

Understanding Sibling Relationships in Blended Families

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Background

- Joint children from intact families fare better than those from other family structures
- However, there is growing evidence that this relationship is more nuanced
- Joint children in complex families do not seem to fit this pattern

Family Structure

- Intact Families - consist of two biological parents and only their joint children
- Stepfamilies - consist of two parents and stepchildren. Each child is biologically related to only one parent
- Blended families - contain two parents and half-siblings. At least one child is biologically related to both parents and the other(s) only to one

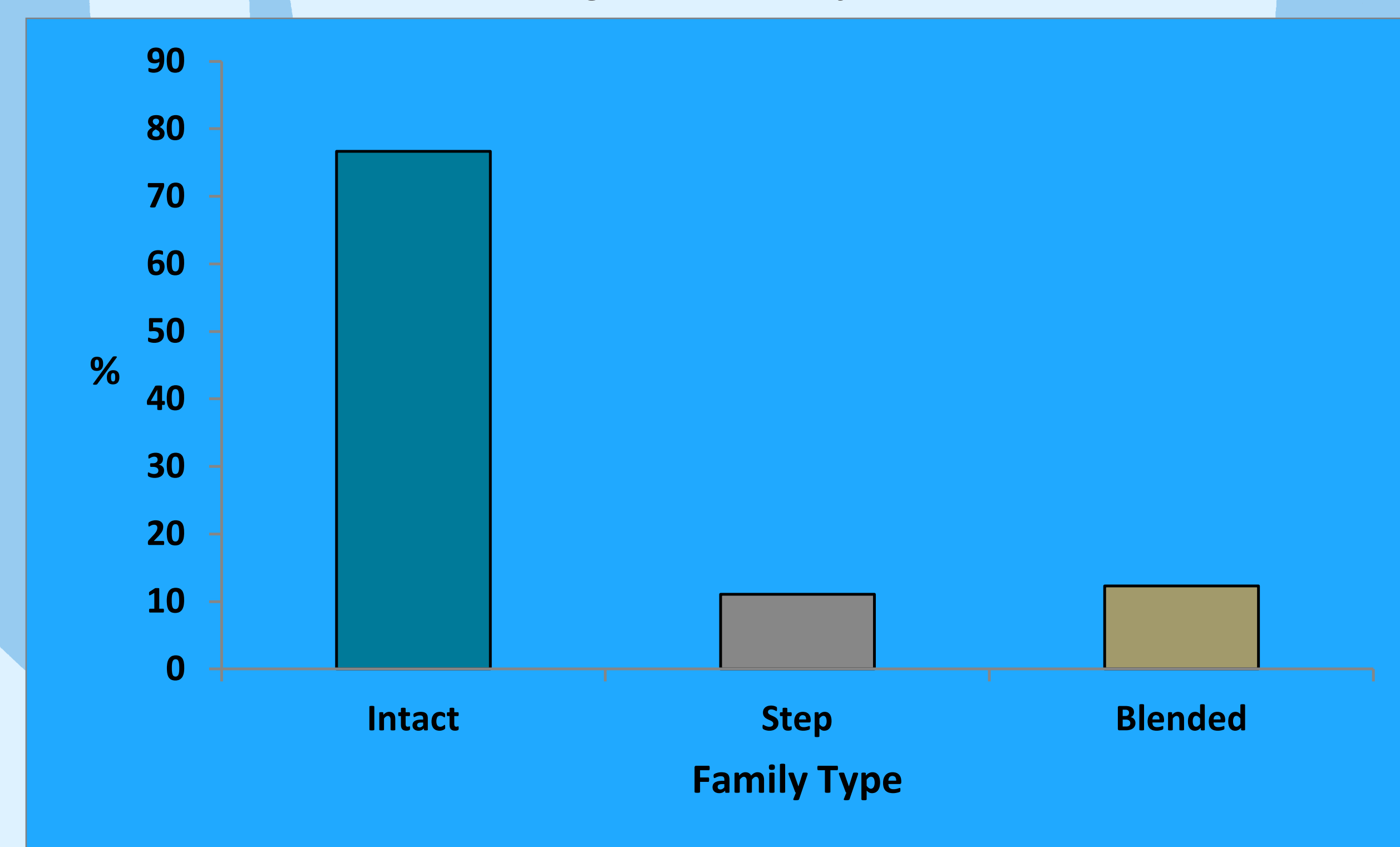
Goals

- To examine how sibling relationship trajectories vary over time and across family structure
- To analyze how trajectories are influenced by parent-child and parents' marital relationships

Data

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health) in-home Waves 1-3
- Analytic sample:
 - adolescents with married parents at Wave 1 (N=12,383)
 - answered sibling relationship quality items at each wave (N=1815)
- Person period file of N = 5445 was used for linear mixed effect growth curve analysis

Figure 1
Percentage Distribution of Families



Measures

- **Sibling relationship quality** (Waves 1-3; mean $\alpha = 0.63$)
 - Scale measuring the following perceived levels:
 - love
 - warmth
 - time siblings spend together
 - conflict with each other
- **Parents' marital quality** (Wave 1)
 - Scale measuring closeness and warmth of parents
- **Parent-child relationship quality** (Waves 1-3)
 - One item measuring frequency of arguments

Controls

- Mother's education
- Family income
- Monitoring
- Number of activities with parents
- Number of relationship transitions of parent
- Parent's age of first marriage
- Birth order
- Sibling gender dyad
- Perceived unequal treatment by parents
- Depression

Growth Curve Models

Level 1 Model

- Sibling relationship quality = $\beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{time}) + \delta_j(\text{step}) + \delta_j(\text{Blended}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{Parent-child}) + \epsilon_{ij}$

Level 2 Model

- $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} \text{ Marital Relationship} + u_{0j}$
- $\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} \text{ Marital Relationship} + u_{1j}$

*All controls included after level 2 specification

Results

Figure 2
Sibling Relationship Quality Means at Each Wave by Family Structure

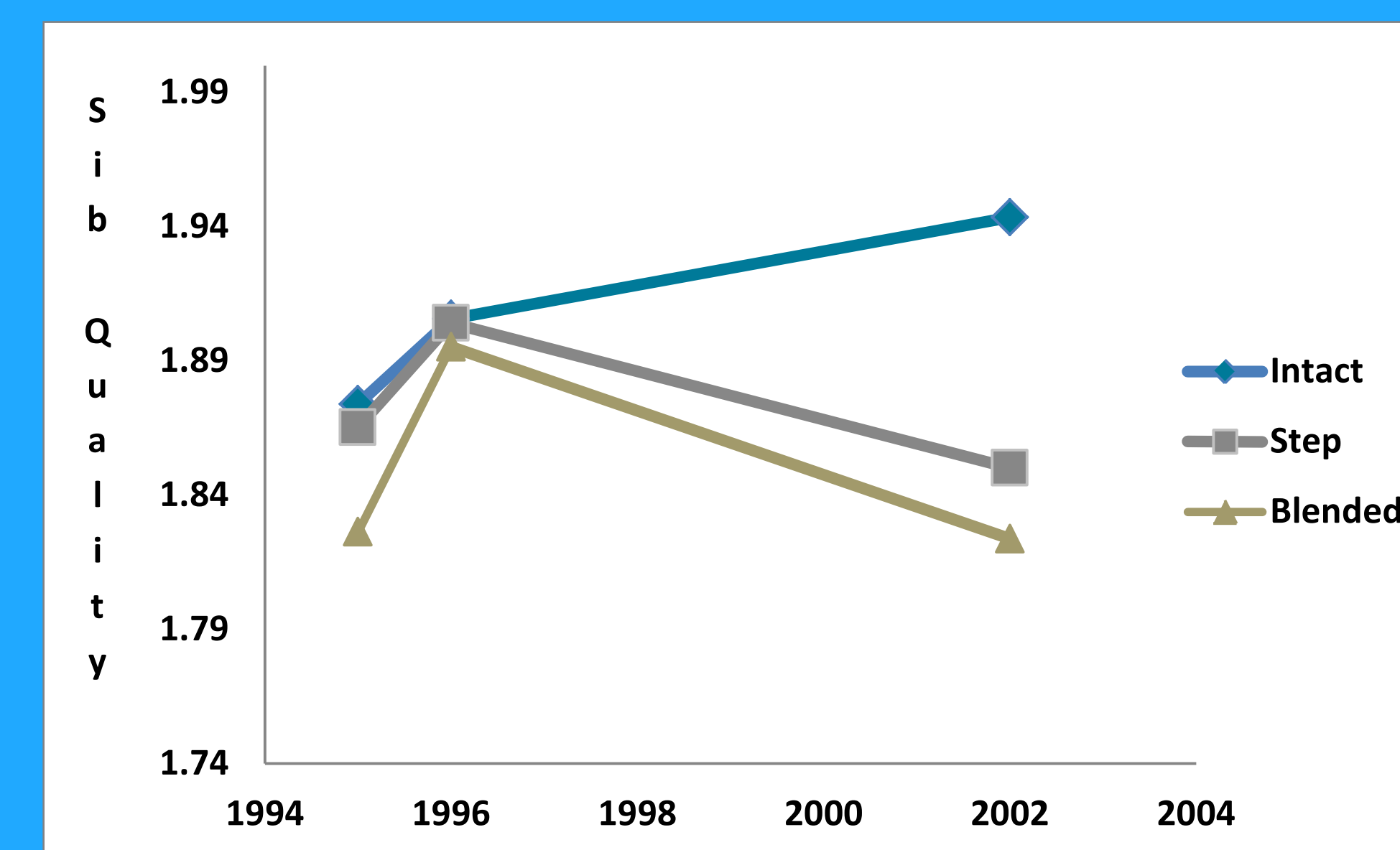
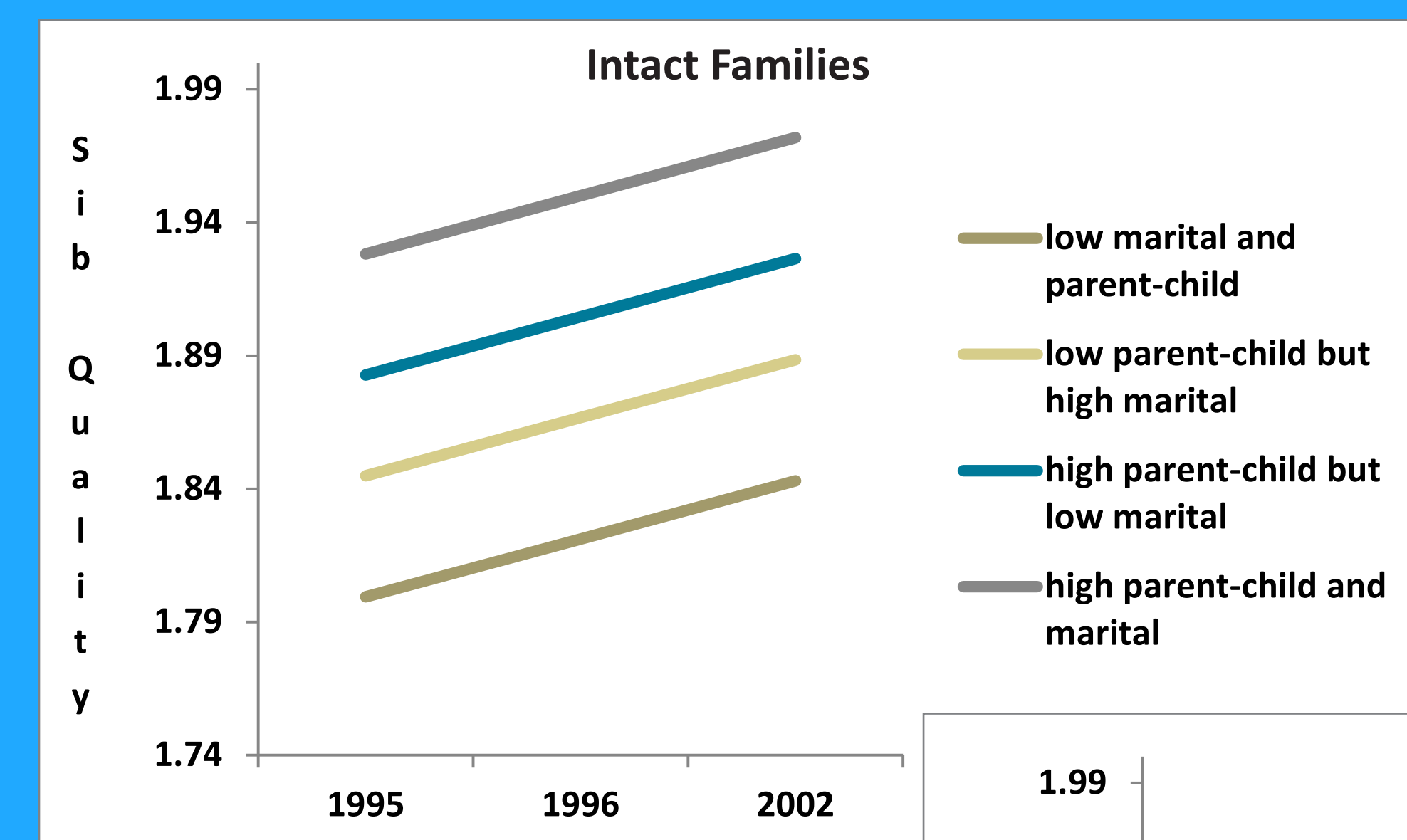
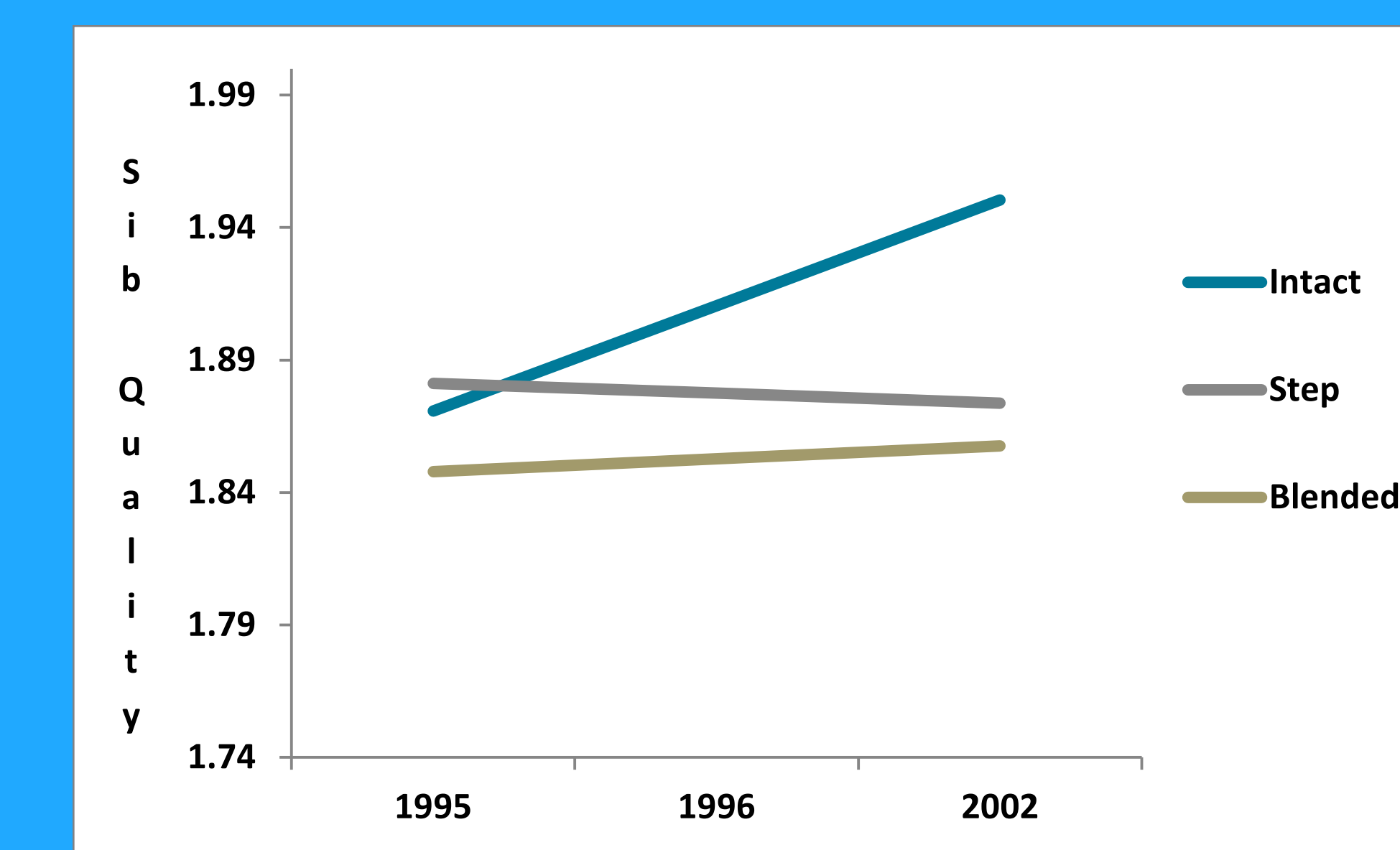
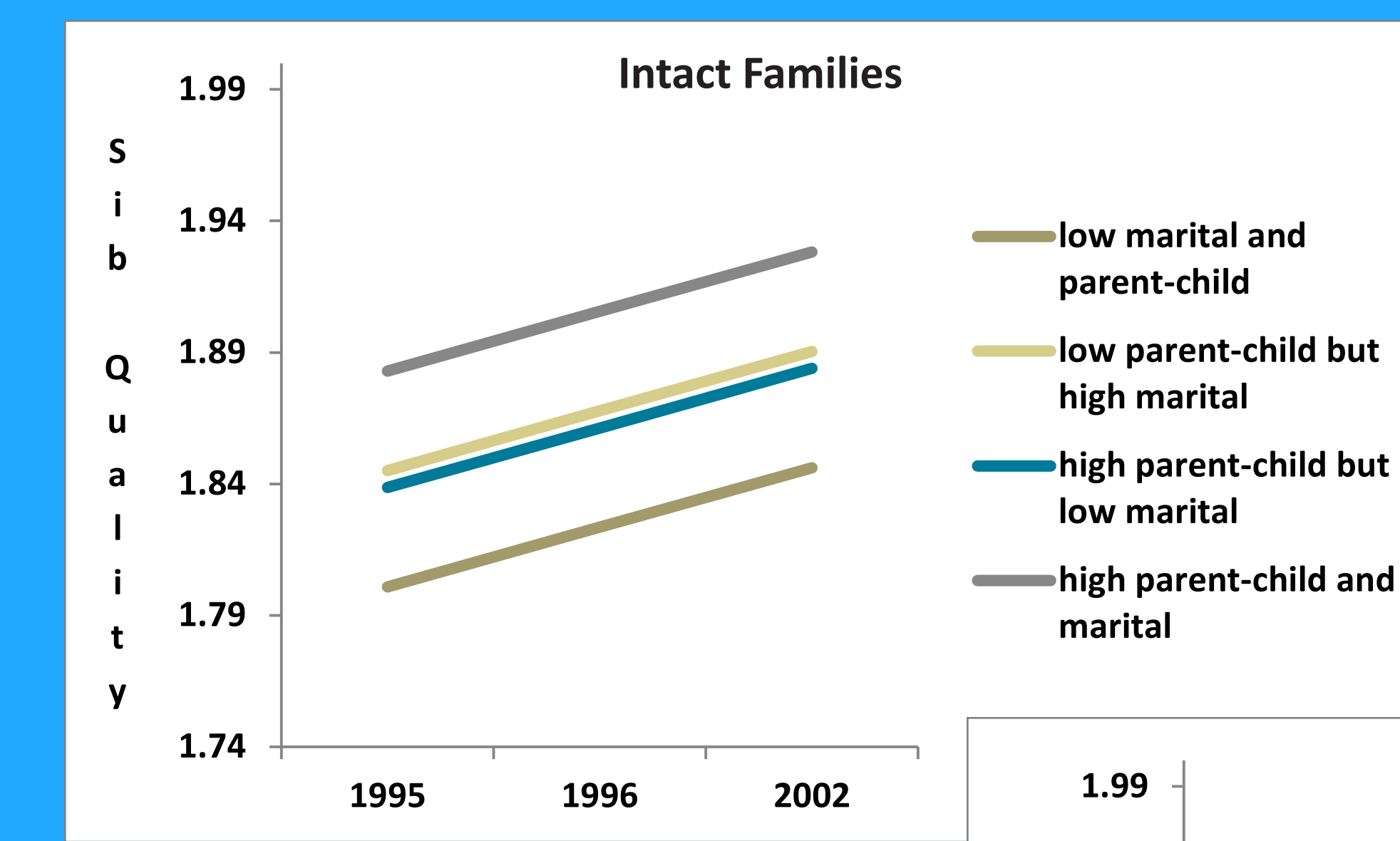
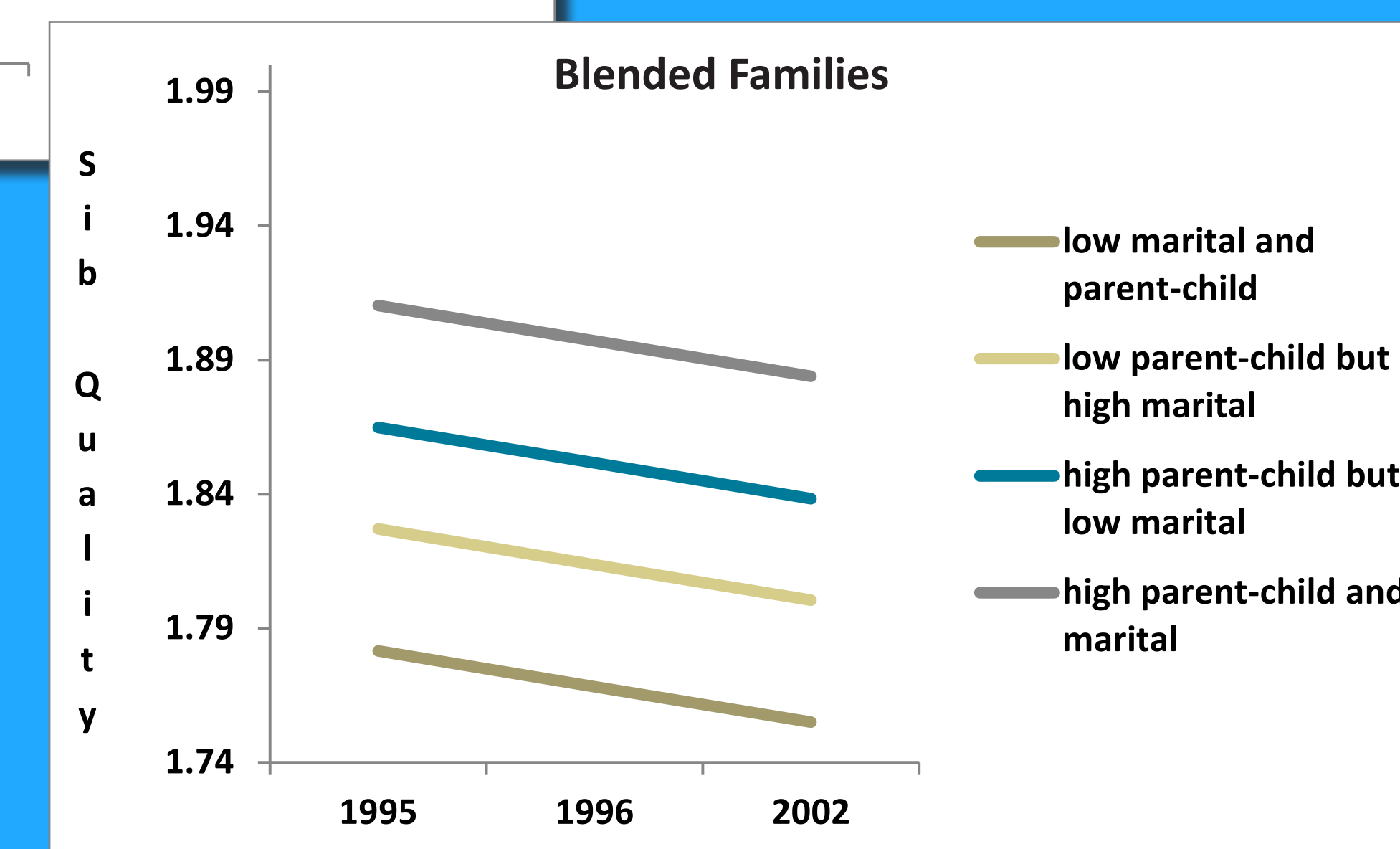


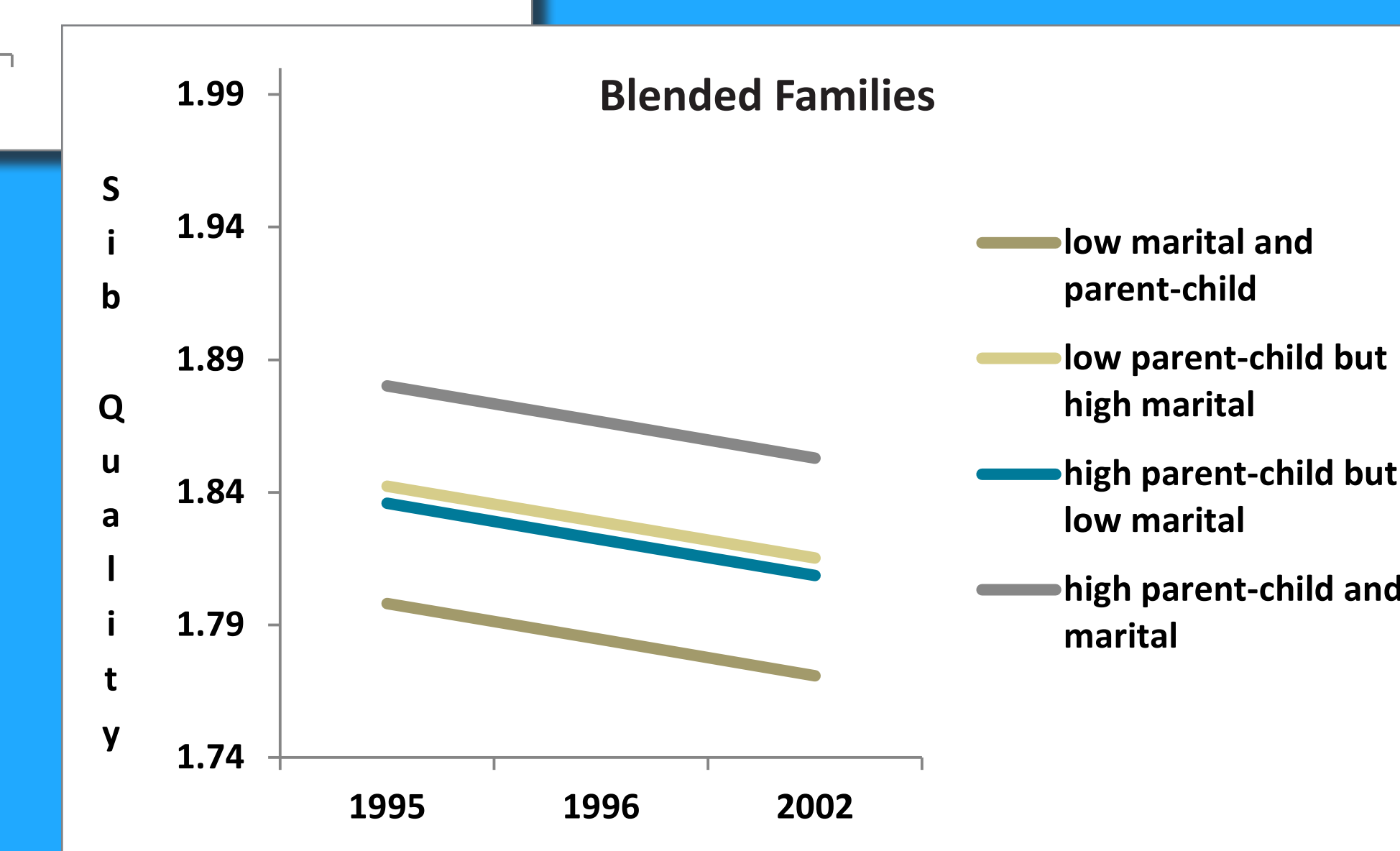
Figure 3
The Effect of Family Structure on Sibling Relationship Quality Over Time



Figures 4 & 5
The Effect of Family Structure Net of Marital and Parent-Child Relationship Quality



Figures 6 & 7
The Effect of Family Structure on Sibling Relationship Quality Net of Controls



Findings

- Sibling relationship quality increases over time only for siblings in intact families
- Marital and parent-child relationship quality positively affect sibling relationship quality
- These effects, though reduced, remain significant with the inclusion of controls

Conclusions

- Sibling relationship quality increases over time only for siblings from intact families
- Step- and half-siblings have lower levels of relationship quality, which decreases with time
- Family processes may be more important for child well-being than the marital status of parents

Acknowledgments

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