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Family Management Practices and Positive Youth Development in Stepfamilies and Single-Mother Families. By: Beckmeyer, Jonathon J.; Su-Russell, Chang; Russell, Luke T.. Family Relations, Feb2020, Vol. 69 Issue 1, p92-108, 17p, 1 Diagram, 4 Charts
Abstract: Objective: To determine how engagement in family management practices (i.e., parent–youth closeness, knowledge of youth's friends, shared family meals, and media monitoring) is associated with positive developmental outcomes for youth living in diverse family structures. Background: As patterns of unmarried childbearing, cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage have changed in the United States, youth increasingly live in diverse family structures. Limited research, however, addresses positive youth development in these families. Specific family tasks and caregiver constellations in the home may mean that youth in different family structures benefit differently from family management practices. Method: Using data from 9,131 households with a 12- to 17-year-old child in the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health, structural equation modeling was used to test whether four family management practices were associated with two positive youth developmental outcomes (flourishing and extracurricular activity participation). Multigroup analyses tested for differences in the associations across family structures. Results: Family management practices were generally positively associated with positive youth development. The strength of associations between specific family management practices and positive youth developmental outcomes, however, varied across family structures, suggesting that practices may have differing effectiveness depending on family context. Conclusion: Understanding mechanisms that promote positive youth developmental outcomes in diverse family structures and how mechanisms may function differently across family contexts can broaden the sophistication of family theories and interventions. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR] 10.1111/fare.12412; (*AN 141076722*)
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Keywords: family structure; multigroup analysis; positive youth development; single-mother family; stepfamily

Approximately, 48% of children under age 18 in the United States live in single-parent, remarried, or cohabiting families (Pew Research Center, [62]). In response to the prevalence of youth living in structurally diverse families, scholars have advocated for researchers to identify factors (e.g., family management practices—parental efforts to manage children's behavior and provide them with warmth and support) that promote youth well-being within those family structures (Amato, [3]; Ganong, Coleman, & Russell, 2015; Murry & Lippold, [56]). Further, recent conceptualizations of youth well-being have emphasized the importance of focusing on positive developmental outcomes in addition to the absence of problem behaviors or health conditions (Lerner, Lerner, & Benson, [48]; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, [65]; Russell, Beckmeyer, & Su-Russell, 2018). Yet few studies on the well-being of youth living in diverse family structures have incorporated a positive youth development perspective (Beckmeyer & Russell, [7]; Ganong et al., 2015). In the present study, data from the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) was used to identify family management practices associated with positive developmental outcomes for youth living in four common contemporary family structures: married stepfamilies, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced/separated single-mother families, and never-married single-mother families. Specifically, we tested whether four family management practices (parent–youth closeness, knowledge of youth's friends, family meals, and media monitoring) were associated with two positive developmental outcomes (youth flourishing and extracurricular activity participation). Finally, using multigroup analyses, we determined whether family management practices benefitted youth differently within each family structure.

Diversifying Family Structures

Changing patterns of unmarried childbearing, cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage have contributed to the growing diversity of family structures in the United States (Pearce, Hayward, Chassin, & Curran, [61]). In 1960, approximately 73% of U.S. children were reared by their married biological parents (Pew Research Center, [62]). Today, the National Center for Health Statistics ([58]) reports that 40.3% of all births are to unmarried parents. Approximately 15% of these births are to single mothers without a romantic partner, whereas 26% are to cohabiting mothers (Wu, [80]). Since 1980, births to cohabiting mothers have increased by a factor of four (Wu, [80]). Cohabitation has also led to an increase in the prevalence of stepfamilies formed through cohabitation, with an estimated 45% of contemporary stepfamilies being cohabiting stepfamilies (Eickmeyer, [24]). Finally, relational instability in cohabitation and divorce mean that many children will spend at least part of their childhood raised in single-parent, separated-parent, or stepparent families (Pew Research Center, [62]). Current estimates suggest that between 24% and 26% of all U.S. children are being raised in a single-parent household, most often by single mothers (approximately 21%) compared with single-fathers (approximately 3%; Eickmeyer, [25]), 15% are being raised in married stepfamilies, and approximately 7% live with cohabiting parents (Pew Research Center, [62]). To build a comprehensive understanding of how these changes in family structure shape youth's developmental experiences, there is a continued need for multidisciplinary and strengths-oriented research on resiliency rather than adversity (Amato, [3]; Murry & Lippold, [56]; Russell, Beckmeyer, & Su-Russell, 2018).

Theoretical Frameworks

Family systems theory and the social determinants of health (SDOH) framework both provide insights into how living in structurally diverse families may shape youth well-being. Family systems theorists contend that family structure is intimately tied to how subsystems, boundaries, and hierarchies organize family relationships (Cox & Paley, [17]; Demo & Buehler, [22]). For example, stepparent and single-mother families experience context-specific tasks and challenges including managing relationships with nonresidential parents (Elam, Sandler, Wolchik, & Tein, [26]; Russell, Beckmeyer, Coleman, & Ganong, [67]); (re)negotiating family roles, responsibilities, and relationships (Emery, [28]; Coleman, Ganong, & Russell, [15]; Jensen, [42]; Stewart, [72]); and changes in financial well-being and employment (Fox, Han, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, [30]; McLanahan & Percheski, [53]; Murry & Lippold, [56]). Those challenges and tasks have implications for the internal organization and dynamics of stepfamilies and single-mother families, setting the stage for the presence, or absence, of promotive parenting practices (Amato, [3]; Bumpus &

Rodgers, [12]; Murry & Lippold, [56]). Further, those challenges and tasks may result in youth living in different family structures benefiting from some family management practices but not others (Beckmeyer & Russell, [7]).

The SDOH framework posits that economic, social, political, and cultural factors create stratified social groupings with differential social prestige, power, and access to resources, leading to health inequality and inequity (Marmot, [51]; Marmot, Friel, Bell, Houweling, & Taylor, [52]). Recently, Deatrick ([21]) and Russell, Coleman, and Ganong (2018) proposed that diverse family structures (i.e., structures other than married nuclear families) represent stratified social groups. Thus, a SDOH framework highlights how social systems, stigmas, and perceived social prestige (or disregard) can constrict or alter family practices available to individuals and family members as they live their daily lives (Deatrick, [21]; Russell, Beckmeyer, & Su-Russell, 2018; Russell, Coleman, & Ganong, 2018). For example, social prescriptions regarding how one should stepparent (e.g., engaging in less hands-on parenting and discipline; Ganong & Coleman, [34]; Jensen, [42]; Jensen & Howard, [43]) and ongoing stigma associated with being a single parent or stepparent (Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette, & Gosselin, [74]) may influence the presence and effectiveness of different family management practices (Beckmeyer & Russell, [7]). Additionally, Cherlin ([14]) has articulated that stepfamilies are incompletely institutionalized, meaning stepfamilies lack cultural norms and expectations for how to relate to one another in the aftermath of divorce and remarriage. This is especially apparent when stepfamilies are compared with first-marriage nuclear families in which there are clearer prescriptions and expectations for family roles and relationships. The growing prevalence of, and ambiguous legal and social ties inherent in, cohabiting stepfamilies may further influence the capability or effectiveness of parents to implement family management practices across diverse family structures (Brown & Manning, [11]; Sweeney, [73]). Finally, single-mother families typically experience greater economic strain than two-parent families (McLanahan & Percheski, [53]; Murry & Lippold, [56]), leading to working more hours (Fox et al., [30]). Thus, single-mothers' abilities to implement some family management practices may also be limited by their employment experiences. Taken together, family systems theory and the SDOH framework support an expectation that the tasks and challenges encountered by structurally diverse families can shape youth's experiences within families, thereby affecting their development.

Positive Youth Development

Youth development and public health scholars have expressed that problem-free youth are not necessarily healthy youth (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, [65]; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health, [77]). In particular, a positive youth development perspective emphasizes the importance of youth, regardless of family structure, developing characteristics and accessing resources that promote a holistic sense of thriving and flourishing (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, [9]; Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, [13]; Lerner et al., [48]; Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, Lewin-Bizan, & Bowers, 2010). Therefore, resiliency among youth living in structurally diverse families can be conceptualized as the attainment of positive developmental outcomes (Beckmeyer & Russell, [7]; Russell, Beckmeyer, & Su-Russell, 2018). In the present study, we focused on two positive youth development outcomes assessed in the 2011–2012 NSCH: youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities.

In the 2011–2012 NSCH, *flourishing* is conceptualized as the degree to which youth follow through with tasks, control their emotions, demonstrate curiosity, and are interested in school (see Measures for specific items). That conceptualization aligns with the expectation that emotional control, delaying gratification, and persisting when faced with challenging tasks are critically important for promoting youth flourishing (Farley & Kim-Spoon, [29]; Larson & Rusk, [47]; Lerner et al., [48]; Moore, Bethell, Murphey, Martin, & Beltz, [54]). Those self-regulatory abilities are expected to promote youth success in multiple domains including academics, social relationships, and engaging in health promoting behaviors (Lerner et al., [49]; Moore et al., [54]). Extracurricular activities (i.e., organized activities that take place outside of the regular school day) provide youth with unique opportunities to gain skills, intra- and inter-personal competence, and build meaningful connections with adult mentors (Fredricks & Simpkins, [31]; Mueller, Lewin-Bizan, & Urban, [55]; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, [65]; Vance, 2016). Therefore, participation in extracurricular activities is both an indicator of positive development and a primary context for youth to attain other positive developmental outcomes (Agans et al., [2]; Guèvremont, Findlay, & Kohen, [39]). Positive youth development, including youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities, is expected to result, at least in part, when youth's strengths are aligned with appropriate resources and opportunities (Lerner et al., [49], [48]).

Family Management Practices

We contend that family management practices are significant resources that can promote positive youth development. This is consistent with the expectation that parents promote positive, and minimize adverse, behaviors when they appropriately regulate youth's behaviors and environments and maintain a warm and supportive presence in their lives (Amato & Fowler, [4]; Darling & Steinberg, [18]; Wang, Dishion, Stormshak, & Willet, [78]). Further, family management practices involve multiple family subsystems, and their meanings and implementation can be shaped by social systems outside the immediate family. Thus, family management practices are consistent with our family system theory– and SDOH-based expectations for how family structure may shape positive youth development. In the present study, we focused on four family management practices that were assessed in the 2011–2012 NSCH: (a) parent–youth closeness, (b) knowledge of youths's friends, (c) eating family meals, and (d) media monitoring.

Although it is normal for youth to pursue personal autonomy as they mature (Rote & Smetana, [64]; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006), youth still seek out and rely on their parents for instrumental and social support (Rosenthal & Kobak, [63]; Withers, McWey, & Lucier-Greer, [79]). A close and responsive relationship with parents can help youth develop self-regulation (Deater-Deckard, [20]; Farley & Kim-Spoon, [29]) and support their participation in extracurricular activities (Kang, Raffaelli, Bowers, Munoz, & Sampkins, [45]). When parents know their child's friends, they can use that information to determine appropriate rules and limits for youth based on concerns (or the absence of) they may have about how youth and their friends spend their time together (Abar, Jackson, & Wood, [1]). Increasingly, researchers have identified shared family meals as an important influence on youth health and development (Fruh, Fulkerson, Mulekar, Kendrick, & Clanton, [32]; Goldfarb, Tarver, Locher, & Preskitt, [38]), including positive youth development (Edwards & Pratt, [23]; Elgar, Craig, & Trites, [27]; Fulkerson et al., [33]). Family meals may be particularly important contexts for promoting positive youth development because they provide opportunities for parents and youth to discuss interests, concerns, and family life. Finally, media monitoring (also referred to as media mediation) refers to parental efforts to control the amount and types of media (e.g., television viewing, video games, and social media) their children consume (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, Dyer, & Yorgason, [60]; Valkenburg, Piotrowski, Hermanns, & de Leeuw, [75]). Media monitoring involves parents engaging with youth about the media they consume, and thus it may provide opportunities for parents to learn about youth's interests and reinforce expectations for their behavior. Consistent with those expectations, researchers have found positive associations between media monitoring and positive developmental outcomes including self-regulation and prosocial behavior (Padilla-Walker et al., [60]; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, & Collier, [59]).

Present Study

Research on youth well-being in structurally diverse families often reflects a deficit perspective, focusing on comparing different indices of well-being between youth living in structurally diverse families to those living with both biological parents (Amato, [3]; Ganong & Coleman, [34]). In reaction to that approach, scholars have called for strengths-based research, using within-group approaches, to identify factors that promote resiliency among youth living in structurally diverse families (Beckmeyer & Russell, [7]; Ganong et al., 2015; Murry & Lippold, [56]). Doing so is crucial for understanding the mechanisms that help youth positively adapt to the challenges of living in diverse family structures and developing helpful interventions for these families.

Drawing on family systems theory and an SDOH framework, we used data from the 2011–2012 NSCH to identify family management practices associated with positive youth development among 12- to 17-year-old children living in married stepfamilies, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced/separated single-mother families, or never-married single-mother families. Specifically, we tested whether close parent–youth relationships, knowing youth's friends, eating family meals, and monitoring media were positively associated with youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities. Our second aim was to determine whether the associations between family management practices and positive youth development were similar across the four family structures. We tested the possibility that youth in different family structures may benefit from some but not other family management practices or benefit with different degrees of magnitude. To do so, we conducted a multigroup analysis (described subsequently) that allowed us to compare statistically the strength of the associations between each family management practice and each positive youth development outcome between the four family structures.

Method

Participants

As noted, the present study used data from the 2011–2012 NSCH. The NSCH is a cross-sectional nationally representative survey of U.S. households with a child aged between 0 and 17 years. Within each household, a target child is randomly chosen to be the focus of the survey. A parent then completes the survey with regard to the target child. Our use of NSCH was reviewed and approved as exempted research by the authors' institution institutional review boards.

For this study, we limited the overall NSCH sample based on the following criteria (a) the target child was between 12 and 17 years old and (b) the family structure was married stepfamily, cohabiting stepfamily, divorced/separated single-mother family, or never-married single-mother family. The final sample comprised 9,131 households (see Table for demographics).

Sample Demographics by Family Structure (N = 9,131)

Variables	Married stepfamily (n = 2981) % or M (SD)	Cohabiting stepfamily (n = 577) % or M (SD)	Divorced or separated single-mother (n = 4244) % or M (SD)	Never married single-mother (n = 1329) % or M (SD)
Youth age	14.70 (1.72)	14.45 (1.79)	14.68 (1.74)	14.37 (1.73)
Youth female	48.7%	48.9%	49.1%	49.0%
Youth race				
White non-Hispanic	68.6%	52.4%	60.6%	26.8%
Black non-Hispanic	10.0%	15.5%	15.1%	43.6%
Hispanic	12.0%	20.8%	14.0%	15.7%
Other	9.4%	11.3%	9.6%	13.8%
Youth with at least one chronic health condition	33.1%	40.7%	38.2%	42.4%
Maternal education				
Less than high school	7.1%	16.7%	9.2%	16.1%
High school graduate	23.4%	29.9%	21.7%	31.5%
More than high school	68.5%	53.4%	69.1%	52.4%
Family poverty level				
At or below 100% FPL	12.2%	27.9%	27.1%	44.5%
100%–133% FPL	7.6%	11.6%	12.1%	14.1%
133%–150% FPL	1.7%	3.1%	2.3%	1.3%
150%–185% FPL	7.5%	9.0%	8.9%	8.1%
185%–200% FPL	2.8%	2.3%	3.1%	2.2%
200%–300% FPL	18.8%	19.2%	17.4%	12.0%
300%–400% FPL	15.5%	10.1%	9.7%	5.6%
Above 400% FPL	33.8%	16.8%	19.4%	12.3%

Measures

All measures of family management practices, positive developmental outcomes, and control variables in the NSCH and used in this study were developed by a technical expert panel (for further details see Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health, [19]). The items used in the present study have been used in previous research on youth well-being using data from the NSCH (e.g., Kandasamy, Hirai, Ghandour, & Kogan, [44]; Ruest, Gjelsvik, Rubinstein, & Amanullah, [66]; Russell, Beckmeyer, & Su-Russell, 2018).

Family management practices. As noted previously, the 2011–2012 NSCH included four family management practices: parent–youth closeness, knowledge of child's friends, family meals, and media monitoring. *Parent–youth closeness* was measured with the item "How well can you and [target child] share ideas or talk about things that really matter?" Parents rated the item on a 4-point scale (1 = *not well at all* to 4 = *very well*). *Knowledge of child's friends* was measured with the item "Regarding [target child's] friends, would you say that you have met all of his/her friends. Parents rated the item on a 4-point scale (1 = *none of his/her friends* to 4 = *all of his/her friends*). *Family meals* was measured with the item "During the past week, on how many days did all the family members who live in the household eat a meal together? Responses could range from 0 to 7���days. *Media monitoring* was measured with two items: (a) "Do you monitor the content of what he/she watches on TV, plays on the computer, or does on electronic devices?" and (b) "Do you limit the amount of time he/she spends watching TV, playing on the computer, or using electronic devices?" There were two responses for each item (1 = *yes* or 0 = *no*). We created the media monitoring variable by summing the two items, so it had a range from 0 to 2.

Positive developmental outcomes

We included two positive developmental outcomes: youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities. *Youth flourishing* was measured with five items: "He/she finishes the tasks he/she starts and follows through with what he/she says he'll/she'll do," "He/she stays calm and in control when faced with a challenge," "He/she shows interest and curiosity in learning new things," "He/she cares about doing well in school," and "he/she does all required homework." Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). To account for shared variance and measurement error among the items we chose to represent youth flourishing as a latent construct, rather than computing a scale score (Kline, [46]). We tested a measurement model for youth flourishing and the latent construct fit the data well: $\chi^2(45) = 1623.949$, $p < .001$, comparative fit index (CFI) =.917, root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) =.062, and standard root mean squared residual (SRMR) =.029. Additionally, standardized factor loadings ranged from.560 to.682 (all significant at $p < .001$). *Participation in extracurricular activities* was measured with three items. Parents were asked (yes or no) if in the past 12 months the target child had (a) played on a sports team, (b) participated in any clubs or organizations, or (c) been involved in community service. We created scores for participation in extracurricular activities by summing the items.

Control variables

Guided by family systems theory, the SDOH framework, and the prior literature on family structure and youth well-being (e.g., Beckmeyer & Russell, [7]; Ben-Arieh, [8]), we included five control variables in our analyses. Specifically, we controlled for youth age, race/ethnicity (White = 1 or non-White = 0), maternal education (less than high school = 1, high school graduate = 2, greater than high school = 3), family poverty level (eight categories ranging from 0 = *at or below 100% poverty level* to 8 = *above 400% poverty level*), and if youth had a chronic health condition (yes = 1 or no = 0).

Analysis Plan

We used Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, [57]) to test a structural equation model (SEM) to determine whether family management practices were associated with youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities. The path model controlled for mother's education; family poverty level; youth age and race/ethnicity; and whether youth had a chronic health condition. We used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors to produce parameter estimates and full information maximum likelihood estimation to account for missing data. In addition to the model chi-square statistic, we used three fit indices to evaluate the model: the CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR. On the basis of Hu and Bentler's (1990) recommendations, good fitting models will have CFIs greater than.90, RMSEAs less than.05, and SRMRs less than.08.

Following the recommendations of Satorra ([70]), our multigroup analysis involved two phases. In the first phase, we compared chi-square differences and model fit indices between the null and alternative models. In the null model, all parameter coefficients between family management practices and the outcomes of interest (youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities) were constrained to be equal across four family structures; in the alternative model, all paths were freed to vary across all family structures (Kline, [46]). If the alternative model provided a better fit for the data, then we can assume that the associations between the family management practices and positive youth development outcomes differed across the family structures (Satorra, [70]). To delineate potential differences between the four family structures, the second phase of the multigroup analyses compared path associations between six pairs of family structures: Pair 1—married stepfamilies and cohabiting stepfamilies; Pair 2—married stepfamilies and divorced/separated single-mother families; Pair 3—married stepfamilies and never-married single-mother families; Pair 4—cohabiting stepfamilies and divorced/separated single-mother families; Pair 5—cohabiting stepfamilies and never-married single-mother families; and Pair 6—divorced/separated single mother families and never-married single-mother families. For each comparison, we compared the chi-square of a partially constrained null model and an alternative model with freely varying paths. If the models differed, we used the partially constrained model as a base model, and one path at a time was freed to identify which particular path(s) significantly differed between the family structures. Tables and present descriptive statistics and correlations among variables by family structure.

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables Among Youth in Married Stepfamilies (Below Diagonal; n = 2981) and Cohabiting Stepfamilies (Above Diagonal; n = 577)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Parent–child closeness	—	.236	.163	.151	.349	.345	.417	.384	.324	.236
2. Number of friends parents know	.200	—	.085	.070	.146	.140	.169	.107	.165	.188
3. Number of days having a meal together	.136	.088	—	.235	.156	.113	.171	.179	.136	.006
4. Parents' media monitoring	.058	.047	.224	—	.105	.078	.159	.067	.079	.139
5. Follows through tasks	.268	.186	.079	–.022	—	.477	.342	.450	.438	.095
6. Calm when facing challenges	.284	.210	.083	–.015	.447	—	.358	.337	.343	.200
7. Interested in learning new things	.275	.175	.134	.076	.337	.335	—	.426	.223	.249
8. Cares about doing well in school	.263	.150	.074	.000	.437	.312	.390	—	.611	.239
9. Does all required homework	.224	.189	.072	.012	.476	.328	.296	.620	—	.160
10. Number of activities youths involved in	.137	.196	.058	.095	.168	.215	.206	.228	.206	—
M married stepfamilies	3.55	2.94	4.58	1.59	3.68	3.77	4.19	4.20	4.12	1.98
SD	.62	.69	2.20	.64	1.04	.97	.90	1.00	.99	1.00
M cohabiting stepfamilies	3.54	2.91	4.80	1.55	3.67	3.72	4.24	4.19	4.08	1.70
SD	.69	.74	2.19	.67	1.14	1.07	.93	1.06	1.07	1.01

1 * $p<.05$.

- 2 ** $p<.01$.
- 3 *** $p<.001$.

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables Among Youth in Divorced/Separated Single-Mother Families (Below Diagonal; n = 4244) and Never Married Single-Mother Families (Above Diagonal; n = 1329)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Parent–child closeness	—	.208	.111	.076	.243	.272	.289	.263	.237	.103
2. Number of friends parents know	.222	—	.114	.120	.161	.169	.168	.162	.155	.144
3. Number of days having a meal together	.156	.101	—	.157	.104	.048	.121	.106	.129	.014
4. Parents' media monitoring	.078	.058	.215	—	.018	.014	.149	.101	.100	.107
5. Follows through tasks	.249	.172	.087	.008	—	.404	.339	.391	.434	.076
6. Calm when facing challenges	.278	.172	.076	.024	.450	—	.330	.321	.318	.092
7. Interested in learning new things	.298	.158	.132	.104	.347	.350	—	.410	.335	.181
8. Cares about doing well in school	.261	.122	.096	.071	.460	.335	.418	—	.599	.195
9. Does all required homework	.245	.151	.106	.089	.476	.337	.345	.650	—	.134
10. Number of activities youths involved in	.105	.148	.028	.082	.146	.170	.183	.245	.201	—
M divorced/separated single-mother families	3.58	3.01	4.61	1.55	3.69	3.74	4.23	4.22	4.12	1.89
SD	.63	.71	2.23	.66	1.07	1.00	.92	1.02	1.04	1.02
M never-married single-mother families	3.57	2.93	4.80	1.60	3.59	3.69	4.26	4.27	4.12	1.65
SD	.67	.77	2.26	.63	1.18	1.10	.95	1.05	1.07	1.05

- 4 ** $p<.01$.
- 5 *** $p<.001$.

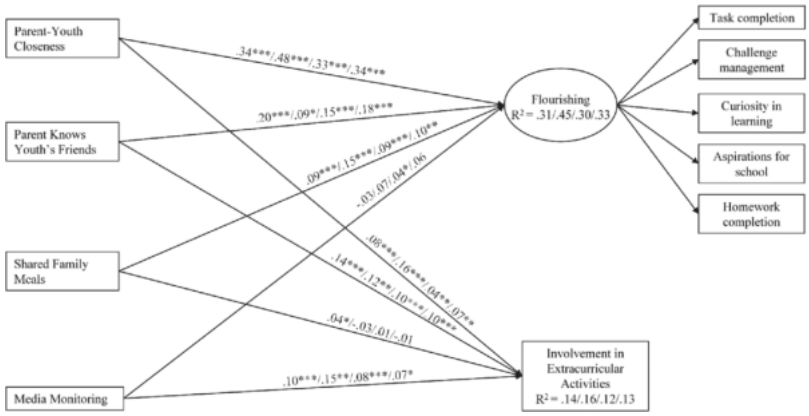
Results

SEM Analysis for Full Sample

The SEM model testing the associations between the family management practices and youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities, using the full sample, fit the data well: $\chi^2(44) = 907.789$, $p<.001$, CFI =.940, RMSEA =.046, and SRMR =.023. Parent–youth closeness was significantly associated with youth flourishing (β =.35, $p<.001$) and number of extracurricular activities (β =.06, $p<.001$). Similarly, knowing children's friends was also associated with youth flourishing (β =.17, $p<.001$) and number of extracurricular activities (β =.11, $p<.001$). Family meals were associated with youth flourishing (β =.10, $p<.001$) but not with number of extracurricular activities. (β =.01, p =.261). Media monitoring was significantly associated with number of extracurricular activities (β =.09, $p<.001$) but not youth flourishing (β =.02, p =.055).

Multigroup Analysis

We first tested a partially constrained null model in which all parameter coefficients between family management practices and the outcomes of interest (youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities) were constrained to be equal across the four family structures: $\chi^2(257) = 1158.616$, $p<.001$, CFI =.937, RMSEA =.039, and SRMR =.028. We then tested an alternative model in which all parameter coefficients were allowed to vary across the four family structures: χ^2 (188) = 1013.395, $p<.001$, CFI =.943, RMSEA =.044, SRMR =.024 (see Figure). The chi-square difference test comparing the null and alternative models was significant: Δ $\chi^2(69) = 145.221$, $p<.001$. Therefore, the alternative model fit the data better (Satorra, [70]), meaning there were differences across the four family structures.



*Associations between family management practices and positive developmental outcomes in youth when path coefficients are allowed to vary freely across family structures. Statistics are for married stepfamilies, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced/separated single-mother families, and never-married single-mother families. Root mean square of approximation =.044, comparative fit index =.943, Tucker–Lewis index =.916, standard root mean squared residual =.024, χ2(df = 188) = 1013.395, p <.001. Error terms, factor loadings, and covariates (maternal education, family poverty level, youth age and race/ethnicity, and whether youth has special health care need) not displayed. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.*

To determine whether the associations between the family management practices and youth flourishing and extracurricular activity participation differed across family structures, we conducted a series of multigroup analyses in which models were compared between the four family structures in six pairs. This allowed us to compare the associations between each pair of family structures (e.g., married stepfamilies compared with divorced/separated single-mother families). The difference between the partially constrained null model and alternative model was significant between all six comparisons: (a) married stepfamilies and cohabiting stepfamilies, Δ $\chi^2(23)$ = 42.293, p =.008; (b) married stepfamilies and divorced/separated single-mother families, $\Delta\chi^2(23) = 54.457$, $p<.001$; (c) married stepfamilies and never-married single-mother families, $\Delta\chi^2(23) = 69.675$, $p<.001$; (d) cohabiting stepfamilies and divorced/separated single-mother families, $\Delta\chi^2(23) = 38.736$, p =.021; (e) cohabiting stepfamilies and never-married single-mother families, $\Delta\chi^2(23) = 37.65$, p =.028; and (f) divorced/separated single-mother families and never-married single-mother families, $\Delta\chi^2(23) = 46.333$, p =.003.

To determine which specific paths were driving differences across the family structures we systematically compared partially constrained null models and alternative models for each pair of family structures compared in the previous set of analyses. In constructing the alternative models, we set each path between the family management variables and positive youth development outcomes to vary freely between the family structures, one path at a time. Table displays the Δ χ^2 tests of the path-by-path comparisons results across family structures. Due to space limitations, here we highlight only those comparisons in which significant differences in paths were identified. When comparing married and cohabiting stepfamilies, the associations between parent–youth closeness and youth flourishing and shared family meals and youth flourishing differed. When comparing married stepfamilies and divorced/separated single-mother families, the associations between media monitoring and youth flourishing and the associations between parent–youth closeness and extracurricular activity participation differed. When comparing cohabiting stepfamilies and divorced/separated single-mother families, the associations between parent–youth closeness and youth flourishing and the associations between parent–youth closeness and extracurricular activity participation differed. There were no other significant differences in the associations between family management practices and youth flourishing or extracurricular activity participation across the other family structure comparisons.

Δ χ2Test Results When Paths Sequentially Set Free Across Family Structure Comparisons

	Δ χ^2 Comparison					
	Pair 1	**Pair 2**	**Pair 3**	**Pair 4**	**Pair 5**	**Pair 6**
Paths Set Free	**Married Stepfamily vs. Cohabiting Stepfamily Δ χ^2 (1)**	**Married Stepfamily vs. Divorced or Separated Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)**	**Married Stepfamily vs. Never Married Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)**	**Cohabiting Stepfamily vs. Divorced or Separated Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)**	**Cohabiting Stepfamily vs. Never Married Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)**	**Divorced or Separated Single-Mother vs. Never Married Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)**
Closeness→flourishing	6.132	.416	1.403	5.001	3.571	1.772
Knows youth's friends→flourishing	2.754	1.400	.163	.975	1.559	.322
Shared family meals→flourishing	5.008	1.000	1.039	3.318	1.332	.152
Media monitoring→flourishing	3.813	6.191	4.505	1.021	.172	.107

Paths Set Free	Δ χ^2 Comparison Pair 1 Married Stepfamily vs. Cohabiting Stepfamily Δ χ^2 (1)	Pair 2 Married Stepfamily vs. Divorced or Separated Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)	Pair 3 Married Stepfamily vs. Never Married Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)	Pair 4 Cohabiting Stepfamily vs. Divorced or Separated Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)	Pair 5 Cohabiting Stepfamily vs. Never Married Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)	Pair 6 Divorced or Separated Single-Mother vs. Never Married Single-Mother Δ χ^2 (1)
Closeness→extracurricular activities	1.641	4.459	1.296	5.617	3.096	.818
Knows youth's friends→extracurricular activities	1.344	2.987	3.163	.509	.316	.578
Shared family meals→extracurricular activities	2.342	1.866	2.138	1.042	.333	.641
Media monitoring→extracurricular activities	.942	1.070	.284	2.019	.427	.929

6 * $p < .05$.

Discussion

Overall, our results support the expectation that family management practices are associated with positive development among youth living in structurally diverse families. Specifically, parent–youth closeness and knowing children's friends are both related to greater youth flourishing and participation in extracurricular activities. Additionally, eating meals as a family is associated with greater youth flourishing, and media monitoring is associated with participation in more extracurricular activities. Our multigroup analyses, however, demonstrate that the strength of the associations for some of these family management practices are different depending on youth's family structure. Most notably, our findings demonstrate that parent–youth closeness and shared family meals have a stronger positive association with positive developmental outcomes for youth living in cohabiting stepfamilies (compared with youth in married stepfamilies and divorced/separated single-mother families), that media monitoring is only associated with youth flourishing in divorced/separated single-mother families, and that parent–youth closeness has a weaker (although still positive) association with youth involvement in extracurricular activities for youth in divorced/separated single mother families (compared with their peers in married and cohabiting stepfamilies).

Family management practices may be particularly important in these structurally diverse families given that a common challenge for stepfamilies and single-mother families is establishing and maintaining consistent family routines (Beck, Cooper, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, [6]). From a family systems perspective, it may be that positivity within the parent–youth subsystem (represented by the presence of these family management practices) spills over into other parts of the family system. If that is the case, parent–youth closeness, knowing youth's friends, sharing family meals, and media monitoring might be creating beneficial spillover, helping youth and their families overcome their challenges, leading to a family context that promotes youth's positive development. For example, family management practices that become ritualized (e.g., shared meals or media consumption) may provide youth with beneficial stability within their families (Malaquias, Crespo, & Francisco, [50]). Family management practices, especially parent–youth closeness, may also be important for building and maintaining affinity within stepfamilies (i.e., a sense of friendship, companionship, and appreciation; Ganong & Coleman, [34]; Jensen, [42]) and ensuring youth in singlemother families feel supported and cared for (Wang et al., [78]). For example, knowing about youth's friends, sharing family meals, and parents' active media monitoring may lead to discussions about what is going on in youth's lives. Those discussions may help parents identify opportunities for youth to participate in extracurricular activities (Kang et al., [45]). Further, in stepfamilies, greater closeness between parents and youth may help build affinity, leading to youth being more willing to accept stepparents (Ganong, Coleman, Chapman, & Jamison, 2017). If youth are more accepting of their stepparent, youth maybe more likely to respond positively when stepparents attempt to help them build their self-regulation.

Although our results illustrate that family management practices are positively associated with positive youth development in each of these four family structures, some may be more beneficial for youth living in specific diverse family structures. According to the SDOH framework, those differences may reflect that family structure shapes how families are able to carry out their daily experiences (Russell, Coleman, & Ganong, 2018). For example, when we conducted the multigroup analyses, media monitoring was only significantly associated with youth flourishing in divorced/separated single-mother families. This is surprising because the broader literature on media monitoring consistently finds benefits for multiple aspects of youth well-being; however, those studies have primarily focused on indices of risk behavior rather than positive development outcomes (Collier et al., [16]). It is possible that the timing of entrances and exits from specific family structures could be driving these findings. We suspect that divorced/separated single-mother families may be the least likely family structure in our sample to include new romantic partners (as any such parents with new partners would likely be included in one of the stepfamily categories). When new romantic partners enter a family, stepchildren may be more prone to perceive media monitoring (particularly increased media monitoring) as an unacceptable display of disciplinary regulation by an adult (but not necessarily parental) figure (Ganong et al., 2015; Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, [36]). Thus, how youth interpret family management practices may depend on the family context in which they are occurring (Pearce et al., [61]). A second group difference is that family meals are only significantly associated with extracurricular activity in married stepfamilies. The recognition and expected family stability that comes with marriage may mean that family meals have a different significance and allow for more meaningful affinity building or identification of opportunities for extracurricular involvement in married stepfamilies. It is also possible that the lack of associations between family meals and extracurricular activity participation is the result of youth activities making it difficult for families to have shared meals. That is, the time and resources families invest in youth activities may mean that they are unable to dedicate time to shared family meals. Finally, across the multigroup analyses, it appears that the associations between family management practices and positive youth development are strongest for youth living in cohabiting stepfamilies. Cohabiting stepfamilies may be the least institutionalized family structure in our analyses, resulting in greater perceived ambiguity in family relationships and stability (Brown & Manning, [11]; Stewart, [72]). Therefore, when these families successfully implement family management practices, youth may perceive greater stability in their families, have a clearer understanding of family rules and boundaries, or closer and warmer relationships with family members.

Implications

In accordance with other recent investigations (e.g., Becher et al., [5]), our results support emphasizing the potential benefits of family management practices for youth well-being in family education programs for stepfamilies and single-mother families. Similarly, family therapists and other clinicians working with stepparent and single-mother families may also find it beneficial to focus on family management practices when helping clients determine what is working well (or not so well) in their families. In doing so, we recommend that family educators and clinicians take a strengths approach. Rather than expecting that family management practices will be absent or deficient in these structurally diverse families, the focus should be on helping parents assess what they are already doing and whether those practices are beneficial, and then come up with plans to sustain, modify, or expand their efforts. A straightforward approach to doing so could be to provide the family management items used in this study (or measures of 40 internal and external developmental assets available from the Search Institute (http://www.search-institute.org) to parents. Clinicians may

find it helpful to have parents and youth describe how they interpret efforts to engage in family management. Differences in parental and youth interpretations of these behaviors may be manifesting themselves as conflict within the family. There should also be sensitivity to how family structure may affect parents' abilities to implement some family management practices. For example, eating family meals and media monitoring may be easier to implement in stepparent families due to their being two caregivers in the home. Thus, family educators and clinicians may want to emphasize ways to enhance parent–youth closeness and knowing youth's friends to single mothers, particularly given that these practices had the strongest and most consistent associations with positive developmental outcomes in both types of single-mother families.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our results must be considered within the context of the study's limitations. First, our study data are cross-sectional. This bars us from definitively stating that family management practices lead to changes in positive youth development. Our data also come from caregiver reports. Parent and youth reports on family management practices and youth well-being do not always match (Bogenschneider & Pallock, [10]). Thus, our results may be different if youth reports were used. In would be particularly helpful to have youth report on how they interpret parents' use of specific family management practices in addition to whether they are present in the family system. If youth interpret family management as a sign of beneficial parental support, compared with a form of unwanted control, then family management practices may more beneficial for positive youth development. We also lack information about the number of transitions these families have experienced. Scholars have noted that in addition to family structure, the amount of family instability experienced by youth plays an important role in family dynamics and youth well-being (see Hadfield, Amos, Ungar, Gosselin, & Ganong, [40]; Murry & Lippold, [56]). Finally, we were limited in the types of family management practices and how they were measured in the 2011–2012 NSCH. Other family management practices, such as parental academic involvement and behavioral control, are also important for youth living in structurally diverse families (Amato & Fowler, [4]; Beckmeyer & Russell, [7]). Further, the family management practices variables in the 2011–2012 NSCH primarily reflect whether they are present or absent in these families. This does not tell us how parents are actually implementing them. For example, caregivers reported whether they had rules for youth media use, but we do not know what the rules were. Finally, family management practices were primarily assessed by single items. Although this is not uncommon in large-scale studies like the NSCH, single-item measures likely do not capture the complexity and nuance of family management. Thus, results may be different when researchers use multi-item measures of family management practices.

These limitations can be addressed in future studies that use longitudinal designs and data collected from multiple reporters, as well as qualitative assessments of family management practices. Additionally, measuring family instability and family structure will allow researchers to determine how these experiences intersect to influence family management practices and positive youth development. Finally, when assessing family management practices, researchers should aim to be comprehensive, measuring not only the presence of specific practices but also the quality and consistency of family management.

Conclusions

Prior research on the potential implications of family structure diversity for youth well-being has typically reflected a deficit perspective, focusing on how living in structurally diverse families may undermine youth development, health, well-being, or a combination of these (Ganong et al., 2015; Hadfield, et al., [40]). Understanding the mechanisms that promote positive youth development in diverse family structures and how those mechanisms function differentially in such contexts, however, can facilitate more appropriate interventions for youth and families. On the basis of our results, youth living in stepparent and single-mother families appear to benefit from family management practices such as family meals, having their media use monitored, closeness with caregivers, and having caregivers know who their friends are.

Author Note

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