent of the difference between children in stepfamilies and two biological parent families remains unexplained, while 89 percent of the difference between children in stepfamilies and mother-only families cannot be accounted for with the variables included in our analyses. The remaining difference presents an intriguing challenge to explain. Given that is the case, some discussion of what else might be at work here seems warranted.

Recently, Ginther and Pollack (2004) have suggested that the stressful nature of the stepfamily may be one reason why children living in these families have worse educational outcomes (including lower high school and college graduation rates, lower years of schooling, and lower math and reading scores) than children living with two biological parents (see also White 1994). This is certainly a plausible explanation for the difference, especially in light of much of the extant literature on the challenges associated with blending two families and the lack of normative rules that might assist in this process (Cherlin 1978).

For instance, much research suggests that there is a marked disjuncture between children's and adults' perceptions of the stepparent role. Whereas

children report conceiving of their stepparents as friends or advisors who hold less authority and decision-making rights than do their biological parents, adults – residential biological parents as well as stepparents – believe the ideal role for a stepparent is that of "parent" (Coleman et al. 1996; Fine et al. 1998, 1999). This disjuncture likely arises because societal understandings of step-relationships remain ambiguous and undefined (Cherlin 1978); consequently, stepfamily members are left to construct family relationships in their own ways – stepparents and stepchildren apparently do this differently (Fine et al. 1998). To the extent that this is true, stepparents may attempt to exert more authority over their stepchildren than those children believe they should, thereby contributing to the "fragile, tenuous, and ... hostile" relationships that are often said to characterize the stepfamily home (Coleman et al. 1996: 46).

Yet, close consideration of Ginther and Pollack's study suggests this is only a partial explanation. Working from the vast research that suggests that children living with two biological parents have better educational outcomes than children living with a stepparent or single parent, they examine blended families – families where one or both of the spouses have children from previous relationships but also have a biological child between them – to see if the protective effect of living with two biological parents (for the child of the remarried couple) continues to hold even when at least some members of the household are involved in a step-relationship (the new spouse and the children from the previous relationships). Remarkably, they find that the biological children in blended families *do not* receive the same kinds of protective effects that biological children in "original" families receive. At least with respect to educational outcomes, biological children in blended families do as poorly as stepchildren and they do worse than children living in single parent homes.

If the different effects we see in stepfamilies are due to the stresses associated with negotiating unclear and culturally undefined stepparent-

stepchild roles, one might assume that biological children who do not have to negotiate culturally ambiguous parent-child roles will benefit from the presence of two biological parents regardless of whether they live in a blended or nonblended family. The fact that this is not the case suggests that there is more going on than merely the stress of negotiating the stepparent-stepchild relationship. We are not saying that the lower educational outcomes of the biological children in blended families are entirely unrelated to the stresses associated with negotiating step-relationships – those stresses may, in fact, exert some generally negative impact on all the family members. We are, however, suggesting that because biological children in blended families appear to receive *no* protective benefits from living with both of their biological parent (they do *as poorly as* stepchildren and *worse* than children living with single parents), the effect of living in a stepfamily is, at the very least, more nuanced than the suggestion that ambiguous parent-child relationships lead to lower educational attainment.

Some of that nuance may be located in the *meaning* individuals attach to living in a stepfamily home. Substantial research suggests that stepfamilies are stigmatized in American society and this stigma may well influence the way individuals come to understand their own family lives (Coleman et al. 1996; Ganong and Coleman 1997; Ganong et al. 1990).

Although people readily recognize that non-nuclear family forms do exist, Ganong and Coleman (1997) argue that the nuclear model has nonetheless had a profound and negative influence on society's views about stepfamilies. As one example of this stigma, they point to the language used to discuss biological parent and stepparent families. Biological parents are often referred to as "real" parents or "natural" parents, thereby suggesting that nonbiological parents, including stepparents, are somehow less real and even abnormal in the lives of children. Individuals referred to as "stepparents"

are evaluated more negatively than those referred to as a "parent" or those given no label at all (Ganong et al. 1990; see also Fine et al. 1998), and Martin, Anderson, and Mottel (1999) contend that the prefix "step" "signifies distance in a relationship and that the relationship is nonvoluntary" (281).

While language can certainly be an indicator of the negative views attributed to stepfamilies, it can also be a powerful *influence* on those views. In short, language not only shapes one's perception of the environment, but it may influence that environment as well. Language has, for instance, been shown to perpetuate and reinforce sexism and racism in the United States (see Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Hofstadter 1985; Moore 2001). It has been implicated in the production of cultural ideas regarding masculinity and femininity (Coates 1998), and it has been argued to be fundamental to the divide between liberal and conservative politics (Lakoff 1996).

Language, then, can be both an indicator of cultural conceptions of the family and a vehicle through which those conceptions are shaped, molded, and perpetuated. Because humans create, understand, and recreate their social worlds through symbolic systems (Cassirer 2001; Mead 1956; Stryker 1980) and because one of the most fundamental symbols is language, the way people talk about stepfamilies can dramatically impact a person's experience with and understanding of family relationships (see generally Lakoff and Johnson 2001; Zerubavel 1991). It is quite possible, then, that members of stepfamilies internalize these negative views which negatively impacts their perceptions of and experiences within their family. In other words, family *means* something different if it involves nonbiological relationships. Moreover, to the extent that biological relationships are considered *the* basis for the family (Modell 1994, 2002), this difference in meaning appears to be detrimental to members

of the stepfamily household.

This difference in meaning can arise from the process of negotiating ambiguous and culturally undefined family relationships, but, as the discussion above suggests, it likely comes from other cultural influences as well – namely, the negative societal views of stepfamilies that are created and perpetuated, in part, through language[1]. Of course, we are not claiming that the meaning individuals attribute to stepfamilies is the ultimate explanation for the remaining difference in college graduation between children reared in stepfamilies and those reared in either two biological parent or mother-only families. Our study does not, and cannot, test such an assertion. We are merely speculating that the meaning people assign to different family forms might be at issue here. If there is any merit to our speculations, future research should examine the influence of family perceptions on educational outcomes, including the likelihood of college graduation.

Ultimately, whether family perceptions, family stresses, some combination of both, or entirely different explanatory variables are explored in future research, it is clear that new inquiries are needed. Even after considering all of the previously hypothesized influences on the differences in educational outcomes between children in stepfamilies and those in two biological parent and mother-only families, this study is unable to account for a significant percentage of the difference. As our title suggests, we are, therefore, left searching for an explanation.

[1]We are not suggesting that language is the sole mechanism through which negative views of stepfamilies are created and sustained. We are merely using language as one means through which these negative attitudes are communicated to individuals. The point is that negative societal views, regardless of how they are communicated, likely influence one's perceptions of family.

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Table 1. Description of Variables

Variable	Definition
Dependent:	
College Graduation	Whether or not student had received a bachelor's degree by 2000
Independent Variable of Interest:	
Family Structure	Stepparent/biological parent, mother only, two biological parents, father only, and other
Control Variables:	
Family Income	Midpoints of fifteen income categories
Parental Education	Years of education for parent with most education
Race/ Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic white, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and other
Gender	Male or female
Siblings	Number of siblings
Respondent Expectations	Years of education that respondent expects to earn
Parental Expectations	Years of education that respondent's parent expects respondent to earn
No Way to Get Money	Parent does not see any way of getting enough money for respondent to go to college: true or false
Saved for College	Saved any money for respondent's education after high school: yes or no
Test Scores	Standardized test composite for reading and mathematics
Grades	Mean of respondent self-reports of grades in English, mathematics, science, and social studies
School Changes	Number of times respondent changed school since eighth grade
Missed School	Number of days missed school in past four weeks
Times Late	Number of times late for school in past four weeks
Without Homework	How often come to class without homework in past four weeks

Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Effects of Family Structure Type and Control Variables on Log-Odds of College Graduation, First Two Sets of Control Variables

	No Controls	Family Income	Parental Education	First Two Control Variables	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Siblings	School Changes
Stepparent	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast
Mother Only	.198	.624*	.401*	.601*	.696*	.646*	.452*	.605*
Bio. Parents	1.198*	1.089*	1.120*	1.068*	1.066*	1.098*	.953*	.937*
Father Only	.252	.325	-.021	.073	.085	.167	-.015	.305
Family Income	-	.024*	-	.013*	.012*	.013*	.012*	.013*
Parental Ed.	-	-	.407*	.331*	.322*	.340*	.325*	.340*
White	-	-	-	-	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast
African Amer.	-	-	-	-	-.354	-	-	-
Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-.549*	-	-	-
Asian	-	-	-	-	.306	-	-	-
Male	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast
Female	-	-	-	-	-	.443*	-	-
Siblings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.189*	-
School Change	-	-	-	-		-	-	-.704*

Table 3. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Effects of Family Structure Type and Control Variables on Log-Odds of College Graduation; Third Set of Control Variables

	First Six Control Variables	Resp. Expect.	Parental Expect.	No Way to Get Money	Saved for College	First Ten Control Variables
Stepparent	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast
Mother Only	.576*	.525*	.474*	.568*	.567*	.466*
Bio. Parents	.873*	.858*	.855*	.890*	.876*	.847*
Father Only	.333	.235	.232	.316	.310	.148
Resp. Expect.	-	.383*	-	-	-	.274*
Par. Expect.	-	-	.392*	-	-	.273*
No Way to Get Money for College						
False	-	-	-	contrast	-	contrast
True	-	-	-	-.435*	-	-.269
Haven't Thought	-	-	-	-.237	-	-.058
Saved Money						
Yes	-	-	-	-	contrast	contrast
No	-	-	-	-	-.175	-.061
Don't Know	-	-	-	-	-.031	-.121

Note: Each of the models above also includes variables for family income, parental education, race/ethnicity, female, siblings, and school changes.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Effects of Family Structure Type and Control Variables on Log-Odds of College Graduation; Fourth Set of Control Variables

	First Ten Control Variables	Test Scores	Grades	Missed School	Times Late	Without Homework	All Control Variables
Stepparent	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast	contrast
Mother Only	.466*	.537*	.476*	.509*	.476*	.477*	.533*
Bio. Parents	.847*	.905*	.793*	.844*	.826*	.831*	.810*
Father Only	.148	.311	.458	.120	.112	.167	.455
Test Scores	-	.063*	-	-	-	-	-
Grades	-	-	1.227*	-	-	-	-
Missed School							
Never	-	-	-	contrast	-	-	contrast
1 or 2 Days	-	-	-	-.313*	-	-	-.198*
3 or 4 Days	-	-	-	-.606*	-	-	-.427*
5 to 10 Days	-	-	-	-.597*	-	-	-.359*
More than 10	-	-	-	-1.172*	-	-	-.520
Times Late							
Never	-	-	-	-	contrast	-	contrast
1 or 2 Days	-	-	-	-	-.267*	-	-.057
3 or 4 Days	-	-	-	-	-.435*	-	-.208
5 to 10 Days	-	-	-	-	-.246	-	.522
More than 10	-	-	-	-	-.966*	-	-.365
Without Homework							
Never	-	-	-	-	-	contrast	contrast
Seldom	-	-	-	-	-	-.296*	-.078
Often	-	-	-	-	-	-.716*	-.208
Usually	-	-	-	-	-	-.840*	-.258

Note: Each of the models above also includes variables for family income, parental education, race/ethnicity, female, siblings, school changes, respondent expectations, parental expectations, no way to get money, and saved for college.