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CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE ACROSS FAMILY TYPES

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Children's Development of Social Competence
Across Family Types

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of children in Canada live with and are raised by adult caregivers. Through birth, adoption, fostering and other avenues, children and parents together become families. Our society has assigned parents the primary responsibility for ensuring the health, well-being and positive development of children. Integral to children's positive development is social competence. Social competence is the ability to regulate one's emotions and behaviours within social contexts, in order to effectively reach one's social goals, engage in satisfying relationships with others, and accomplish relevant developmental tasks. Social scientists have documented that parents are important agents of socialization, and that variations in parental socialization practices contribute to the quality of social competence that children develop. Further, parents often serve as the conduit by which other environmental or contextual factors, such as culture and socioeconomic conditions, influence children's development. One aspect of socialization context that has received considerable attention from psychologists and other developmental scientists is family type: the organization and structure of the family unit, particularly as this pertains to the number of adults involved in the child's upbringing, and the relationships shared by these adults.

There is incredible diversity in family types. The *traditional nuclear* family of the modern Western world is comprised of two married, opposite-sex parents raising one or more children. This can include families with adults who are both the birth parents of the children; "step" families in which one biological parent marries the second parent who is not biologically related to the children; "blended" or "reconstituted" families in which one lone-parent with children marries another lone-parent with children; and adoptive families where neither parent is biologically related to one or more of their children. All of the same combinations can exist for two opposite-sex adults who are raising children together but who have *not* married, that is, who are *cohabiting* or in common-law relationships. The *traditional extended* family is also fairly common in Canada, and probably more common globally: two parents share the responsibility for child-rearing, and often share the home, with one or more biologically-related adults, most often grandparents and aunts of the children. A similar assortment of *lone-parent* families exist: one parent—most often the mother—raising one or more children. The lone parent may or may not be biologically-related to the child; may have always been a lone parent or may have been in a two-parent family that ended through separation, divorce or the death of one parent; may or may not include a second, non-resident parent in care and upbringing of the children; and may or may not include extended family members in the care and upbringing of children. Finally, all of these family types also can exist for adults who are not heterosexual: children may be raised by one *gay or lesbian* parent, or by *two gay or lesbian parents of the same sex.*

Canada has recently debated a profound redefinition of "marriage," by extending its parameters through the legalization of civil marriage between same-sex adults. However, this change does *not* result in the beginning of families headed by lesbian mothers or gay fathers. These families have always existed, and "out" or publicly self-identified gay and lesbian adults have been documented as raising children, as lone parents or as couples, throughout history. However, one issue that has been raised in the debate over legalizing same-sex marriage, and thereby granting

same-sex two-parent families access to the same legal status as opposite-sex two-parent families, is whether there are any effects of family type on children's development of abilities and characteristics like social competence. From the perspective of social policy and public health advocacy, should there indeed be differences in children's social competence across family types, it would be even more important to identify *why* such differences exist. Identifying the variables and processes that contribute to children's developmental advantages and disadvantages would provide avenues for designing targeted, selective intervention efforts to promote the well-being and positive development of all Canadian children.

1.2   GOAL STATEMENT

Social scientists have conducted hundreds of studies that address the issue of variations in the development of children's social competence across family types, including many studies of families with gay or lesbian parents. It is a scientific challenge to make comparisons of children's development across diverse family types, given the multiple life circumstances that may differ across the range of families. This field of empirical research is active, dynamic, and growing. Although there are still gaps in our accumulated knowledge, the current literature is strong enough to provide reliable answers to the question of whether children's social competence varies across family types, and if so, why.

This paper will review the scientific literature to document: (1) the relations between parental socialization practices and children's development of social competence; (2) the extent to which children's social competence varies across family types, with particular attention to comparisons of lone-parent versus two-parent families, and within each of those broad categories, families with heterosexual versus gay or lesbian parents; and (3) the risk and protective factors that may account for any variations in children's social competence across these family types, including but not limited to parental socialization practices, socioeconomic conditions, and the social support systems of families that include both extended family members and non-familial adults who are involved in the socialization of children. Implications for social policies that address these processes will then be described, with the goals of promoting the positive development of all Canadian children.

1.3   DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

1.3.1   Social Competence

1.3.1.1 Definition

Social competence is something that the majority of children develop over the natural course of maturation, and yet it reflects a remarkably sophisticated and complex developmental achievement. Social competence encompasses a range of behaviours that support adaptive and successful functioning within interactions with other people. In social contexts, adaptive and successful functioning reflects the ability to attain one's own social goals with others, while also being aware of the goals held by those others and facilitating their accomplishment of their own goals (Howes & James, 2002; Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992). As such, social competence inherently recognizes the reciprocity of social relationships. Acting with social competence

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promotes the aims, satisfaction and well-being of oneself and one's social partners, and builds affection, trust and stability within social relationships.

A number of behaviours and skills contribute to social competence (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997; Denham et al., 2002; Wentzel & Looney, in press). These include emotional and behavioural self-regulation, interpersonal perspective-taking, peer-relation skills like group entry and effective communication, self-assertion abilities, and social problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Together, these and other behaviours allow one to initiate and maintain satisfying social interactions, and improve or discontinue social interactions that are unsatisfying.

Conversely, social incompetence can be evident in a variety of behaviours that undermine the reciprocal and mutually-beneficial features of relationships. Acting to attain one's own desires or promote one's own goals without regard for the effects on others, or even with malice toward others, reflects selfishness and aggression. Following the directions and demands of others, even if these disregard or block one's personal goals, shows a lack of agency and assertiveness. Social isolation, avoidance of social situations, and withdrawing from social interactions reveal shyness and an anxious inability to advance one's social goals.

On the surface, it may seem like this definition of social competence asks too much of children. The personal strengths and interpersonal skills that are required might make it seem both more challenging and less likely for children to develop social competence than these myriad forms of social incompetence. This is not the case. Social competence is the norm, and the problems underlying social incompetence characterize the minority of children (Masten et al., 1999; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). The beginnings of social competence are even seen in the earliest social interactions of very young children.

1.3.1.2 Indicators of social competence at preschool, elementary school-age, and adolescent periods

A great deal of research has gone into the deceptively simple task of identifying and measuring the indicators of social competence across child and adolescent development, which has generated a widely agreed upon set of behaviours and abilities (Cillessen & Bellmore, 2002; Coplan, 2000; Denham et al., 2002; Howes, 1988; Ladd, Buhs, & Troop, 2002; Rubin, Booth, Rose-Krasnor, & Mills, 1995). Across development, socially competent children are described as emotionally well-regulated, confident, friendly, engaged, prosocial, helpful, considerate, attentive, persistent, and communicative. Social competence takes different forms at different ages, with the developmental course revealing increasingly diverse and complex personal and social capacities. These capacities can be seen as emerging and being consolidated across three broad developmental periods: early childhood (the preschool period, from 2-5 years), middle childhood (the elementary school-age period, from 6-12 years), and adolescence (from 13-17 years).

It is typically in early childhood that children begin to spend large amounts of time with same-aged peers, through daycare and preschool, and both formal and informal social opportunities organized by their parents. At this age, social competence is evident in empathy and prosocial behaviours, sharing and turn-taking, decreasing competition and increasing cooperation over resources like toys or adult's attention, seeking and enjoying social engagement

with peers, being accepted by and getting along with peers, maintaining positive relationships with others, and learning to follow rules and comply with adult-defined tasks. A casual visit to any well-run preschool will show that the majority of young children manifest these skills (Walter & LaFreniere, 2000). Any child may occasionally have some social difficulty, becoming angered or distressed during an unpleasing interaction with peers. However, for most children these events are infrequent and short-lived, and rather than indicating social incompetence, they constitute opportunities to learn and practice the behavioural repertoires comprising social competence. Only a minority of young children regularly have conflicting or dissatisfying social interactions with peers that persist over time and are shown across social settings (Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

The social world of peers and friends becomes increasingly important during the elementary school-age years. Children spend most of the day in the company of their age-mates at school, . and engage in regular social interactions outside of school through clubs, teams, and other organized group activities, and during a variety of unstructured play opportunities. For elementary school-age children, social competence includes learning to engage others and enter ongoing social interactions, getting along well during play and activities with same-age peers, resolving disputes through prosocial rather than aggressive means, maintaining comfort and confidence in social contexts, increasingly being able to function autonomously, and accommodating one's behaviour according to contextual demands, such as inhibiting play during classroom hours. One core ability, common to these various skills, is self-regulation (Dodge, Coie, & Brake, 1982; Shantz & Hartup, 1992; Underwood, Hurley, Johnson, & Mosley, 1999). More socially competent children can selectively inhibit their expressions of anger or anxiety during challenging peer interactions in order to feel good and appear positive, and can stop themselves from engaging in impulsive or disruptive acts that are likely to drive others away. Emotional and behavioural dysregulation are typical of elementary school-aged children who are characterized as socially incompetent.

During adolescence, youths face the challenge of developing and defining their own self-identity while simultaneously navigating social realms that carry new expectations for maturity and autonomy. Social competence requires balancing the increasingly complex and multi-faceted demands of school, friendships, family and employment. Peer influences are at their strongest, and balancing social demands with personal and familial goals is challenging (Allen & Land, 1999). While some testing of limits and rules is normative and healthy, socially competent adolescents are able to resist peer and societal pressure to engage in frequent or extreme deviance, while also maintaining satisfying friendships (Bukowski, Vitaro, & Brendgen, in press). Sexual interests also emerge during this period, and social competence is linked to the novel experience of entering into romantic relationships with others (Brendgen, Vitaro, Doyle, Markiewicz, & Bukowski, 2002) Socially incompetent youths may manifest difficulties across many of these developmental tasks. Bullying against peers, aggression in romantic relationships, delinquency, family conflict, academic failure, immaturity, lack of self-esteem or self-confidence, social isolation and loneliness, and being repeatedly victimized can all be indicators of adolescents' inability to competently manage the goals and requirements of their social worlds.

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1.3.1.3 Evidence for the importance of social competence

As this examination of the behaviours and abilities contributing to social competence shows, social competence is clearly more than simply "playing nicely." It is fundamental to the personal and social well-being of children and adolescents, and the positive impacts of the development of social competence are profound and far-reaching.

Over 70 years ago, Piaget (1926, 1935) proposed that peer interactions allow children to broaden their perceptions about the social world. The egalitarian nature of peer relationships provides children with the opportunity to learn about reciprocity, taking the perspectives of others, and resolving conflicts through negotiation (Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, 2002). Preschool and kindergarten educators emphasize the importance of children's sociability, self-regulation, cooperativeness, and emotional capacity to cope with the novel stresses of the classroom setting as integral to future academic success (Rimm-Kauffman et al., 2000). More socially competent children are more accepted and liked by their peers, receive more positive initiations from peers, and are more popular (Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990; Schneider, Attili, Nadel, & Weissberg, 1989). Over time, socially competent children have greater self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities (Boivin & Beguin, 1989; Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, & LeMare, 1990), perform better in school (Coplan, Barber, & Lagace-Seguin, 1999; Huffman, Mehlinger, & Kerivan, 2000; Ialongo, Edelsohn, Werthamer-Larsson, Crockett, & Kellam, 1995), report more happiness and well-being (Parker & Asher, 1993), experience fewer mental health problems (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Ollendick, Ross, Weist, & Oswald, 1990), and are less likely to engage in serious delinquency or criminal activities (Lochman, Barry, & Pardini, 2003). Thus, children's development of social competence appears to confer lasting benefits on emotional health and wellbeing, human and intellectual potential, and successes both within and beyond the social realm.

1.3.2   Development

1.3.2.1 Trajectories, stability versus change, and probabilistic development

Pursuant to understanding how parents contribute to children's development of social competence, and why social competence might differ across family types, it is necessary to understand some general principles about human development. Development of any characteristic, be it physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioural or social, is necessarily time-dependent. Development unfolds over the course of weeks, months and years. As such, the growth and maturation of skills and abilities follow developmental trajectories, or continuous pathways. New capabilities that appear qualitatively different from prior modes of functioning may seem to emerge suddenly, but typically these represent the observable consolidation of many small and progressive advances that have transpired as a series of unnoticed steps (Thelen, 2002). The acquisition of more mature and advanced capacities thereby reflects a process of building upon past abilities, rather than abrupt changes in the forms of behaviour reflecting social competence.

Thus, the development of social competence and other human characteristics can be seen as manifestations of change in the context of stability. The simplest behaviours and abilities constituting early social competence are acquired, practiced, and consolidated. Advancements

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occur as these capacities are expanded, modified, or built-upon in order to continue functioning competently within changing social contexts. Experience in new and more challenging social contexts are essential for eliciting these progressions (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), as the social goals that motivate and necessitate social competence can themselves only be understood within relevant contexts.

The social competence of an elementary school-aged child is built upon the social competence of his or her preschool years, and in turn lays the foundation for the social competence of adolescence. Although the specific behaviours reflecting social competence across these ages are different, they are developmentally linked and serve the ongoing general function of promoting the accomplishment of social goals within reciprocating relationships. It therefore should not be surprising that, like many other characteristics, individual differences in social competence are fairly stable over time (Denham et al., 2003). Children who are more socially competent tend to remain above-average as they age, and those who are less socially competent tend to remain so as well. This is likely due to the facts that (1) the socialization agents and factors that contribute to children's social competence, such as parents and culture, are also stable and therefore exert continuing influences on individual differences, and (2) children are themselves active contributors to their social environments, and more socially competent children will elicit positive social experiences which are likely to further strengthen their own skills, abilities and well-being.

Despite the mechanisms contributing to stability, development is not completely inflexible or rigidly canalized. Although stability and continuity are the norm, change can occur as well. All preschool-aged children who show social difficulties or awkwardness are not destined to be forever less socially competent than their peers. A socially competent 10-year-old might experience pronounced and undesirable physical changes through puberty that undermine his or her social comfort and competence in adolescence. How well a child is functioning at a given point in time, and how that child's functioning is likely to develop over time, is shaped by an enormous range of factors: the child's genetic predispositions and patterns of physiological reactivity, health, and temperament or personality; parents, siblings, extended family members, and the family's socioeconomic resources; teachers, peers, and the school organization; friends, neighbourhood quality, and community resources; religion, cultural norms and expectations, and societal provisions and requirements; and random, unpredictable events that might affect anyone's life. Developmental science has shown how many of these factors are related to children's social competence, but no investigators have been (or likely ever will be) able to measure each one of these factors for every child studied and use them to make completely precise predictions about the exact developmental trajectory of each individual (Sameroff, 2000).

There is an old maxim that "Life does not come with any guarantees," and this is true for developmental science. Human development is probabilistic, rather than deterministic. How well a child is functioning at a given point in time, and what that child is experiencing at home, at school, and in the community, will make some pathways of development more likely, and other less likely, but they will not make it a certainty that a specific developmental outcome will be achieved (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996). There is *multifinality* over development; many outcomes may be reached from different developmental pathways that stem from the same starting point. Two children may begin with the same origin, having similar levels of social competence and living in similar family, school and neighbourhood contexts, but as events occur and experiences

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are accumulated over the course of time, they might become strikingly different individuals by adolescence. Conversely, there is also *equifinality* in development; many different pathways might lead to the same destination. There are more ways than one to develop social competence, and different children might arrive at similar levels and qualities of social competence from very different backgrounds and experiences.

These facts do not require that one throws up their hands and fatalistically surrenders the notion that the causes of development and individual differences in children can never be known. They can be studied, and to a great degree, they are known. Research documents the variability, or range of differences, that children can experience, and relates it to the levels and qualities of social competence that children display. For example, in terms of the emotional climate of the home, parents may be cold and distant, or angry and hostile, or warm and supportive, or effusive and overbearing. Living in these different kinds of homes might be associated with *the likelihood* that a child will appear more or less socially competent than his or her peers. This is the process followed in developmental science. Researchers carefully, thoroughly, and repeatedly measure the range of factors that might influence children's development, and then relate these to careful measures of social competence taken at various ages and in various contexts. Over many studies, researchers have thereby identified *which* factors are reliably associated with children's social competence, and *how strongly* those factors predict social competence.

1.3.3   Socialization

The general notion that parents and family types influence children's development of social competence or other characteristics represents belief in the influence of socialization on development. Socialization represents lasting impacts of external agents or forces on a child's beliefs, behaviours, or functioning (Grusec & Hastings, in press). It is the influence of the environment on a child's development. Children are not the passive recipients of these socialization messages. Internalization is the process whereby a child takes in the explicit or implicit messages being delivered by socialization, evaluates and possibly reinterprets them, and incorporates them into his or her developing sense of self (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Socialization is also a bidirectional process (Hastings & Rubin, 1999): children act upon the socializing agents in their social environments, and change the agents' beliefs and behaviours through the children's own actions and development. However, for the purposes of the present paper, our focus will be upon the actions and influences of socializing agents upon children.

Research and interest in socialization does not seek to discount the roles of genetic and biological factors in development. Indeed, humans are biological beings; there are no aspects of functioning and development that can occur without biology. Yet it is equally true that there can be no biological activity without environment. Humans are social creatures, as well as biological, and social environments are the contexts within which development occurs. Experiences in social environments interact with children's genetic predispositions and biological functions to generate individual developmental trajectories. Understanding when and how the social environment makes its contributions to development is the essence of studying socialization.

There is a great diversity of external agents and forces that might have influence over a child's development, but our society has assigned parents the uniquely privileged role of being the first, most long-lasting, and most responsible agents of socialization. Parents influence their children

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directly: feeding, clothing, and housing them; teaching them; helping them; reading to them;
comforting; playing; disciplining; organizing; setting limits and supporting initiatives. Parents
also influence their children indirectly: modeling behaviours through their own ways of acting;
choosing neighbourhoods and schools; having books and computers in the home; and creating
new social environments through the parents' own peer networks. For the majority of children in
Canada, there are no other adults who will have as much contact or control over children's first
two decades of life than children's parents.

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2   FRAMEWORK

2.1   SOCIALIZATION THEORIES

The hypothesis that children's development of social competence might vary depending on whether a child has one or two parents in the present in the home, and whether those parents are of the opposite sex or of the same sex, has been characterized as rooted in Freudian psychoanalytic theory (Hay & Nash, 2002; Maccoby, in press). Although children were presumed to identify with their same-sex parent, Freud emphasized the importance of children's relationships with both biological parents (e.g., Freud, 1938). Thus, children who were not raised in homes with their biological mothers and fathers were thought of as being at risk for maladjustment and, in particular, of not following typical gender role development. In many ways Freud's theory must be considered within the historical context of the era in which he lived, when it was rarer for children to be raised by non-biologically-related parents. His lack of attention to the socialization of children by non-biological parents and legal guardians is one of the reasons Freud's ideas have been criticized by developmental scientists. There is little empirical support for psychoanalytic theory, and it is generally not considered influential for current theories and research in socialization.

Socialization is a central element of many current theories of child development, including attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957), and family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997). Attachment theory places primary importance on the sensitivity of parents to the signals and needs of their infants. Parents who respond contingently and appropriately to their infants' needs, and provide a supporting, warm and safe context for early development, will facilitate their children's optimal emotional and social functioning. Their children will internalize mental models of "secure" attachment relationships, in which they believe that they have a safe base with protective caregivers from which they can explore the world, that their relationship partners are trustworthy and good people, and that they themselves are worthy of receiving love and positive attention from others. Conversely, because of their experiences with less sensitive, supportive and warm parents, children with mental models of "insecure" attachment relationships lack these adaptive belief systems and are at risk of experiencing social difficulties.

Social learning theory, and its extension, social cognitive theory (Grusec, 1992), was built from classic behaviourism to explain how children learn in the social world. Behaviourism was focused on direct rewards and punishments of behaviours. Behaviours that were rewarded would be reinforced and would be more likely to be repeated. Behaviours that were punished would be less likely to be repeated. Sears proposed that children did not have to engage in these behaviours directly in order to learn. Rather, they could watch another person engage in the behaviour and be rewarded for it by attaining some valued goals, and thereby learn that the behaviour was effective. Thus, children would model the behaviours of powerful and influential people around them. The implications for the influences of parents' own behaviours on those of their children can be grasped immediately. In the extension to social cognitive theory, Bandura suggested that children actively interpret the meanings of the behaviours that they observe, and the feedback they receive for their own behaviours, and then internalize messages about their characters and who they are as individuals. Thus, a child develops a core sense of self that guides

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their likely actions in future social situations. Parental statements to children ("You're such a help:" "You're being very mean") become incorporated into how the children see themselves as social actors.

In family systems theory, the relationship between a parent and child is seen as embedded within the entire family unit, which functions as a dynamic whole. Thus, within a two-parent family, a parent is also a partner and has a spousal relationship as well as child-rearing relationship. If there are siblings, a child is also a brother or sister and has sibling relationships. Each individual has multiple roles within the family, and each relationship influences the functioning of each individual. The multiple family relationships provide the context within which specific interactions, such as those between a parent and child, need to be understood. When one relationship within the family changes, such as marital dissolution or divorce, this necessarily impacts every other relationship in the family and leads to redefinitions of individuals' roles. Although it has directly generated relatively little empirical research, family systems theory has considerable appeal as a theoretical perspective from which to examine the literature on family types and children's social competence.

These theories and others (e.g. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model; 1989) form a broad basis on which current socialization research rests. However, it would be accurate to say that for the past few decades, the majority of research on family types, parental socialization, and children's social competence is conducted without explicitly or exclusively drawing from any specific theory. Rather, a more integrative and multi-faceted perspective seems to guide most empirical research. A newer omnibus theory, or 'macro-paradigm,' that reflects this eclectic approach to research is *developmental psychopathology* (Luthar, Burack, & Cicchetti, 1997). Rather than adhering to the tenets of a single theoretical perspective, developmental psychopathology acknowledges that all theories are likely to contribute important ideas, and drawing from each will give researchers the greatest opportunities for understanding development. This perspective also denies that psychology, or any other field of study, has a unique disciplinary advantage. Child development will be best understood by combining the strengths of work in psychology, education, sociology, anthropology, psychiatry, and other fields. Finally, as already discussed, development is recognized as a series of trajectories that are multiply-determined. A variety of *risk and protective factors* combine and interact to shape each child's individual pathway of growth (Rutter, 2000).

2.2   RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Risk factors are those influences that undermine children's positive functioning and direct children along adverse trajectories toward undesirable or maladaptive developmental outcomes. Poverty, child abuse, parents' spousal conflict, chronic illness, and neurocognitive problems are clear and obvious examples of hardships that are likely to disadvantage children and decrease their chances of developing the skills and abilities of social competence (Mash & Wolfe, 2002). However, risk factors can also be more subtle and harder to detect than these examples might suggest.

Protective factors are those influences that bolster and support children's positive functioning, steer them away from maladaptive behaviours, and guide them along pathways of effective and successful development. Sufficient socioeconomic resources, supportive and attentive parents,

stable home lives, mentoring relationship with another concerned and involved adult, good health, and intact intellectual abilities are examples of the normal aspects of life that provide a child with the resources to thrive and achieve social competence (Masten, 2001). Protective factors are not necessarily rare or special qualities; they are the common strengths of human life.

A child's fate is not decided by any one risk or protective factor. There are abused children who grow to be confident, kind, and successful youths, and there are children from advantaged homes who become delinquent and destructive. But development is probabilistic, and multiply-determined. Risk factors often occur in clusters; the presence of one disadvantage may point to others. As a child's exposure to and experiences of risk factors increases, the likelihood that the child will follow positive and adaptive developmental trajectories diminishes. Conversely, the presence of multiple protective factors offers the child a range of strengths and shields to ward off the ill effects of risk factors. Two children who differ in their history of protective factors, perhaps because of their parents' differing socialization approaches, may react quite differently to the same experience of a risk factor, such as a violent episode at school. The child protected by a more supportive and involved parent would be less likely to suffer lasting ill effects from their exposure to the violence, compared to the child who was relatively less protected due to having a more distant and disengaged parent.

Research on child development under conditions of serious risk, such as chronic poverty, has revealed that the majority of children do not develop serious problems or adjustment difficulties (Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003). Children who do not develop problems despite the presence of risk factors are described as *resilient*. A growing body of literature is attempting to address what makes some children resilient. A recent comprehensive survey of the literature (Masten, 2001) points to the primary importance of two protective factors: intact neuropsychological functions and the presence of an effective parent. When both of these factors are present, children appear to be protected from the worst effects of risk factors, and are more likely to follow trajectories of positive development.

This focus on risk and protective factors points to the fundamental importance of recognizing the broader contexts of the lives of parents and children. The ability of parents to raise their children appropriately and effectively is shaped by their own experiences of stress and support. The social context of the family will also affect how children perceive, internalize and respond to the socialization efforts of their parents. Acknowledging and understanding these broader influences is essential for explaining how socialization processes function, and—should any differences in children's functioning across groups be identified—whether those differences are due to parenting and family variables *per se*, or due to the varying circumstances of the families' lives.

2.3   SELECTION CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH REVIEWED IN THIS PAPER

For the rest of this paper, we will focus on evaluating the research examining how several aspects of parental socialization and family type are associated with children's social competence, with particular attention to evaluating evidence for differences in social competence depending on whether children's parents are of the opposite sex or of the same sex. This review will be restricted to empirical work. We acknowledge from the outset that the research is drawn primarily from the field of developmental psychology, but some research from other disciplines also is examined. Papers that present opinions, beliefs or theories, without accumulating

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quantitative or qualitative evidence, are not reviewed. Chapters and review papers that do not include new empirical data are not reviewed. Papers that present case studies, which are detailed descriptions of the unique qualities of individual lives, are not reviewed, as these cannot be presumed to generalize beyond the individuals described. Papers that present retrospective data, such as adults thinking back upon their socialization experiences during childhood, are not reviewed, as such data are notoriously unreliable and subject to the effects of biased recall. Papers that are deeply flawed methodologically through biased recruitment of participants, inadequate measurement of key constructs, flawed or inaccurate analyses, or inappropriate misrepresentations of their results, are not reviewed, except to serve as examples of problematic research.

2.3.1 Explanation of methodological limitations on inferences

It should be recognized that socialization research in general, and research on socialization in families with heterosexual versus gay or lesbian parents in particular, has frequently been targeted as suffering from widespread methodological limitations, and criticized as misinterpreting or making incorrect assumptions about the meanings of results (Bell, 1968; Cameron, 1999; Harris, 1998; Lerner & Nagai, 2001; Scarr, 1992). Many of these criticisms are warranted. Documenting that a relation exists between two variables, for example, that there is an association between children's levels of social competence and parents' enforcement of rules in the home, does not necessarily mean that the variables have any kind of causal influence on each other. Groups of participants selected from a local or convenient community are not likely to be representative of the broader population, so, for example, observing the social behaviours of a group of children selected from one large preschool does not warrant the assumption that their behaviours are typical of all preschoolers. Observations made at only one point in time do not reveal processes and pathways of development, so one cannot assume that if the children of lone heterosexual mothers and lone lesbian mothers do not differ in social competence at preschool-age, then they also will not differ in social competence when they are older. It is also difficult to interpret any results without appropriate standards or points of reference for comparison; if adopted children raised by two gay fathers are found to differ in social competence from children raised by their birth parents in heterosexual-couple families, would adoption status or family type be the probable cause of these differences? These are all valid and unquestionable limitations, at least some of which apply to most of the studies that will be reviewed in the remainder of this paper.

But this recognition of limitations does not mean that the studies reviewed herein are fundamentally flawed, or that their results are invalid, or that we cannot draw from them in order to understand the socialization of social competence across family types. It is extremely difficult, time-consuming and expensive to do research in developmental science. Every kind of research procedure has its strengths, but also its limitations. *No single study will ever be able to overcome any and all methodological limitations.* The key to having confidence in the results of scientific research is *replication*. If the same results are documented by independent researchers, using independent samples of participants, then we can have greater confidence that the results are valid. The weaknesses of one methodology can be addressed by the strengths of a second. If two different studies, utilizing two different methodologies, show convergent results, then we can feel more certain that the results are not due to the limitations of a given methodology. When a

consistent message is seen across the majority of studies within a large body of research, we can state with confidence that the message should be accepted.

Prior to reviewing these studies, it is useful to begin by briefly explaining the important features, strengths, and limitations of the most common empirical designs and methodological features used in developmental research.

2.3.1.1 Correlational versus experimental design

In correlational research, two or more variables are measured, and the relation(s) between the variables are examined. (A note on language: two variables share a 'relation', whereas two people share a 'relationship'.) If higher levels of one variable are associated with higher levels of another variable, they are said to be positively correlated. For example, if emotionally warm parents were found to have children who were more socially competent than the children of emotionally cool parents, then parental warmth and child social competence would be said to be positively correlated. Conversely, if higher levels of one variable are associated with lower levels of another variable, the variables are negatively correlated. Correlational methods are the most common techniques used in socialization research. Investigators observe and measure various aspects of what they see in families, or at schools, or in communities, and examine how strongly and in which directions these aspects are related to each other. Thus, correlational research tells us whether variables in the world *are* related to each other. However, it cannot tell us *why* these relations exist. The fact that two variables are associated with each other does not suggest that the level of the first variable *causes* the level of the second variable. In the preceding example, we do not know whether more parental warmth makes children more socially competent, or whether being a more socially competent child makes parents feel more warmly toward the child, or whether some third factor—say, the family having greater economic resources—causes both parental warmth and child social competence to be higher.

That kind of causal information can be derived from experiments. When conducting an experiment, a researcher is interested in testing whether changes in one variable *cause* changes in a second variable. The researcher manipulates the first variable in some way, in order to create at least two different conditions. The researcher then randomly assigns research participants (e.g., parents or children) into one of the conditions. Thus, one group of participants experiences the first variable as it exists in one manipulated condition, and a second group of participants experiences the first variable as it exists in a different manipulated condition. The researcher then measures the level of the second variable for all participants. If the level of the second variable differs for the group in one condition compared to the group in the other condition, then the researcher can infer that manipulating the first variable caused the level of the second variable to change. Thus, an experiment can show that a relation *can be* produced between two variables, and the variables are related in a causal way.

Importantly, the fact that a researcher can manipulate conditions and produce a causal relation between variables does *not* mean that the causal relation exists naturally and operates in the real world. Thus, experimental and correlational procedures are complementary. Observations and measurements in the real world can tell us that a relation between variables *does* exist, and experiments can tell us whether that relation appears to be causal.

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However, true experiments are very, very rare in socialization research. For both ethical and practical reasons, investigators do not have the ability to randomly assign children to parents, or parents to family types. When an investigator measures whether two pre-existing groups differ, for example, whether children with opposite-sex parents differ in social competence from children with same-sex parents, the investigator has used a correlational procedure, not an experimental one. If a difference were to be found between the two groups of children, it could not be assumed that living in different family types produced or caused that difference. It is worth noting, though, that the *absence* of differences can be informative about the *absence* of causal relations. Causation cannot exist in the absence of correlation. If family type really does affect social competence in a causal way, and if families are carefully matched on all other potentially relevant factors (age, race, education, income, number of children, etc.) such that the only difference between groups is family type, then some differences across family types should be observed. Observing those differences using correlational techniques would not allow researchers to definitively say that variations in family type were the unquestionable cause of the differences in social competence. *Failing* to find differences, though, would support the argument that variations in family type *do not cause* variations in social competence.

2.3.1.2 Single time-point/cross-sectional versus longitudinal design

One way in which socialization researchers have attempted to overcome their limited opportunities to conduct meaningful experiments and still gain some insight into probable causal relations between parent and child variables is by conducting *longitudinal* research. Most correlational studies are static. They measure how things are "now," that is, what the relations between variables are at a single point in time. This does not provide information about change and growth. Some correlational studies include two or more groups of participants at different ages, such as preschool-aged children and elementary school-aged children; these are called *cross-sectional* studies. However, these are still static, single time-point studies. Finding that younger and older children differ on some variable suggests that the difference is associated with age and maturation, but it does not reveal how or why that apparent developmental change occurs.

Longitudinal studies can provide this information. In longitudinal research, the same group of participants is followed over an extended period of several months or years, and the same variables are measured repeatedly. Thus, it is possible to chart the nature of change over time. Importantly for socialization research, both parent and child variables can be measured, and changes in the relations of those variables can be observed. Longitudinal techniques also allow researchers to progress from stating whether one variable is related to another variable, to stating whether one variable *predicts* another variable over time. If the earlier levels of one variable, such as parental involvement, predict the later levels of a second variable, such as children's prosocial behaviour, this provides greater evidence that there might be a causal relation of the first variable to the changes produced in the second variable. Even longitudinal studies do not produce incontrovertible proof of causal relations, but they offer more support for them than do single time-point correlational studies.

Longitudinal studies are expensive, time-consuming and difficult to conduct. However, they are being used with increasing frequency by socialization researchers. Several of the studies on the relations between parenting practices and children's social competence that are reviewed in the

subsequent section are longitudinal studies. However, as it is a newer and smaller field of work (Patterson, 2002), few longitudinal studies of children with gay or lesbian parents have been completed. Therefore, conclusions about the possible causal influences of parenting practices on children's social competence are likely to be more defensible than conclusions about whether family type impacts social competence.

2.3.1.3 Convenience versus random/representative sampling

Most socialization studies also utilize convenience samples. These are groups of voluntary participants that the researchers obtain from the local community. Convenience samples cannot be assumed to be representative of the overall community, or of the broader population. For example, in North America, most convenience samples typically are comprised of mostly White families from middle- to upper-middle socioeconomic levels who live in towns or cities with universities. Families from lower socioeconomic groups, from ethnic or racial minority groups, and from rural areas are relatively under-represented. The results of studies conducted with a select and limited sample simply might not apply for families living in very different cultural, social and physical realities. Some socialization researchers have designed their studies to examine processes specifically within these under-represented groups, and those studies will be reviewed in order to examine whether the links between parenting and social competence appear to vary depending on socioeconomic status (SES) or other group characteristics.

A smaller number of studies have been completed that include samples of families that are representative of the general population. These are typically large studies of several hundred to several thousand participants. Epidemiological (popular-based) techniques, such as utilizing census data, are used to recruit samples that are as diverse as the province, state, or country within which they live. The results of the studies therefore can be generalized broadly. Two recent studies have used data from large, representative samples in order to study the social competence of children living in families with same-sex parents (Golombok et al., 2003; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

2.3.1.4 Sources of information

A final consideration for understanding the results of research is knowing about the sources of information. Most researchers use questionnaires. Parents, children, and/or teachers are asked to complete pencil-and-paper measures of the variables of interest. Thus, these researchers are examining the *reported levels* of the variables. Many researchers use direct observations of behaviour. Parents are watched while they interact with their children or children are watched while they interact with their peers. Thus, these researchers are examining the *observed level* of the variables. Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

Researchers cannot be with participants twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and therefore they cannot see participants' behaviours in all circumstances. Participants' reports of their behaviour may be more complete and representative than researchers' direct observations. And of course, some things cannot be observed directly, such as beliefs about childrearing, or interpersonal perceptions; participants need to be asked to provide the information on those kinds of variables. However, participants' reports may not be completely honest and accurate. People may not be consciously aware of their levels of skills or abilities, relative to others. Parents may

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be reluctant to report parenting practices that could be considered less than ideal. Children may not have the maturity or cognitive capacity to reflect upon their own actions and describe them accurately. Reports may be *biased*, and must be interpreted with some caution.

An even greater concern emerges when questionnaires measuring different variables are obtained from a single respondent. Such data are not *independent* of each other, and this lack of independence limits what researchers can infer about the nature of relations between variables. For example, adolescents might be asked to describe both their own capacity to influence their peers and the quality of their relationships with their parents. The fact that the two measures of peer and family relationships are both obtained from adolescents might result in apparent relations between these variables because (a) individuals have a style of answering questionnaires that is used for both measures, such as preferentially endorsing the extreme ends of rating scales, or (b) the adolescents project their beliefs that their relationships are or are not related, or (c) the peer and family relationships truly are related.

Behaviour that is directly observed is free from the possible biases that can affect reports on questionnaires. The researchers are examining what can actually be seen in the home, at school, in the playground, in the laboratory, or wherever they observe their participants. Researchers cannot watch people forever or in all contexts, though; therefore observations are not efficient ways of measuring behaviours that occur rarely or that are only presented in specific, difficult-to-access locations. Participants also usually know that they are being observed, and this might cause them to hide or selectively present certain actions. As mentioned above, some variables of interest, such as beliefs and other cognitive processes, may not be directly observable behaviours. Finally, it is much more expensive to directly observe behaviours than it is to distribute questionnaires, and it is more work to process observed data.

Both reported and observed data are useful, and both have their limitations. It is inaccurate to infer that one kind of data is always superior. When used correctly, both can provide informative, objective information. Some of the best socialization studies combine these approaches, using both reported and observed measures of variables. In the following review, we will point out the constraints on conclusions or inferences that can be drawn from specific studies because of the nature of data obtained by researchers.

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3   PARENTING

3.1   FEATURES AND DEFINITIONS

Research on parental socialization has principally followed one of three main approaches: broad characterizations of the typical or general style of child-rearing used by parents (Baumrind, 1967); more specific measurements of discrete child-rearing practices and behaviours (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994); or descriptions of the quality of the relationship shared between parents and children (Sroufe, 2002). Occasionally researchers measure multiple aspects of parenting that cross these different approaches (Coplan, Hastings, Lagace-Seguin, & Moulton, 2002). All three have provided useful information on the nature of the relations between parental socialization and children's development of social competence.

The most influential program of research on general parenting styles was initiated by Diana Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1971) and further refined by other socialization researchers (e.g., Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Aspects of child-rearing are seen along two dimensions of behaviour: control and responsiveness. Crossing these two dimensions results in a four-cell grid, which represents a typology of four general patterns of parenting. The two cells representing high control are most often studied. *Authoritative* parents are high in both control and responsiveness. They have rules and guidelines for their children, set limits, and expect compliance, but this is balanced by providing explanations for rules, being sensitive to children's needs and wants, a willingness to listen to children's perspectives, and flexibility in the application of control depending on situational factors. Authoritative parents are often characterized as warm, although this draws in emotional qualities that do not clearly relate to the dimensions of control and responsiveness. *Authoritarian* parents are high in control but low in responsiveness. They apply rules and limit-setting strictly and without explanations or flexibility, engage in more punitive control and discipline, and do not take their children's perspectives into account when making decisions. Authoritarian parents are often described as angry, harsh or negative, although again, these emotional qualities are not inherent to the Baumrind typology.

The two cells representing low-control have been studied in relation to children's social competence less often. *Permissive* or *indulgent* parents are low in control and high in responsiveness. They have few rules for their children, tend not to enforce what rules they do have, forgive children's transgressions, and apply few limits on children's behaviour, but they are engaged with their children, aware of their children's wants and needs, and responsive to their children's desires. *Neglectful* or *dismissive* parents are low in both control and responsiveness. They are disengaged and not attentive to the needs of children, neither providing necessary supervision nor sharing enjoyable or close interactions.

Many socialization researchers find these descriptions of parenting styles are too broad for gaining any true understanding of how parents influence their children. Each style encompasses so many different behaviours that it is difficult to determine whether any specific element of a given style explains its association with children's social competence (Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 1997). Parents have also been found to vary their child-rearing behaviours considerably depending on contexts and situational demands, their children's behaviours, or the parents' immediate goals (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). Thus, a number of researchers measure specific elements of parenting behaviour, including but not limited to: sensitivity to children's

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cues and contingent responding; emotional expressions and affective communication; providing reasons and explanations; pointing out the consequences of children's actions (other-oriented reasoning); monitoring activities; setting rules and imposing limits; commanding; physical punishment; time-outs; withdrawing privileges; threatening; yelling; voicing disapproval; shame and guilt induction; criticism and demeaning comments; love withdrawal; negotiating; surrendering; protective and intrusive management; teaching; modeling specific behaviours; playing; expressing affection; and comforting and providing assistance. Most of these features of child-rearing have been examined in relation to children's social competence by socialization researchers.

Examining the quality of parent-child relationships often involves focusing on the emotional climate present in the home and in parent-child interactions, and on the ways in which parents and children coordinate their actions contingently and reciprocally (Cox & Paley, 1997; Patterson & Fisher, 2002; Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999). Research on the quality of parent-infant and parent-child attachments typifies this work with young children. Sensitive and contingent parenting supports children's felt security and regard for their parents as trustworthy and loving, and this secure attachment relationship with parents influences children's relationships with others. Across ages, many researchers measure the overall levels of warmth and affection that are expressed between parents and children. With older children and adolescents, the focus is often on the amount of conflict that is present in the parent-child relationship. Relationships that include more frequent, intense or hostile conflict are seen as problematic and not optimally supportive of the development of social competence.

3.2   RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN'S SOCIAL COMPETENCE

3.2.1   General parenting styles

Many studies have found that parenting styles are associated with young children's competence and positive peer engagement. Baumrind (1966, 1967) was one of the first researchers to show that, compared to parents of aggressive and withdrawn preschoolers, parents of sociable preschoolers used authoritative styles of childrearing. The parents of less competent children tended to be permissive or authoritarian. These associations have been replicated often with preschoolers (e.g., Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Denham et al., 2000; Kochanska, 1991; Pearson & Rao, 2003) as well as school-aged children and adolescents (Baumrind, 1989, 1991; Chao & Willms, 2002; Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991) across a variety of cultural and economic groups (Beyers & Goosens, 1999; Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride-Chang, 2003; Chen, Dong, & Zhou, 1997; Jones et al., 2002).

Authoritative parental socialization seems to promote children's resilience, and help to maintain children on positive developmental pathways. Authoritative parents may serve as models for social competence, as their combination of assertive, flexible, child-focused and responsive behaviour reflect the same kinds of social actions that characterize children's positive and effective engagement with peers. As they are used to having more positive and satisfying interactions with their parents, the children of more authoritative parents might also have higher self-esteem or more positive expectations for their relationships with others. Authoritative parenting could also foster children's self-regulation, as the combination of parents' limit-setting

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and support for autonomy provide children with opportunities to practice managing their emotions and social behaviours.

Examining some of the specific associations between social competence and parenting practices and relationship qualities within each of the three developmental periods outlined earlier will help to reveal how socialization supports the development of social competence. It should be recognized that most of the research in this area has either focused exclusively on the socialization practices of mothers, or it has not distinguished between mothers and fathers (e.g., asking adolescents to report on their 'parents'). The more limited body of research that has contrasted maternal and paternal socialization, or that has been focused exclusively on fathers, is examined subsequently.

3.2.2 Parenting that supports social competence within developmental periods

3.2.2.1 The preschool period

Studies have shown that preschool-aged children are more socially competent when they have secure attachment relationships with their mothers. Fagot (1997) observed peer play and turn-taking between toddlers who had the quality of their attachment relationships measured six months previously. When toddlers with secure attachments made positive and friendly initiations toward their peers, they were more likely to receive positive responses and less likely to receive negative responses, compared to toddlers with insecure attachments.

In a longitudinal study with a representative sample of more than 1000 families, Belsky and Fearon (2002) found that attachment in infancy predicted mothers' reports of children's social competence two years later, depending on the stability of maternal behaviour. Specifically, three-year-old children were described as more empathic, prosocial and cooperative when they had secure attachment relationships at 15 months and when their mothers were observed to be sensitive and unobtrusive at 24 months. Comparatively, children were described as less socially competent if they had secure attachments at 15 months but relatively less sensitive mothers at 24 months, or if they had insecure attachments regardless of subsequent maternal sensitivity. In another examination of this sample of children, repeated observations of mothers' sensitivity, warmth and involvement with their children from 6 to 36 months predicted both mothers' and teachers' reports of the children's social competence at 4.5 years (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network, 2002).

Parental sensitivity, warmth, and involvement with infants are the key elements of parenting that contribute to secure attachments. Another longitudinal study has shown that mothers' levels of these behaviours with infants predict the levels of children's observed empathic and prosocial responses toward adults one year later (Kiang, Moreno, & Robinson, 2004). Kochanska (1997) also found that maternal sensitivity and responsiveness with toddlers predicted some children's cooperativeness, compliance with adult directions, and prosocial behaviour two years later. This predictive association was particularly strong for toddlers who were temperamentally outgoing, sociable children. Conversely, for toddlers who were more shy or fearful, these aspects of preschool social competence were predicted by mothers' tendency to use gentle and supportive rather than strict discipline.

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Maternal sensitivity also influences the quality of their controlling or child-management behaviours. Rubin, Hastings, Stewart, Henderson, and Chen (1997) found that mothers who were more sensitive and less intrusively domineering of their toddlers' activities had children who were more comfortable and engaged during interactions with unfamiliar peers and adults. As well, these maternal behaviours impacted the stability of children's behaviour over time. Observed again when they were four years old (Rubin, Burgess, & Hastings, 2002), children were most withdrawn and anxious with their peers when, two years previously, they had been more shy and withdrawn toddlers and their mothers had been less sensitive and more over-bearing.

Together, these longitudinal studies strongly support the argument that maternal warmth and sensitivity, and secure attachment relationships, support the early development of social competence. The use of diverse sources of information, including observations, mother-reports and teacher-reports, strengthens this conclusion. The research of Kochanska, Rubin and their colleagues also reinforces the principles of *equifinality* and *multifinality*. Different socialization experiences can predict the same developmental outcomes for children with different predispositions, and a given socialization experience can predict divergent developmental for different children.

Other researchers have examined the nature of parental control, demands, and management of children's negative behaviours, as they pertain to preschoolers' social competence. Hastings and Coplan (1999) found that teachers described preschoolers as more socially competent when they had mothers who reacted to child transgressions with balanced concerns for obtaining compliant, obedient behaviour and for preserving a close parent-child relationship, rather than focusing on only one of these goals. Kuczynski and Kochanska (1995) examined the links between parenting style and the nature of mothers' demands, and how mothers' demands predicted children's compliant and cooperative behaviour. More authoritative mothers were more likely to make demands that encouraged behaviour rather than prohibited behaviour, telling their toddlers *what to do* rather than telling what *not* to do. As well, they focused more on supporting autonomous behaviours (e.g., "Clean up your room.") than on regulating their children's behaviours (e.g., "Sit up straight and behave."). In turn, encouraging demands and supporting autonomy predicted children's cooperativeness and compliance three years later, when they were 5 years old. Similarly, Dumas, LaFreniere, and Serketich (1995) found that limit setting was applied more sensitively and in more firm but positive ways during interactions between mothers and their socially competent preschoolers, compared to the interactions of mothers with aggressive or anxious preschoolers.

The warmth and reciprocity of parent-child interactions have also been linked to preschoolers' social competence. As well as measuring attachment, Fagot (1997) also observed how toddlers' playful interactions with their parents corresponded to their playful interactions with peers. Although positive parent-child interactions were not associated with peer interactions, she found that toddlers who had more mutually negative interactions with their parents (e.g., parent criticizes when child whines) also had more mutually negative interactions with their peers (e.g., peer pushes when child takes toy). Thus, toddlers who had more conflicted relationships with their parents also had more conflicted relationships with their peers.

Clark and Ladd (2000) obtained analogous results in a study of kindergarten-aged children. Mothers and children were observed while they talked about events in the child's and family's lives, and a measure of positive relationship quality was derived from their mutual warmth, engagement, reciprocity, and happiness. According to teachers' and peers' descriptions of their social competence in kindergarten, children with more positive relationships with their mothers were more empathic and concerned for others, more socially accepted, and had more friends and more harmonious interactions with their peers.

The quality of play between parents and preschool-aged children has been examined in a number of studies. Parent-child play is thought to be an important training context for children's development of social competence. It provides opportunities for children to learn important principles of turn-taking, reciprocity, and shared positive emotions that they can bring to their interactions with peers. A number of studies have shown that preschoolers are happier, more engaged, and more competent with their peers when they have parents who play with them more, engage in more fantasy and physical play, express more warmth and positive emotion during play, and reciprocate more positive behaviours (Isley, O'Neil, Clatfelter, & Parke, 1999; Lindsey & Mize, 2000; Lindsey, Mize & Pettit, 1997; MacDonald & Parke, 1984). It has been suggested that play is a particularly important context for fathers to shape the social competence of their young children, a point that we will return to shortly.

Other studies have examined the emotional qualities of children's relationships with their parents. For example, parents' responses to their children's emotions have been linked to children's social competence. Teachers describe young children as less able to make friends and behave appropriately when mothers react to their children's distress or negative emotions in dismissive or rejecting ways (Fabes, Leonard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001). As well, the extent to which mothers express positive or negative emotions during interactions is mirrored by their children, both at home and in preschool (Denham, 1989; Denham & Grout, 1993).

These and other studies point to a number of aspects of parental socialization that support or undermine children's development of social competence in the preschool years. Preschoolers are more likely to be socially competent when they have secure attachment relationships with their parents; when their parents are more sensitive, warm, and engaged without being intrusive or domineering; when parents play more often and more positively; when parents are supportive of their children's emotions and avoid reacting negatively to children's aversive behaviours; and when parents demands are reasoned, well-balanced, and directed toward fostering a child's autonomous behaviour.

3.2.2.2 The elementary school-aged years

Socialization researchers have tended to focus their attention on young children and adolescents. The middle childhood period is relatively under-studied. However, several studies have shown that many of the same parenting factors that support the social competence of preschoolers appear to be associated with greater social competence in the elementary school-age years as well.

In a study of six-year-old children, maternal warmth was positively associated with children's prosocial solutions to hypothetical conflicts, and with mothers' reports of their children's social

competence, but not with teachers' reports (Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2004). As well, children generated fewer prosocial and more aggressive solutions when their mothers reported using more harshly punitive discipline.

Janssens and Dekovic (1997) looked at the links between six to ten-year-old children's helpful and cooperative behaviours at school, and their parents' socialization practices. Mothers and fathers were observed assisting their children with solving difficult puzzles, and also reported on how they would deal with a variety of difficult situations with their child. Both techniques produced a measure of socialization that ranged from restrictive, strict control at the low end, to supportive, authoritative control at the high end. Mothers' and fathers' supportive, authoritative parenting were correlated equally strongly with both teachers' and peers' descriptions of children as helpful. Interestingly, the link between parental socialization and children's helpful behaviours at school was stronger for older than for younger children in the study.

Not all studies produce strong results. One investigation compared parental socialization and child adjustment for nine-year-olds with and without spina bifida, looking at parents' over-protection and autonomy granting, and children's social acceptance and good behaviour as reported by parents, teachers, and the children themselves (Holmbeck et al., 2002). Parental socialization did not predict social acceptance, although children in both groups had higher scores for good behaviour when their parents were less over-protective.

A study of seven to ten year-old children and their parents in France examined whether children's descriptions of their friendships were related to mothers' descriptions of their child-rearing style (Alles-Jardel, Fourdrinier, Roux, & Schneider, 2002). Children reported both more positive and more conflicted friendships when their mothers' reported a *laissez-faire* style of being fairly permissive and disengaged, compared to children of more rigid or more democratic mothers. This study is somewhat discrepant with the majority of research on parenting styles, which generally show that authoritative parents, who would be akin to the democratic mothers in this study, have more socially competent children than permissive or neglectful parents.

More in keeping with the bulk of research, a study of ten-year-olds and their parents in the United States showed that parents' warmth, responsiveness and use of reasoning during discussions with their children predicted children's social competence at school, according to teacher and peer reports (McDowell, Kim, O'Neil, & Parke, 2002). Similarly, using data on eleven-year-old children from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, a large and nationally representative sample, Chao and Willms (2002) found that firm, rational and responsive parents had more prosocial children.

The style with which parents gave advice to their children about handling difficult situations has also been examined in relation to the development of children's social competence from nine to ten years of age (McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003). Parents who were more controlling of their nine-year-olds, telling the children what to do without explaining why, had children who showed more negative social behaviour at school according to teachers' and peers' reports. Fathers' control and lack of warmth when giving advice also predicted more negative and less positive social behaviour one year later.

These kinds of longitudinal studies have also shown that parental socialization in the preschool years predicts social competence in the elementary school-age years. For example, mothers' authoritative parenting and avoidance of strong expression of negative emotion with preschoolers predicted children's helpful and caring behaviour two years later, as assessed by a compound measure that included observed behaviours, mothers' reports, and teachers' reports (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, & Bridges, 2000).

Similarly, the NICHD Early Child Care Network (2004) followed the development of most of their large sample of preschoolers into the early elementary school-age years, focusing on more than 600 opposite-sex two-parent families. Both mothers' and fathers' sensitivity and child-centered socialization (more support for child autonomy than for parental authority) predicted teachers' reports of children's social competence, including cooperativeness, self-assertion, and self-control. Child-centered socialization was the stronger predictor for mothers and sensitivity was the stronger predictor for fathers.

These studies clearly show that many of the previously-identified features of parental socialization continue to support children's social competence in the elementary school-aged years. Warmth, involvement, sensitivity and authoritative parenting are all important contributors. In addition, teaching through providing explanations and non-directive advice appears to emerge as salient. This might be due to children's increasing cognitive capacities and ability to understand and apply parents' lessons in their interactions with others. Support for children's autonomy also seems important, reflecting the social reality of elementary school-aged children's ever-increasing amounts of time spent away from their parents. As was seen with younger children, parents' negative emotionality and strict control do not benefit their older children's development of social competence.

3.2.2.3 Adolescence

Many studies of the socialization of social competence in the adolescent years have examined broad parenting styles. As reviewed previously, these consistently show that youths with more authoritative parents show greater social competence, prosocial behaviour, self-esteem, and resistance to peer pressure, compared to youths with authoritarian, permissive or neglectful parents (Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). Longitudinal studies show that authoritative parenting fosters adolescents' social competence, autonomy and positive orientation toward work, which in turn improves their academic performance (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). Conversely, other parenting styles, and particularly neglectful parenting, appear to undermine adolescents' well-being. A number of studies have examined more specific measures of parenting and parent-adolescent relationships as they relate to adolescents' social competence; examining these studies may reveal the processes by which authoritative parenting confers its benefits on adolescents' development.

Adolescents who are more socially skilled and have better friend relationships describe their parents as warm and supportive, flexible, and as both encouraging their children's autonomy while still monitoring their children's activities, without being enmeshed or intrusive (Engels, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2002). In a study that tracked the development of adolescents' self-confidence from thirteen to fifteen years of age, youths' initial descriptions of their parents

as highly critical, emotionally manipulative and controlling were found to predict lower levels of self-confidence, especially for fifteen-year-old boys (Conger, Conger, & Scaramella, 1997). Similarly, when young adolescents perceived their parents as more strict and offering them little opportunity to participate in decision-making in the home, they were more likely to turn to their peers for advice and to blindly follow peers' directions, even to their own detriment (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). However, when parents were careful about monitoring their adolescent children's activities, the youths were less likely to show such extreme peer orientation.

Parental monitoring of adolescents' activities and social relationships appears to be a critically important aspect of effective socialization during this developmental period (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Dishion & McMahon, 2003). Allowing autonomy and involvement in decision-making does not mean that parents should withdraw from their youths' lives. Several studies have shown that adolescents are more likely to get involved with deviant peer groups when their parents do not keep track of where and with whom their children are. Adolescents often need assistance from their parents in order to manage their peer relationships competently. Parents who talk with their adolescent children about their friendships, mediate when there are social difficulties, and grant their children some autonomy, have children who report more positive and less conflicted friendships, and less engagement in delinquency and drug use (Mounts, 2004).

Examinations of the quality of parent-adolescent relationships also reveal associations with adolescents' social competence. Adolescents who have secure attachments to their mothers, reflecting affection and trust, also have secure attachments to their friends, which is associated with higher quality friendships (Markiewicz, Doyle, & Brendgen, 2001). Secure attachments to parents also seem to support adolescents in forming satisfying and appropriate romantic relationships (Furman & Wehner, 1994). Adolescents who maintain positively connected relationships with their parents, based in cohesion, supportiveness and mutual reciprocity, report that they are more capable of making autonomous decisions. Thus, adolescents' autonomy, confidence and social competence appears to be supported by maintaining positive relationships with their parents, rather than being either staunchly independent or needy and dependent.

Adolescence is a critical period for the development of autonomy, maturity, and personal identity. Social competence requires balancing the personal goals of emerging adulthood with the increasing social demands of peers while maintaining positive engagement with the family. These studies clearly show that parental socialization has powerful impacts on adolescents' successful accomplishments of these developmental tasks. Granting more autonomy, monitoring adolescents' activities and friendships, talking with youths, and providing warm, supportive and secure relationships provides the necessary family context for adolescents' social competence to flourish.

3.3   MOTHER-FATHER SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES, AND UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS

Most of the research reviewed in the preceding sections has either focused exclusively on the socialization practices of mothers, or it has not distinguished between mothers and fathers (e.g., asking adolescents to report on their 'parents'). Socialization researchers have studied mothers much more than fathers. Some argue that mothers are the primary caregivers in the vast

majority of families, and they are therefore likely to be the most influential socialization agents in the home. Others point out the practical aspects of completing research; it is notoriously difficult to engage and maintain fathers in the research process. However, a growing group of socialization researchers have rejected both the theoretical and practical reasons for overlooking fathers, and have completed investigations on the relations between paternal socialization and children's social competence.

Research on the relative contributions of mothers and fathers to children's development is of obvious relevance for the goals of this review paper. If there are aspects of social competence that appear to be exclusively supported through fathers' involvement in child-rearing, then children being raised in homes without a father—whether that means one mother or two mothers—may be at a disadvantage. Perhaps more likely, though, is the possibility that mothers make exclusive contributions to some aspects of their children's social competence. If that is the case, then children being raised without a mother—either by one father or by two fathers—might be at risk of maladjustment. We will turn to the evidence for the salience of family type after examining the research on paternal socialization and children's social competence.

There are a variety of reasons why it seems likely that, when they are present in children's lives, fathers will make contributions to their children's social development. Although fathers generally spend less time with their children than do mothers, a greater proportion of father-child time is spent in play (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; MacDonald & Parke, 1986; Russell, Mize, & Bissaker, 2002). Recent comprehensive reviews of the literature reveal that the vast majority of studies do not find substantial differences in the qualities of parental relationships that children have with their mothers and fathers (e.g., Russell & Saebel, 1997). Fathers are as sensitive and responsive to their children's cues (Parke & Sawin, 1976; Russell & Russell, 1989) and are as effective at supervising their children's activities (Ladd, Profilet, & Hart, 1992) as are mothers. One of the few consistent differences is that mother-child relationships are warmer and more involved than father-child relationships (Russell et al., 2002), qualities that have been shown to support children's social competence. Fathers have relatively greater concern for socializing their children's practical skills and understanding of rules and less concern for fostering emotional closeness within the family (Hastings & Grusec, 1997, 1998). Thus, there are many parallels between parenting by mothers and fathers, but some differences as well. In heterosexual two-parent homes, fathers may make contributions to children's competence that complement the contributions of mothers. Given the nature of paternal involvement with children, fathers may have a special role to play in developing their children's social competence.

There is only limited empirical support for this claim, however. Mothers and fathers are equally good at facilitating the competent peer interactions of young children when they get directly involved with the children's play, but mothers may be more likely to do so (Bhavnagri & Parke, 1991). Various aspects of both mothers' and fathers' styles of play with their preschool-aged children, such as control, warmth, involvement, and time spent in physical or fantasy play, have been found to be associated with children's social competence at preschool and during play with peers (Barth & Parke, 1993; Isley, O'Neil, Clatfelter, & Parke, 1999; Lindsey & Mize, 2000). In most of these analyses, there were more associations or stronger associations between mother-child play and children's social competence than there were for father-child play, although a few studies showed the opposite pattern (Lindsey, Mize, & Pettit, 1997; McDowell, Parke, & Spitzer, 2002).

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Some research shows that parents may engage in more positive play styles with their same-sex children, that is, fathers with sons and mothers with daughters (Lindsey & Mize, 2000). This might lead to mothers and fathers having differential influences on their daughters' and sons' development of social competence (MacDonald & Parke, 1984; Russell et al., 2002; Russell & Saibel, 1997). For example, mothers' warmth and positive emotions during play has been correlated with observed, peer-reported and teacher-reported kindness, acceptance and social competence for both sons and daughters, whereas these aspects of fathers' play were primarily associated with their sons' behaviours (Isley et al., 1999; Pettit, Glyn Brown, Mize, & Lindsey, 1998). Similarly, mothers' engagement in cooperative pretend and fantasy play was more correlated with their daughters' social competence and peer acceptance than their sons', whereas these aspects of fathers' play only predicted social competence for sons (Lindsey & Mize, 2000). However, there is a fair amount of inconsistency in the research on mothers' and fathers' relative influences on sons' and daughters' social development (Hastings, Rubin, & DeRose, in press), and there are more studies that fail to find such sex-specific effects than there are studies that document them (Lytton & Romney, 1991).

Research on mothers' and fathers' socialization of older children is generally consistent with the overall character of research with preschoolers. For example, both mothers' and fathers' warmth, responsiveness and reasoning during conversations with their elementary school-aged children were correlated with the children's emotional self-regulation and social competence (McDowell et al., 2002), but results were stronger for maternal parenting. In an examination of conflicted and calm interactions between young adolescents and their mothers and fathers, only the number of angry issues between youths and mothers was associated with adolescents' poorer social adjustment (Tesser, Forehand, Brody, & Long, 1989). Calm exchanges with fathers predicted other aspects of adolescent functioning, such as academic performance.

Following 50 youths from mid-adolescence over five years of development, Jones and colleagues (2000) found fathers' parenting only contributed to social behaviour in the context of mothers' parenting. Specifically, fathers' firm control predicted young adults' more secure romantic relationships only if mothers had reported high levels of warmth and acceptance of their adolescents. Conversely, mothers' firm control independently and positively predicted young adults' romantic relationships. Similar findings emerged in another study, in which adolescents' descriptions of themselves as more sympathetic and having better self-confidence and social competence were correlated with mothers' but not fathers' reports of being more supportive and less rigidly controlling (Laible & Carlo, 2004). Fathers' supportiveness was only correlated with adolescents' sympathy when mothers' supportiveness was relatively low. In other words, adolescents' empathic engagement with others might be promoted by having either parent show those kinds of caring and warm behaviours toward them.

Overall, there is at best limited evidence that fathers make uniquely special contributions to children's social competence. Although a few studies have documented that the links between paternal socialization and children's social competence are stronger or different than is the case for mothers, particularly for fathers' socialization of sons, the majority of research does *not* support this argument. Fathers may make some additional, incremental contributions, but mothers appear to have the more powerful influence over children's social development.

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Moreover, research comparing mothers' and fathers' socialization does not reveal whether maternal socialization can support the same developmental outcomes in their children whether or not fathers are present in the home. That is, children may benefit from both mothers' and fathers' parenting when both are present, but they may do just as well when they experience only one of these sources of socialization. Research on the social competence of children living in families where both a mother and father are present, compared to children in families where either a mother or father is absent, could clarify this issue. We now turn to the research on family types.

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4   VARIATION IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL COMPETENCE ACROSS FAMILY TYPES

Having documented the development and qualities of social competence, and the features of parental socialization that support social competence, we have the basis with which to judge the literature on the links between family types and social competence. We focus on studies of parents and children in families with two parents of the opposite sex, compared to families with two parents of the same sex. We also examine lone parent compared to two parent families, both heterosexual and gay or lesbian. We review studies of children's social competence, studies of parental socialization that we have shown to be related to children's social competence, and studies that directly assess the relations between parental socialization and children's social competence across family types.

4.1   LONE-PARENT AND TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

Far more research has been done comparing socialization and development in heterosexual lone-parent and two-parent families than has been done comparing heterosexual and gay or lesbian families. Several recent and comprehensive reviews of the literature on lone-parents are available (Hay & Nash, 2002; Patterson, in press; Weinraub, Horvath, & Gringlass, 2002). We provide a brief summary of this area of research first, before examining research on families with heterosexual parents compared to families with gay or lesbian parents.

There is a disproportionate over-representation of young mothers with poor economic resources in the population of lone-parent families (Martin, Kochanek, Strobino, Guyer, & MacDorman, 2005). The social and economic stresses that burden the lives of young lone mothers are likely to have adverse impacts on their parenting and their children's well-being; these points are addressed further in a subsequent section on the environmental contexts of families. However, the number of older, college-educated and well-employed women who are choosing to become lone parents has been increasing in recent years (Bachu, 1998). Similarly, although they are still less common, the number of lone-father families also is increasing (Weinraub et al., 2002).

Never-married lone mothers have been found to be more rejecting, and to provide less supervision and authoritative control, than married mothers (Shaw, Winslow, & Flanagan, 1999; Thomson, McLanahan, & Braun-Curtin, 1992), although there is considerable variability in the parenting skills of never-married lone mothers (Brody, Flor, & Gibson, 1999). Despite these differences in parenting, some research indicates that children of never-married lone mothers and children of married mothers do not differ strongly on behavioural measures of social competence (Shaw et al., 1999).

When researchers are careful to match samples of lone-mother families and two-parent families on measures of education and income, they often find that these two family types do not differ on measures of parental socialization or children's behaviour (Weinraub et al., 2002; Patterson, in press). However, Gringlas and Weinraub (1995) found differences even with carefully matched samples, especially when families were experiencing high levels of stress. Teachers described the elementary school-aged children of highly stressed lone mothers as least socially competent,

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compared to children of less stressed lone mothers and children of both more and less stressed married mothers.

Interestingly, this research was based on a sample of families who had been studied when the children were preschool-aged (Weinraub & Wolf, 1983, 1987). At preschool-age, stress was also associated with family functioning for the lone-mother families but not the two-parent families. More stressed lone mothers used less effective parenting behaviours during interactions with their children, were less nurturing, and poorer at communication, and their children were moodier. Conversely, the presence of more social support was associated with more optimal parenting by both lone mothers and mothers in two-parent families. This suggests that all mothers benefit from protective factors like social support, but lone mothers and their children are uniquely vulnerable to the adverse effects of risk factors like perceived stress. Mothers in two-parent families may be able to rely upon their co-partners for emotional and practical support when they are under stress, whereas lone mothers would not always have a substitute social support for this ready resource.

There is limited research on lone fathers. Some studies suggest that the socialization by lone fathers and lone mothers is similar; for example, they have both been found to be more permissive than mothers and fathers in two-parent families (Dornbusch & Gray, 1998). Compared to lone mothers, lone fathers tend to have more economic resources, feel more confident, be more positively engaged with children, and have more authority over their children (Hilton & Devall, 1998). Some studies find no difference in the social competence of elementary school-aged children living in lone-father, lone-mother, and two-parent families (Histon, Desrochers, & Devall, 2001; Schnayer & Orr, 1989). However, another study found that daughters of lone fathers showed adjustment difficulties including decreased sociability and increased neediness, whereas sons of lone fathers did not differ in social competence from their peers (Santrock, Warshak, & Elliott, 1982).

Many lone-parent homes result from divorce or spousal separation. The emotional, social and economic stresses that frequently follow divorce may account for the fact that divorced parents are less authoritative than parents in intact families (Hay & Nash, 2002; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 1999). However, the benefits of authoritative parenting for children's social adjustment appear to be just as strong in divorced families as they are in intact families (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). This is further evidence that the impact of divorce on children's well-being may be partially explained by the deleterious effects of divorce on the quality of parenting that children receive (O'Connor, Thorpe, Dunn, & Golding, 1999).

In summary, the risk factors that adversely affect functioning and development appear to have stronger impacts on the parents and children living in lone-parent families. Many lone parents cope well with their life circumstances and use appropriate and effective socialization strategies, and their children seem to benefit from these practices and develop social competence just as much as children in two-parent families. Overall, though, the proportions of lone parents and children of lone parents who manifest social difficulties are greater than is seen with two-parent families. Moreover, more lone parents, and especially lone mothers, live in highly stressed contexts, and lone parents appear to be more vulnerable to the adverse effects of stress. It seems likely that the effects of life stress on children are at least partially accounted for by the impact of stress on the quality of parental socialization.

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4.2 FAMILIES WITH HETEROSEXUAL PARENTS AND FAMILIES WITH LESBIAN AND GAY PARENTS

Although many of the early studies of socialization and social competence in families with gay or lesbian parents were plagued by methodological limitations, the situation has improved considerably in the past 15 years. Most researchers now use careful recruitment and matching procedures to ensure that they have comparable samples of heterosexual families and gay or lesbian families, and well-validated measures of family relationships, parenting practices, and child functioning. We first provide one example of a study with serious methodological limitations, and then give greater attention to methodologically superior studies.

4.2.1 General

We begin with an example of the kind of study that is very difficult to evaluate because of its methodological limitations. Cameron and Cameron (2002) reported on a "content analysis" of life-story narratives made by 24 five to seventeen-year-old children with one gay or lesbian parent. These narratives were published transcripts of stories told by the children about being reared by gay or lesbian parents. The stories were collected through interviews conducted by two other researchers (Rafkin, 1990; Saffron, 1996), although how they recruited the samples of children is not described. The majority of the children described a variety of social and emotional difficulties in their lives, such as being embarrassed, teased, or victimized, or experiencing family instability. Only two to four children (it is impossible to determine exact numbers from the report) reported such serious problems as possible sexual abuse, violence, or criminal behaviour. The authors stated that most problems were attributed to the gay or lesbian parent and not to the heterosexual parent, although they did not describe how this was determined.

There are numerous problems with this study. The authors tell nothing about the samples: were the parents still cohabitating, divorced, or separated, or were the children raised by lone parents from birth? Did children live with their gay or lesbian parent? Were any children raised by two gay or lesbian parents? What were the socioeconomic circumstances of the families? Experiences of spousal conflict and family dissolution, contact with parents, and access to resources or experiences of economic stress would have direct bearing on the children's well-being, regardless of parents' sexual orientation (Bornstein, 2002). The interviews were specifically stated to be about "the nature of homosexual parenting" (p. 73). The children apparently were not also asked to talk about their heterosexual parent, so the transcripts probably contained little information on any problems in that parental relationship. Thus, the authors could not validly determine whether children associated more problems with their gay or lesbian parent than with their heterosexual parent. There was not a matched comparison group of life stories from children with heterosexual parents who lived in similar socioeconomic and family type circumstances. It is impossible to know whether these 24 children reported social and emotional difficulties at greater or lesser frequency, or of greater or lesser severity, than children without a gay or lesbian parent. Finally, the authors provided no information about the reliability or validity of their procedures for quantifying the information in the transcripts.

As well as being seriously flawed methodologically, this study is almost unique in its conclusion that children of gay and lesbian parents experience serious adjustment problems. As mentioned earlier, replication is an important part of research. The results of any one study may be suspect,

especially if it is a purely descriptive or correlational study with a small sample of participants. When independent studies produce identical results, we can be more certain of the validity of those results. Meta-analysis is a statistical method of evaluating the extent to which results are replicated. It combines the results of many studies in order to test whether findings are consistent across studies, and to assess the overall strength of any consistent findings that are identified.

Allen and Burrell (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of 18 independent studies on gay or lesbian parents and/or children with gay or lesbian parents, compared to heterosexual parents and/or children with heterosexual parents. All 18 studies included comparison groups, making them methodologically superior to the Cameron and Cameron (2002) report. The meta-analysis included both studies of lesbian mothers and studies of gay fathers. Four of the studies included teachers' reports of children's behaviour at school, five studies included parents' reports of the quality of the parent-child relationship, four studies included parents' reports of children's happiness and life satisfaction, and seven studies included children's reports of their adjustment and life satisfaction. By aggregating across studies, their analyses of these measures of social competence were based on 167 to 386 families.

None of the tested effects were significant (Allen & Burrell, 1996). In other words, children with heterosexual parents and children with gay and lesbian parents did not differ in any of the measures of socialization and social competence. The conclusions of this report are strikingly different from those of Cameron and Cameron (2002). Studies with better methodologies, larger samples of participants, and aggregation of data across multiple independent studies, provide stronger support for the conclusion that children with a gay or lesbian parent do not differ in these indicators of social competence from children without a gay or lesbian parent.

In the following review of specific studies, we do not provide reviews of each of the 18 investigations that were included in this meta-analysis, because reviewing Allen and Burrell's (1996) paper has already accounted for that research. However, reports that included additional relevant information that Allen and Burrell did not examine, such as lone parent versus two parent family status, are reviewed for results pertaining to those features. Our main focus will be on research studies published since Allan and Burrell's meta-analysis, and on earlier papers that were not included in their study.

4.2.2 By developmental period

In this section, we examine specific empirical investigations of social competence and socialization across family types. There is more research available on the social competence and adjustment of elementary school-aged children of gay or lesbian parents than there is on either preschool-aged or adolescent children (Patterson, 2002). Thus, our conclusions about differences or similarities in children's functioning will be strongest for school-aged children.

4.2.2.1 The preschool period

Most studies on gay and lesbian families with preschool-aged children have focused on parental socialization and family functioning, rather than children's social competence. The information on parents and families is reviewed in the following section.

One of the few longitudinal programs of research on children in families with same-sex parents followed the development of 84 lesbian families who conceived through donor insemination (DI) from pregnancy until children were five-years-old (Gartrell et al., 1996, 1999, 2000). There were initially 14 lone-mother and 70 two-parent families, although some separations and new unions occurred over the 5 years of study. Although there was no comparison sample of children being raised in heterosexual families, this study does provide useful descriptive information on the lives and experiences of young children with lesbian mothers. Interviewed when their children were five-years-old, mothers reported that 68% were open about their family type with their peers, and that 87% of children related well with their peers. Given the incidence of social problems in the general population of preschoolers (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000), this suggests that preschool-aged children with lesbian mothers were at least as socially competent as preschool-aged children of heterosexual mothers. However, mothers reported that 18% of children had experienced some form of homophobic discrimination from peers or teachers, an adverse social event that would be a source of stress unique to children raised in gay and lesbian families.

4.2.2.2 The elementary school-age period

In a study of seven-year-old children who had been conceived through DI, 30 lesbian two-parent families were compared with 16 heterosexual two-parent families (Chan, Brooks, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998; Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998), matched on age and sex of children, age of parents, employment and income, and duration of the couples' relationships. Biological mothers, non-biologically-related parents (fathers or lesbian partners who are sometimes called 'social mothers'), and teachers reported on the children's social functioning. Children in the two family types did not differ on any of the measures of social competence. An independent study of ten-year-old children who had been conceived through DI showed that children with lesbian parents and children with heterosexual parents did not differ in self-reported social competence or mother-reported behaviour problems (Vanfraussen, Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2002). Children in lesbian families described themselves as having fewer aggression and anxiety problems than children in heterosexual families, although teachers described the children in lesbian families as less attentive.

Similar results were found in a study of 50 lesbian lone mothers and 40 heterosexual lone mothers (Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, & Smith, 1986). There were no differences in children's popularity and social engagement, according to both mothers' and children's reports. Using published data about children's normative scores on psychological tests rather than a direct comparison group, Patterson (1996) also found that children of lesbian mothers reported levels of social competence and closeness with peers that did not differ from the average scores for children of the same age.

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Golombok and her colleagues have conducted some of the most methodologically sound studies of socialization in lesbian families, matching families on methods of procreation, ages of mothers and children, birth order, and family size. They examined the social and emotional functioning of children raised by lone lesbian mothers, lesbian mothers with a partner (social mother), lone heterosexual mothers, and heterosexual mothers with a partner (biological father) (Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 1997). Children in both types of lesbian families and children of lone heterosexual mothers had been raised without a father-figure in the home since infancy. The six-year-old children raised in father-absent homes had greater security of attachment than the children raised in two-parent heterosexual homes, but the children of lesbian mothers and children of lone heterosexual mothers did not differ in attachment. There were no family type differences in children's reports of their social acceptance by peers, but children in father-absent homes reported less physical and cognitive competence than children in father-present homes. Again, children raised by lesbian and heterosexual lone mothers did not differ in these competence scores.

In a longitudinal extension of this study, most of the families were visited again when children were 12 years old (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). Both mothers and children were interviewed about the children's social competence. At this time, there were no differences across family types on any of the measures of children's peer relationships, experiences of bullying, self-esteem, or school adjustment.

Golombok and colleagues (2003) also identified lesbian-mother families within a large, representative sample of families enrolled in a longitudinal geographic population study. They recruited 20 lone-mother and 19 two-parent lesbian families with a five to seven-year-old child, and compared these families with 60 lone-parent heterosexual families, and 74 two-parent heterosexual families. There were no differences across family types in mothers' reports of their children's social adjustment, although there was a weak tendency for lesbian mothers to report that their children were having more problems with peers. Teachers also did not report any differences in functioning for children in lesbian-headed families compared to children in heterosexual-headed families. However, teachers reported that children in lone-mother families, either lesbian or heterosexual, had more behavioural problems than children in families with two mothers or with a mother and father. As well, children did not report different levels of self-esteem or competence across the family types, although there was a weak tendency for children of lesbian mothers to report that they were less accepted by peers. Thus, this study replicated previous results showing little association between mothers' sexual orientation and children's social competence, but children of lone-mothers have more problems related to social competence than children of heterosexual or lesbian two-parent families.

In one of the only large studies of gay fathers, Barrett and Tasker (2001) interviewed 101 gay fathers of 179 children. The fathers generally reported that their children had very few problems related to adjustment, life satisfaction, or comfort with having a gay father. However, only fathers' perspectives on their children's functioning were assessed, and there was no comparison group of heterosexual fathers.

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4.2.2.3 Adolescence

Given the great importance of peer relationships during adolescence, societal homophobia or discrimination might be a serious problem for adolescent children of gay or lesbian parents. Adolescent children of lesbian mothers who reported perceiving more stigma against lesbian families reported lower self-esteem, less social acceptance, less close friendships, and decreased likelihood of disclosing their mothers' sexual orientation, compared to youths of lesbian mothers who perceived less stigma (Gershon, Tschann, & Jemerin, 1999). However, being willing to disclose appeared to protect some aspects of the youths' social functioning. Youths who disclosed more had closer friendships, even if they perceived high levels of stigma.

A reluctance to disclose mothers' lesbianism because of anticipated negative reactions by peers seems to be a common concern for children of lesbian mothers (Javaid, 1993; Patterson, 2002; Ray & Gregory, 2001). There is little evidence, however, that children who have disclosed their mothers' lesbianism actually experience more rejection or social problems than children who do not disclose their mothers' sexual orientation. One research program showed that the majority of children with gay or lesbian parents experienced some social problems, such as teasing or bullying, because of their mothers' sexual orientation (Ray & Gregory, 2001). However, older adolescents reported that peers are more accepting than younger adolescents.

As well, these studies did not compare children of different family types for the actual frequency of experiencing teasing, bullying or discrimination. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether youths with gay or lesbian parents were victimized more frequently or more severely than youths with heterosexual parents, although the reasons for victimization might vary across family types.

Not all studies of adolescents have shown that having gay or lesbian parents was associated with experiencing social problems at school. Drawing on a large and nationally representative sample of youths, Wainright and colleagues (2004) identified 44 adolescents living in lesbian two-parent families, and also recruited 44 adolescents living in heterosexual two-parent families. These groups were carefully matched for age, sex, ethnicity, adoption status, learning disability, parental education and family income. Having matched characteristics, and statistical control of non-matching characteristics, increases our confidence that any group differences in adolescent functioning could be accurately attributed to the adolescents having lesbian or heterosexual parents.

Adolescents with lesbian mothers were at least as socially competent as adolescents with heterosexual parents (Wainright et al., 2004). There were no differences between family types in adolescents' self-reported self-esteem, anxiety, or having romantic relationships. Adolescents with lesbian mothers reported being more connected with their schools than youths with heterosexual parents.

4.2.2.4 Summary

Almost uniformly, research has documented the absence of differences in social competence and adjustment across studies describing the behaviours and experiences of children with gay or lesbian parents, and comparing children with gay or lesbian parents to children with heterosexual parents. Only one aspect of social functioning distinguished children in different family types

and was replicated across multiple studies: discrimination. There were more concerns about being discriminated against, and possibly more experiences of being discriminated against, for children living with one or two gay or lesbian parents compared to children living with heterosexual parents. Adolescents with gay or lesbian parents appeared to be more worried than younger children about negative peer reactions to their family types. However, a larger number of studies showed that children with gay or lesbian parents and children with heterosexual parents did not differ in any measures of their peer acceptance and social adjustment at school, and one study indicated that youths with gay or lesbian parents had marginally better school adjustment. It should be recognized that the majority of these studies were methodologically limited, in that they utilized single time-point, correlational designs with convenience samples. This limitation is off-set by the small set of longitudinal studies and studies with representative samples that also found convergent results: children with gay or lesbian parents and children with heterosexual parents did not differ on measures of social competence.

Conversely, on average, children raised in two-parent families appeared to show better social competence than children raised in lone-mother families, regardless of parents' sexual orientation. As we show in later sections, this difference is partially attributable to the different life circumstances of many lone parents and coupled parents, including access to emotional and socioeconomic resources.

It should be recognized that the evidence for average or marginally better-than-average social competence in children with gay or lesbian parents is based primarily on children with lesbian mothers. A few studies on children with gay fathers were included in the meta-analysis of Allen and Burrell (1996), but these were not distinguished from the studies on children with lesbian mothers. There is not yet sufficient research on children with gay fathers to determine whether being raised by two gay fathers is associated with any differences in children's social competence, compared to being raised by two mothers, or by a mother and a father (Bigner, 1999).

4.3   VARIATIONS IN PARENTING ACROSS FAMILY TYPES

A second way of inferring whether children with one or two gay or lesbian parents might differ in social competence from children with heterosexual parents is by looking at whether the factors associated with social competence differ across family types. As we have documented earlier, there are strong and consistent associations between many aspects of parental socialization and children's social competence, and it is likely that parental socialization has causal influences on the development of social competence. Therefore, it is informative to examine whether studies of parental socialization have documented any differences between heterosexual families and gay or lesbian families.

In a study comparing parenting in 15 lesbian families who conceived through DI to parenting in 15 matched heterosexual families who conceived through DI, the family types were found to differ on only one aspect of parental socialization (Flaks, Ficher, Masterpacqua, & Joseph, 1995). The lesbian parents scored higher on their awareness of parental problem solving, meaning they were able to identify more potential child-care problems and a greater variety of solutions to those problems, compared to heterosexual parents. This difference was mainly

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attributable to fathers in the heterosexual families, who scored lower on problem solving awareness than all mothers.

Another study compared 30 lesbian two-parent families with four to eight-year-old children conceived through DI at a fertility clinic to 38 matched heterosexual families who conceived through DI and 30 matched heterosexual families who conceived without medical assistance. (Brewaeys, Ponjeart, & Golombok, 1997). Couples in the three family types did not report differences in their satisfaction with their couple relationship, although lesbian social (non-biological) mothers were more involved in helping with practical childcare duties than fathers in both heterosexual family types, a common finding (Patterson, 2002). Biological mothers in the three groups reported similarly positive relationships with their children. However, lesbian social mothers reported more positive relationships with their children than did fathers in either of the heterosexual family types. Children in the three family types reported similarly positive relationships with their biological mothers, and the quality of children's relationships with lesbian social mothers did not differ from the quality of children's relationships with fathers. In all family types, children reported more positive relationships with biological mothers than with social mothers or fathers. When these families were seen again about four years later (Vanfraussen, Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2003), the researchers did not find any differences in parental socialization or parent-child relationship quality between heterosexual families and lesbian families.

Differences in the quality of relationships children have with their two mothers in lesbian families have been seen in other research as well. Despite sharing the job of childcare fairly equally, being satisfied with their couple relationships, and having overall positive relationships with their children, lesbian couples tend to report that children form a stronger bond or closer relationship with one of their two mothers (Bennett, 2003; Nelson, 1999). In families with a birth-mother, the stronger relationship is typically with the biological mother. In adoptive families, the mother with whom the child is closer is seen as more caring and nurturing. This parallels the usual difference seen in children's relationships with their mothers and fathers in heterosexual families (Russell et al., 2002). However, although the mother-child bond may be strongest for the primary caregiver, almost all social mothers establish close and strong attachments to their children (McCandlish, 1987; Steckel, 1987), just like the majority of biological fathers.

Golombok et al. (1997) found mothers in father-absent homes expressed greater warmth, were more engaged, and had more serious disputes with their six-year-old children than mothers in father-present homes. When lesbian mothers were compared with lone heterosexual mothers, the mothers in these two family types did not differ in warmth or seriousness of disputes, but lone heterosexual mothers were found to be more engaged with their children than lesbian mothers.

These differences were not replicated in a subsequent investigation of families with five to seven-year-old children (Golombok et al., 2003). In that study, mothers in two-parent families, whether they were lesbian or heterosexual, reported more affection and enjoyment in their roles as mothers, less serious disputes with their children, less fantasy play, and more supervision of play, compared to lone heterosexual and lesbian mothers. Thus, number of parents in the home was associated with parenting quality. There were some differences according to sexual orientation as well. Compared to heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers were less likely to use

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physical discipline, and more likely to engage in fantasy and domestic play with their children.
In two-parent families, lesbian social mothers also differed from fathers in heterosexual families,
with social mothers reporting greater emotional engagement, less physical discipline, and more
domestic play than fathers. Another study of lesbian and gay two-parent families showed that
both lesbian mothers and gay fathers report lower rates of physical discipline than the national
average (Johnson & O'Connor, 2001). These differences would be likely tend to advantage
children in families with lesbian and gay parents, vis-à-vis the development of social
competence.

Golombok and her colleagues saw these same families again six years later (MacCallum &
Golombok, 2004), when the children were about 12 years-old. Some of the group differences
were maintained and others changed. There were no differences across family types in warmth
and affection, use of reasoning or aggression during conflicts, and children's reports of parental
monitoring and discipline. Lone heterosexual mothers reported the highest levels of aggression
during discipline, and all mothers in father-absent homes reported more serious disputes than
mothers in father-present homes. Compared to children in father-present homes, children in
father-absent homes reported that their mothers engaged in more activities with them.

Conversely, no substantial differences in parenting attitudes and behaviours were found in
several studies comparing the socialization of lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers
(McNeill, Rienzi, & Kposowa, 1998; Mucklow & Phelan, 1981; Wainright et al., 2004). This
lack of differences has been replicated in a large, carefully designed study. The parenting and
relationship experiences of 100 lesbian families who conceived a child through DI after having
established their couple relationship were compared with those of 100 heterosexual two-parent
families, matched on number of children in the family, ages and sexes of the children, and living
in urban, suburban or rural areas (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2004). Mothers and fathers,
and lesbian biological and social (non-biological) mothers, did not differ on any of the parenting
measures. Parents in the two family types did not differ in their self-reported competence as
parents, feelings of parental burden, or access to social support outside the family. The lesbian
social mothers reported feeling more need to justify the quality of their parenting than did fathers
in the heterosexual families, but they also reported more satisfaction with their couple
relationship than did fathers. Lesbian biological mothers were more satisfied with their partners'
contributions as co-parent than were heterosexual mothers.

There have been more studies on the parenting attitudes and practices of gay fathers than there
have been studies that directly assess the social competence of their children. Compared to
heterosexual fathers, gay fathers put more emphasis on the importance of tradition and security
in their decision to have children, and they describe using a more authoritative parenting style
with their children (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989a, 1989b).

Gay fathers who have disclosed their sexual orientation to their children, compared to gay fathers
who have not, were more likely to be in stable committed relationships with another man
(Bigner, 1999; Bozett, 1987a, 1987b). As well, fathers who had disclosed spent more time in
positive interactions with their children. This may be because disclosing gay fathers had greater
self-confidence and self-acceptance than non-disclosing gay fathers, as better psychological
health generally supports more effective parenting.

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Looking at relationship dynamics within gay and lesbian and heterosexual families, McPherson (1993, as cited by Patterson, 2002) studied 28 gay parent families and 27 heterosexual two-parent families. Gay couples shared household and childcare responsibilities more equally than heterosexual couples, were more satisfied with their division of labour, and felt that their couple relationships were more cohesive and affectionate. Similarly, in a study that included only gay fathers, Barrett and Tasker (2001) found that these fathers generally reported that they had very few difficulties with parenting. A number of the indicators of fathers' effective socialization and coping were associated with the presence of another supportive adult in the home. Gay fathers who were cohabiting with either another man or a woman had fewer practical, emotional, and financial difficulties related to parenting, compared to gay fathers who lived alone.

Overall, studies of the socialization practices used by gay fathers and heterosexual fathers find few consistent differences between them (Bigner, 1999; Patterson, 2002). When differences are identified, they point to gay fathers using slightly more authoritative parenting styles, or generally being marginally more positive and effective, than heterosexual fathers.

4.4 VARIATIONS IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN PARENTING AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL COMPETENCE ACROSS FAMILY TYPES

There are few if any consistent differences in the social competence of children with heterosexual parents and children with gay or lesbian parents. As well, studies of many aspects of parental socialization do not suggest that children with gay or lesbian parents experience less effective and supportive socialization than children with heterosexual parents. It is possible, however, that the associations between parental socialization and children's social competence are not the same across family types. In other words, in accordance with the principle of *multifinality*, the same parenting practice may be correlated with different child outcomes depending on whether children live in heterosexual families or gay and lesbian families. In this section, we review studies examining the associations between parental socialization and children's social competence across family types.

In a longitudinal study of rural lone-mother African-American families, Brody and colleagues (1998, 1999, 2002) found that firm parental control and structuring of the home environment, more positive mother-child relationship quality, and maternal involvement predicted their elementary school-aged children's better behavioural self-regulation. In turn, more well-regulated children evidenced better social competence. Similar results emerged in a study of lone-parent and two-parent African-American and Latino families (Florsheim, Tolan, & Smith, 1998). Boys in lone-parent families generally had more problems than boys in two-parent families, but more effective and positive parenting was associated with more positive developmental outcomes for boys in both lone-parent and two-parent families.

Children in divorced families have been found to be given more responsibilities in the home and more opportunities to participate in family decision-making, compared to children in intact families (Gately & Schwebel, 1992). This egalitarian and engaged approach to socialization and child management predicted more maturity, self-esteem and empathy in the children. As well, pre-adolescent children of divorced lone mothers described themselves as more socially competent when their mothers used more authoritative control.

In research on lesbian mothers that did not include comparison samples of heterosexual mothers, Patterson (1995) found that children in these lesbian two-parent families reported a greater sense of well-being when their social mothers were more involved in their childcare, such that childcare was shared more equally between the mothers. Conversely, Chan and colleagues (1998) did not find that children of lesbian couples were more socially competent when their mothers had more satisfying and less conflicted couple relationships, and engaged in more co-parenting and shared family decision-making. However, these aspects of positive family functioning were correlated with children having fewer aggression or acting-out problems.

In one of the few studies of parent-child relationships in families with two gay fathers, Crosbie-Burnett and Helmbrecht (1993) studied 48 adolescents and their parents, including the biological mother, the biological gay father, and the social gay father. Only 12 of the adolescents lived with their biological fathers, but all of the children living with their biological mothers also had regular contact with their fathers. Adolescents reported being happier when they had closer relationships with their biological fathers, when their social gay fathers were more included in the family, and when their biological fathers and social gay fathers had a more satisfying couple relationship.

Investigations that have compared the links between parental socialization and children's social competence across family types generally have not found any differences in correlations. For example, Golombok et al. (2003) found that mothers and teachers reported that young elementary school-aged children had fewer social and behavioural problems when mothers were warmer and had less conflict with their children. The correlations between these aspects of socialization and children's social adjustment were consistent for children in lesbian and heterosexual families, and for children in lone-mother and two-parent families.

Similarly, Wainright et al. (2004) found that parents who described their relationships with their adolescent children as being closer, more trusting, and involving more open communication had children who reported fewer problems and more connectedness at school. These correlations existed for both lesbian two-parent and heterosexual two-parent families.

4.5   OVERALL SECTION SUMMARY

Research has consistently shown little difference in children's social competence, parental socialization, and family functioning between families of heterosexual parents and families of gay or lesbian parents. The few differences that do emerge consistently suggest that (1) gay and lesbian couples tend to have a more egalitarian and satisfying balance of child-care tasks than heterosexual couples, (2) gay and lesbian parents may be marginally more effective socialization agents than heterosexual parents, and (3) children with gay or lesbian parents may be more concerned with or even experience more discrimination due to their parents' sexual orientation, although this does not appear to interfere with their social competence. From the perspective of risk and protective factors, the marginally, more effective socialization practices of gay and lesbian parents might act to protect their children from the adverse effects that could otherwise result from concern about or experience of teasing, bullying and discrimination because of the sexual orientation of their parent(s). Additionally, the marginally more positive home environment that likely results from lesbian and gay parents' greater support of each other's

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child-care activities might provide a marginally more supportive context for children's development of feelings of security and self-worth.

Conversely, having one parent or two parents present in the home appears to be more robustly associated with children's social competence and parents' socialization practices. Lone mothers often appear more engaged and involved with their children than mothers with a partner. This may reflect lone mothers' efforts to compensate for the lack of a second parent in their children's daily lives, or simply the fact that parents without a partner do not need to divide their time and activities between the other adult and the child as often as parents with a partner may need to do. However, on average, lone mothers are also less warm and authoritative, use stronger disciplinary tactics, and have more conflicted relationships with their children. A larger proportion of children of lone mothers are likely to have social and behavioural problems, and lower social competence, than children in two-parent families. Although there has been less research on lone fathers, their children also seem on average to be at a somewhat increased risk of having problems with social competence. Whether other forms of social support can ameliorate the challenges involved in being a lone parent is considered in Section 5.2.

Despite these patterns of similarities and differences in functioning, the associations between parental socialization and children's social competence appear to be remarkably consistent across family types. The same child-rearing practices that foster better social and emotional functioning in the children of heterosexual two-parent families also promote the well-being of children of gay and lesbian two-parent families and lone-parent families. Consistent with the principle of *resilience*, when children are supported by effective parental socialization practices, they are likely to attain similarly positive developmental outcomes despite living in markedly different social circumstances.

5   ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

In our original plans for this comprehensive review of the literature, we had intended to use this section to examine the economic and social differences in the lives of heterosexual families and gay and lesbian families that might account for any differences in children's social competence that we identified. However, no substantial difference in social competence depending on parents' sexual orientation has been identified. Children raised in families with same-sex parents are at least as socially competent as children raised in families with opposite-sex parents. Children raised in families with lone gay or lesbian parents are at least as socially competent as children raised in families with lone heterosexual parents. Therefore, the original goal is moot.

However, examining the environmental contexts of families' lives may help to reveal why there are differences in social competence and parental socialization for children in lone-parent and two-parent families. As well, across family types, understanding the contributions of these extra-familial factors may help to reveal why some children and families fare better than others. In this section, we review research on the links between financial and social resources, the quality of parenting, and children's social competence.

5.1   A RISK FACTOR FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN: SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES)

Sociodemographic disadvantages (e.g., low income, low level of education) and stressors (e.g., job and income loss) are well-established family risk factors in children's development (Curtis, 2000; Curtis, Dooley, Lipman, & Feeny, 2001; McLoyd, 1990). Less access to economic resources is associated with more maladaptive, punitive and authoritarian parenting practices (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002).

Research has consistently shown that parents with low incomes and less access to resources have poorer socialization practices and less authoritative parenting styles, compared to more financially well-off parents (Magnuson & Duncan, 2002). Lone African American mothers with greater financial resources had more confidence in their parenting, and used more positive parenting practices, compared to poorer mothers (Brody, Flor, & Gibson, 1999). Similar relations were found in a study of two-parent African-American families (Brody et al., 1994). Another study showed that, across racial groups in the United States, poor mothers were less verbally engaged and less warm and affectionate than more affluent mothers (Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001). A study of fathers also showed that those fathers with lower SES reported more frequent use of verbal and physical punishment with their preschool-aged children (Burbach, Fox, & Nicholson, 2004).

As well, children in socioeconomically disadvantaged families fare less well than their more advantaged counterparts (Lipman & Offord, 1997). Young children living in persistent poverty are twice as likely to have a variety of adjustment difficulties and emotional problems, including anxiety-related difficulties, even in the toddler years (Offord, Boyle, & Jones, 1987). The effects of socioeconomic stress on children are likely to be at least partially mediated by their effects on parents (Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995; Miller, Jenkins, & Keating, 2002; Ross, Roberts, & Scott, 1998). One study showed that SES was positively correlated with better parenting practices in divorced mothers, and that better parenting practices predicted children's adaptive

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and prosocial behaviour at school (DeGarmo, Forgatch, & Martinez, 1999). Job loss, income loss, and persistent economic hardship undermine parents' ability to respond nurturantly to their children, thereby decreasing the possibility that positive parenting would guide children toward greater competence and well-being.

Clearly, low SES, reflecting a lack of financial security or access to adequate resources, is an important risk factor for poor parental socialization that undermines the social competence of children. The question emerges, then, as to whether different family types tend to differ in SES. They do.

Lone-parent families have lower mean incomes than two-parent families, and lone mothers have lower mean incomes than lone fathers (Meyer & Garasky, 1993). In Canada, lone-mother families are more than four times as likely (52.5%) as two-parent families (11.8%) to be within the low-income bracket (Statistics Canada, 2005). Income also decreases as a consequence of divorce, for both divorced mothers and divorced fathers (Cherlin, 1992). In the United States, 33% of divorced mothers with custody and 14% of divorced fathers with custody live in poverty (Weinraub et al., 2002). Canadian statistics also show that divorce increases the risk of income loss. A child in Canada is almost five times more likely to move into the low income bracket if their custodial parent experiences divorce in the previous year, compared to a child in a family with an intact marriage (Picot, Zyblock & Pyper, 1999).

Given the documented associations across all family types between enduring the stresses of economic deprivation and being less effective parents, it should not be surprising that many lone parents tend to have poorer socialization practices, and many of their children tend to show lower social competence. Lone-parent families with adequate or better financial resources usually are found to fare as well as two-parent families. However, although differences in SES do account for much of the differences between lone-parent and two-parent families in parental socialization and children's adjustment, SES alone does not account for all of the differences (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardiff, 2002; Patterson, in press). SES may have direct effects on children's well-being, as well as indirect effects via parenting.

Relative economic hardship is common for gay and lesbian parents, as well. Gay men earn 11% to 27% less than heterosexual men with the same education, experience, and occupation, who live in the same region (Badgett, 1995); lesbians also earn less than heterosexual women, although the difference is smaller. Lesbian mothers are more likely to experience job loss than heterosexual mothers (Pagelow, 1980), and lesbian mothers tend to be less affluent than heterosexual mothers (Miller, Jacobsen, & Bigner, 1980).

SES can also vary across types of gay and lesbian families. van Dam (2004) interviewed lesbian mothers in two-parent families who first started their couple relationship and then had a child (original families), and those who became families because one lesbian already had a child when the couple formed (stepfamilies). Mothers in stepfamilies had less education, lower incomes, and more children than mothers in original families. The stresses arising from this relative economic hardship could be expected to adversely affect the quality of their parenting.

It is curious, therefore, that overall gay and lesbian parents are equally good, or marginally better, socialization agents than heterosexual parents. Their relatively greater financial stresses

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do not appear to undermine the quality of their parenting. Perhaps anticipating that their children may be at risk of social disadvantage due to discrimination, gay and lesbian parents may put extra effort into meeting the needs of their children and providing them with strong social and emotional resources (Flaks et al., 1995; Gartrell et al., 2000; Miller et al., 1980). Thus, the expected deleterious effects of economic stress on the quality of parental socialization may be ameliorated to some extent by the added child-care motivation present in many homes with gay or lesbian parents.

5.2   A PROTECTIVE FACTOR FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN: SOCIAL SUPPORT

The preceding review clearly showed that having a partner helps a parent to cope and do well with child-rearing (e.g., NICHD Early Child Care Research network, 2004). Parents in two-parent families can rely upon their partners for emotional and practical assistance, and as we have already shown, same-sex couples do this to a greater extent than opposite-sex couples. Support can be obtained through other social relationships as well. Researchers have looked at the positive contributions to parental socialization and children's social competence made by the support parents receive from their social networks: the other family members, adult friends, and community members with whom parents have regular contact (Cochran & Niego, 2002).

Support from others can be either *emotional*, bolstering a parent's confidence and providing an outlet for stress, *informational*, giving useful advice about child-rearing, or *instrumental*, offering practical assistance to a parent (Crockenberg, 1988). Other adults can also act as additional socialization agents for children, becoming involved in child care, providing social or material resources to children, or serving as models of healthy adult social functioning (Cochran & Brassard, 1979). All of these aspects have been found to benefit parents and children. Parents with greater social support are less stressed, have warmer interactions with their children, and are more authoritative (Cachran & Niego, 2002). Their children tend to fare better too, as parents who maintain more frequent and satisfying contacts with their social networks have been found to have children who have more friends and are more socially competent (Homel, Burns, & Goodnow, 1987; Krantz, Webb, & Andrews, 1984; Markiewicz et al., 2001).

Vulnerable parents, such as low-income and lone-parent mothers, seem to derive particularly strong benefits from the support they receive through their social networks (Belle, 1982; Cochran & Niego, 2002). Thus, social support can be seen as a protective factor that offsets the negative effects of disadvantages in a parent's life. Some researchers have examined the availability and effects of social support for lone-parent and two-parent families with heterosexual parents or gay and lesbian parents.

Support from social networks appears to be an important part of the lives of gay and lesbian parents. Younger lesbian mothers, who might be expected to be more vulnerable, were more likely to use informal social support, such as talking to friends, than were older lesbian mothers (Bos et al., 2004a). Children of lesbian mothers may also derive benefits from their mothers' social networks. Having greater contact with their grandparents was associated with having fewer anxiety-related problems (Patterson, Hurt, & Mason, 1998). As well, children who had more frequent contacts with their lesbian mothers' friends reported feelings of greater well-being, compared to children who were less involved in their mothers' social networks.

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Social support can also vary across types of gay and lesbian families. In van Dam's (2004) study of lesbian mothers in two-parent original families and stepfamilies, mothers in stepfamilies perceived less support than mothers in original families, and had less contact with their families of origins (the children's grandparents). Many mothers reported that they had experienced harassment at work and that their children had been teased at school, but negative experiences were more common for lesbian stepfamilies than for lesbian original families.

Social networks can sometimes be sources of stress as well as support (Cochran & Niego, 2002). Gay and lesbian parents are likely to be selective about their social networks in order to minimize their likelihood of encountering criticism or disapproval. Negative societal attitudes about the appropriateness of child-rearing by gay and lesbian parents may limit the quality of support that gay and lesbian parents can obtain from some of the typically-identified social network members. For example, gay fathers and step-fathers reported that they receive more support for their families from their gay friends than from either their relatives or their heterosexual friends (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993). Conversely, the children of gay or lesbian parents may not have as many options for establishing a supportive social network. Adolescent children of gay fathers reported fairly low levels of support from friends and families, and many youths kept their 'gay stepfamily' secret from their peers out of fear of negative reactions and rejection (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993).

Thus, the presence of supportive social networks is associated with better functioning for gay and lesbian parents and their children. The availability of this support may be limited for some gay and lesbian families, however, because of concerns about real or expected discrimination by some friends and family members.

Research on lone-parent families also has shown that social support may be beneficial for parents and children. Lone fathers who obtained custody after divorce seemed to receive more offers of informational and instrumental support from their social networks than newly divorced single mothers (Weinraub et al., 2002), although there is not evidence that they utilized the offered support. Both lone mothers and mothers in two-parent families showed more optimal parenting when they felt that they had more social support (Weinraub & Wold, 1983, 1987). However, lone mothers of preschoolers felt that they received less social support than mothers in two-parent families. Young lone mothers are more likely to finish their education when they receive more emotional, instrumental and economic support from their own parents and other family members, but many teen-aged mothers do not retain supportive ties with their families of origin (Weinraub et al., 2002). A program designed to strengthen the social networks of low-income mothers with preschool-aged children (Cochran, 1991) showed that as European-American mothers in lone-parent families built larger and closer networks of non-kin friends, the mothers felt more confident as parents and became more active in preparing their children for school. African-American mothers in lone-parent families appeared to benefit from strengthening their social connections with both relatives and non-kin adults, as they became more engaged with their children and showed more preparedness for schooling.

Overall, these studies indicate that social support is associated with better quality parenting as strongly for lone parents as it is for other family types (Cochran & Niego, 2002; Weinraub et al., 2002). There may be less availability of social support for lone parents, however.

The social support network may benefit children's development of social competence directly, as well as through its benefits to parental well-being and socialization. A growing body of research indicates that children and youth living in conditions of heightened risk and adversity may have their resilience fostered through the committed involvement of mentors: extended family members and non-familial adults who become involved in the child's up-bringing (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). The presence of these role models and sources of support is associated with children living in high-risk environments attaining more positive developmental outcomes and avoiding destructive behaviours like serious delinquency. Thus, the social support network can compensate for other risk factors and help to foster children's social competence.

5.3   SUMMARY

SES and social support appear to act as risk and protective factors, respectively, in terms of their impact on parents' and children's well-being. Parents of all family types are more likely to be more effective socialization agents, and their children are more likely to be socially competent, when they have adequate or better economic resources and when they are involved with more supportive social networks.

Given the correlational and single time-point nature of most of the studies reviewed in this section, it is difficult to determine whether variations in SES and social support cause any observed differences in quality of parenting. It is possible, for example, that more effective and positive parents are generally happier and more sociable people. They may seek out and establish better social networks, and they may be more able to keep their jobs and avoid being terminated. However, Cochran's (1991) intervention research was, in effect, an experimental manipulation of mothers' social conditions. When mothers' social networks were improved, mothers' parenting skills improved. Thus, this study showed that levels of social support can impact maternal parenting in causal ways. Having more support makes mothers better care-givers for their children.

6   CONCLUSION

In this report, we have conducted an extensive review of the contributions of parental socialization to children's development of social competence. We concentrated on evaluating the evidence for and against the proposition that children's social competence varies depending upon family type, determined by number of parents in the home and the gender and sexual orientation of parents. More specifically, we determined whether social competence differs for children being raised in heterosexual versus gay and lesbian two-parent families, heterosexual versus lesbian lone-mother families, and heterosexual versus gay lone-father families.

In conducting this evaluation of the literature, we provided detailed descriptions of the nature of children's social competence from preschool-age through adolescence, and demonstrated the ways in which normal variations in parental socialization practices are associated with children demonstrating greater or lesser social competence. This provided the context for examining the findings of several dozen studies on family types as they pertain to parental socialization and children's social competence.

We ended with an examination of two of the broader contextual factors that influence the quality of parenting and family functioning: socioeconomic status and social support. These factors can indirectly influence children's social competence through their impacts on parents' stress and coping, and directly affect social competence through children's own experiences of economic advantage or deprivation and interactions with other adults.

6.1   INTEGRATIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEWED LITERATURE

6.1.1   Extent to which children's social competence differs in heterosexual versus lesbian and gay two-parent families

The strongest conclusion that can be drawn from the empirical literature is that the vast majority of studies show that children living with two mothers and children living with a mother and father have the same levels and qualities of social competence. A few studies suggest that children with two lesbian mothers may have marginally better social competence than children in 'traditional nuclear' families, even fewer studies show the opposite, and most studies fail to find any differences. The very limited body of research on children with two gay fathers supports this same conclusion. We can tentatively suggest that children with two gay fathers do not seem to differ in social competence from children with a mother and father, although more research on the families of gay fathers clearly is needed. Given the currently available literature, an objective evaluation of empirical research supports only one conclusion: Whether a child's two parents are heterosexual or lesbian or gay has no significant discernable impact on that child's social competence.

This lack of difference in children's social competence may be due to the fact that, on the whole, children do best with maximum positive attention from committed parents. Most studies show that the quality of parental socialization in two-parent lesbian and gay families is equal to that seen in two-parent heterosexual families. The few studies that report differences almost uniformly find marginal differences favouring gay and lesbian families: overall, gay and lesbian

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parents may be marginally more authoritative, warm, sensitive and positively engaged with their children than heterosexual parents.

These conclusions may be somewhat surprising considering that lesbian and gay two-parent families live with an additional set of stressors that could potentially adversely impact socialization and social competence. Many gay and lesbian parents express concern over the potential for themselves and their children to experience teasing, bullying and discrimination due to attitudes against gay and lesbian individuals and parenting. A sizable minority of gay and lesbian parents report that they or their children have directly experienced teasing, bullying or discrimination related to the parents' sexual orientation. Some children of gay or lesbian parents, and in particular many adolescent children, share their parents' concerns. Some children do not tell their friends that they have gay or lesbian parents, out of fear of bullying, teasing, rejection, or discrimination by peers, although it appears that a minority of children of gay or lesbian parents actually experience such reactions directly.

It seems likely that the high quality of parental socialization within lesbian and gay two-parent families acts to protect their children from the adverse effects of this additional stress and discrimination. In turn, gay and lesbian parents are protected by the quality of their relationships with their partners. On the whole, lesbian and gay couples in two-parent families report sharing the tasks of child-rearing more equally than many heterosexual couples, and also report having more satisfying couple relationships. Many lesbian and gay parents are also protected by the availability of good economic resources and positive social support from outside the family. These appear to bolster the parents' ability to cope effectively with the normal challenges of child-rearing and the unique challenges of discrimination because on their sexual orientation.

6.1.2 Extent to which children's social competence differs in lone-parent versus two-parent families

More robust differences in socialization and social competence were found in the comparisons of lone-parent families and two-parent families. Lone mothers are at increased likelihood of providing less positive and effective socialization than mothers in two-parent families, and it is also more likely that their children will appear less socially competent. Although the amount of research on lone fathers is more limited, it supports the same conclusion. Overall, socialization and social competence are better in two-parent families than in lone-mother or lone-father families.

It is important to note that many lone-parents do adequate, or even excellent, jobs of raising their children and fostering their children's social competence. There is a great deal of variability in socialization and social competence within lone-parent families, just as there is within two-parent families. Although, overall, lone-parent families are at risk of lower quality socialization and poorer social competence, many parents and children in lone-parent families are fine. It is clear that effective socialization and positive development within lone-parent families are supported by the same extra-familial protective factors that are seen with two-parent families: having adequate economic resources, and being socially embedded in a supportive network of friends and family members.

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de la Loi sur l'accès à l'information.

Recognizing that many lone-parent families are functioning well, it is worth noting that the overall greater frequency of difficulties related to socialization and social competence in lone-parent than in two-parent families appears to be independent of the sexual orientation of parents. Just as there are effectively no differences in socialization and social competence between heterosexual two-parent families and lesbian and gay two-parent families, there are effectively no differences between heterosexual lone-parent families and lesbian and gay lone-parent families. On average, children raised by lone lesbian mothers, lone heterosexual mothers, lone gay fathers, or lone heterosexual fathers are likely to be less socially competent than children raised by heterosexual mothers and fathers, two lesbian mothers or two gay fathers. Lone parents, be they heterosexual or lesbian or gay, are on the whole less likely to provide good quality socialization to their children than parents in two-parent families, be they heterosexual, lesbian or gay two-parent families.

The research on risk and protective factors suggests that at least three factors are likely to contribute to the differences between lone-parent and two-parent families in socialization and social competence. First, lone parents do not have the regular emotional and instrumental support of a partner and co-parent to rely on. When difficult events occur and stresses accumulate, the absence of a close, dependable and supportive partner leaves lone parents more vulnerable, and the quality of their parenting is more likely to suffer. Their children are also lacking a second attachment figure, socialization agent, and source of support and comfort. Unlike the children in most two-parent families, the children of lone parents also are not regularly exposed to models of positive and effective social relationships: well-functioning couples may show their children how to be socially competent through their own positive interactions.

Second, on average, lone parents are more likely to experience economic hardship than two-parent families. This is particularly true for lone mothers, although lone fathers also tend to have lower incomes than fathers in two-parent families. Lacking adequate financial resources, it is more difficult for lone parents to meet all of the material needs of themselves and their children. This leads to more frequent and more serious experiences of stress, which exacts a toll upon the quality of their parenting. Children of lone parents also experience the effects of economic hardship, as they may have less access to resources and are more likely to live in impoverished neighbourhoods.

Third, there is evidence that lone parents are more likely to have less social support from adults outside the family, compared to parents in two-parent families. Some studies show that lone parents perceive themselves to have fewer sources of support, and other studies indicate that lone parents are more likely to be socially isolated. This would compound the lack of support that results from not having a partner and co-parent, such that lone parents could be far less likely than parents in two-parent families to have access to emotional and instrumental assistance that protects them from the adverse effects of stress from a variety of risk factors. As well, children of more socially isolated lone parents are less likely to benefit from regular contacts with other adults, depriving them of these additional agents for the socialization of social competence.

6.2   IMPLICATIONS

From the perspective of doing what will most benefit the well-being of children, it appears that governments and non-governmental organizations should focus on ensuring that children are

living in well-functioning families. Families function well when parents function well. Parents are most successful in raising well-functioning children when they have the social and economic resources to cope with the normal stresses of life. Building support for the establishment and maintenance of these resources will help to improve the quality of life, quality of socialization, and quality of children's social competence in all families.

Parents need to not be alone in the job of raising their children. Supportive and engaged partners, and accessible and supportive social networks, help parents to provide their children with the socialization experiences that foster the development of good social competence. The experience of stresses related to economic hardship and, in the case of lesbian and gay parents, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, undermine the quality of parental socialization *when good social support is lacking*. As a society, we should endeavour to eradicate poverty and discrimination because of their adverse effect on children and families. In addition, we should support the social factors that protect families against the adverse effects of these risk factors. All two-parent and one-parent families should be accepted and supported, and the positive social support networks of lone-parent and two-parent families should be fostered and encouraged.

Children do well when their parents do well. The more positive attention a child has, the more likely that they are to achieve good social competence. Children can develop good social competence in all family types: mothers and fathers together, mothers together, mothers alone, fathers together, and fathers alone.

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