A Comparison of the Parenting Dimensions that Lead to Positive Social Problem Solving in the Children from Traditional Versus Children from Same-sex Parent Families

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A COMPARISON OF THE PARENTING DIMENSIONS THAT LEAD TO POSITIVE
SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING IN THE CHILDREN FROM TRADITIONAL
VERSUS CHILDREN FROM SAME-SEX PARENT FAMILIES

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Psychology
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PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dissertation Approval

This is to certify that the thesis presented to us by Karen J. Taratuski on the 10th day of June, 2010, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology, has been examined and is acceptable in both scholarship and literary quality.

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Dedication

This work is lovingly dedicated to my daughter Miranda. Every day she teaches me new things about myself and challenges me to be a better person. It is through her that I have learned the importance of being a parent.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the cheerleading of Dr. Virginia Salzer. Without her guidance, this project would not have been possible. She helped me to navigate the murky waters of research and held the confidence that I would successfully make my way through. I believe that this work is better because of her support, enthusiasm, and commitment to its completion. I also extend my thanks to the members of my committee, Dr. Susan Panichelli Mindel and Dr. Daniel Weldon for their constructive comments and encouragement to someday, eventually, publish this work.

I am thankful for the courage of the families who opened their homes to me as part of the process of this work. I am appreciative of their time and willingness to share part of their lives with me for this project.

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Finally, I am eternally grateful for the love, encouragement, and most of all the patience of Kim, my partner in life. She has taught me what it means to be a family. Without her support, this work would not have been meaningful.
Abstract

Building social competence is an important task of childhood. Effective social problem solving is a vital skill in the development of social competence. Although there are myriad factors that influence a child’s learning of social problem solving skills, the quality of the interaction between parents and children has been found to be a pivotal influence. Although much research focuses on the effects of parenting in the context of a traditional family (two parents of opposite gender), little more than half of all children are living in this type of family. Same-sex parent households draw particular criticism. However, research suggests that children living in non-traditional families benefit from the fluidity of family relationships and the cumulative effects of nurturing relationships with various adults. The quality of the relationship between the parental figure and the child has more impact than the family structure. This study sought to explore how parents and children from traditional families compare with parents and children from same-sex parent (female couples only) families with respect to a) the children’s problem solving outcomes, b) the parenting qualities that might predict prosocial problem solving, c) the different parenting qualities in each family group that may lead to prosocial outcomes, d) the differences between fathers and mothers when interacting with their children, and e) the differences between mothers from both family types when interacting with their children. Although no clear predictors of positive responses were found, there was evidence to support the influence of the quality of the parent-child interaction. The findings suggest that children are more likely to choose positive social behaviors when parents are responsive to children and are supportive of the child’s autonomy.
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Chapter One

Although there are many factors that can affect social competence, the ability to solve problems and learn from the problem-solving process may be a proximal control mechanism by which people effectively cope with day to day challenges, as well as with critical life events. For children, social problem solving can be a determining factor in how they relate to their peers, including how they are able to make friends and how well they are accepted by others (Petit, Dodge & Brown, 1988). In general, children who demonstrate effective social skills are more likely to be accepted by their peers (Mostow, Izard, Fine & Tretacosta, 2002). Children who possess effective social problem solving skills are more successful in initiating peer interactions and they are also more successful in responding to peer conflicts (Dodge & Price, 1994). Conversely, poor social problem-solving skills are associated with a host of adjustment difficulties including aggressive behavior, depression and social withdrawal. It is believed that such interactional and intrapersonal problems are connected with peer rejection and the subsequent development of conduct problems (Dodge, et al. 2003). In order to maximize personal success, honing effective social problem-solving skills is a critical part of a child’s development.

Statement of the Problem

The interaction of familial factors, intra-individual factors and experiences combine to shape a child’s relational skills. In particular, the type of behaviors parents display and the quality of these behaviors has the potential to impact a child’s social adjustment positively or negatively (Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001; Hasan & Power, 2002). There is strong evidence that children’s social information processing is an important link in the generalization of social skills from the family to a broader social
context (Rah & Parke, 2008; Haskett & Willoughby, 2006). Examination of the parenting influences on social information processing is helping to understand more fully, the means through which children develop effective social problem solving skills (Rah & Parke, 2008). Although there has been a great deal of research that identifies the parental qualities which contribute to negative social behaviors, (i.e., harsh parenting is related to the development of negative and aggressive behavior), there is little research looking at children who are competent and prosocial. A better understanding of the familial precursors to positive social problem solving can help to establish focal points for prevention and intervention. Therefore one of the primary purposes of this study is to examine how parents interact with their children during the social problem-solving process as a means of better understanding how children may be learning this skill during parent-child interactions.

An additional focus of this study is to examine potential unique contributions that different family structures may have in this socialization process. There has long been a focus on the importance of the traditional (i.e., two parents of opposite gender) family unit for positive child development. In actuality, each family constellation is unique. There are a multitude of family structures. Parental units may consist of a mother and a father, two male parents, two female parents, parents who are separated or divorced, single parents with no other consistent parent figure, or a parent and a grandparent. Furthermore, there is no convincing evidence that only those children who come from a traditional family structure have good social problem-solving skills and likewise, those children who come from a non-traditional family have ineffective social skills. Because
it is the qualities of the individual(s) in the parenting role that help to shape the social world of the child, the gender of the parent is not significant.

*Purpose of the Study*

This study is a pilot study for a larger scale study that will identify the specific parenting qualities, or combinations of qualities, that have the greatest impact on children’s prosocial problem solving. There are several purposes for this study. First, this study will facilitate the development of a paradigm to identify and assess how parents facilitate their children’s social problem solving. Second, through this investigation, a reliable coding system will be developed to adequately assess the qualities of parenting that may be associated with increased prosocial problem solving in children. Lastly, it is expected that the findings of the study will help to estimate the effect size necessary to conduct a larger study comparing same-sex families with traditional families. It is proposed that although there will be differences between the qualities displayed by each parent in the family unit (mother-father or mother-mother), overall, those same qualities will predict positive social information processing. Such findings would support the premise that the quality of the interactions between parents and children is more essential than family structure to the development of prosocial problem solving for children.
Chapter Two

Defining Social Competence

The term “social competence” describes an individual’s ability to engage with others and to navigate the social realm. Although it is sometimes used to characterize a person, i.e., “Joey is socially competent,” it is also used to describe a person’s behavior. For example, the ability to solve interpersonal conflicts effectively is considered a socially competent behavior. Although there are many ways to define social competence, at the core of this construct is an individual’s interaction with others. To a certain extent, the level of one’s competence in social situations can be inferred by observing his or her behavior, but social competence is more than simply the actions of an individual (Schneider, 1993). The review by Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker (1998) of the various definitions of social competence highlights skill effectiveness and the ability to balance one’s own needs and preferences with the potential outcomes of one’s actions as common to most all definitions. Schneider (1993) contends that social competence is: “…the ability to implement developmentally appropriate social behaviors that enhance one’s interpersonal relationships without causing harm to anyone…” (p. 19). This would include not only relationships with peers, but also with parents, teachers, and others with whom the child interacts. Given the fact that interactions with others are inevitable in daily functioning, social competence is a critical developmental skill.

Competent social interaction requires the development of a range of cognitive and emotional skills. The ability to perceive, read, and interpret social cues is key to making decisions about how to interact with others (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). This includes taking in environmental cues (setting, type of activity, number of people, etc.), nonverbal
cues from the other person (facial expression, body language, vocal quality, etc.) as well as intrapersonal cues (one’s own body sensations, emotions, and thoughts). Language provides another cue about the nature of the interaction. In conjunction with the environmental, intrapersonal, and nonverbal cues, verbal communication can provide an indication of the other person’s thinking and intention. The ability to understand another’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions, and make sense of the cues perceived is part of the social decision making process (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Throughout the cognitive processing of this information, individuals continually make judgments about others that influence the selection of social behaviors. Children who are able to integrate cognitive and emotional abilities most accurately have a greater chance of social success (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000; Eisenberg, 2001).

In addition to the development of social cognitive and perceptual skills, Bandura (1986) emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy to social competence. In addition to the judgments made of others, individuals continually make assessments of their own social abilities. Not only is it important to have the skills, but it is also essential to believe in one’s capacity to think and behave in socially competent ways. Self-appraisals are estimates of how effective we are at interacting with others and how others perceive and accept that individual. Other people have the potential to affect one’s level of confidence in approaching social situations and even bias one’s interpretation of others’ actions in social situations. If an individual has had successful social experiences in the past, it is more likely that that person will believe and expect to have social success in the future.
The Importance of Social Competence

The benefits of displaying socially competent behavior are clear. A child who knows how to make friends, to interact cooperatively with others, be respectful, and solve conflicts effectively is more likely to enjoy positive relationships with others (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 1998). Additionally, children who show positive social skills tend to be more successful in school (Malecki & Elliot, 2002; Miles & Stipek, 2006). Conversely, children who encounter difficulty in navigating the social landscape are more likely to be rejected by peers (Crick & Dodge, 1990), have difficulty cultivating new friendships (Moore, Hughes & Robinson, 1992), and struggle in school (Malecki & Elliot, 2002). Furthermore, these children are more at risk for repeatedly using a repertoire of aggressive behaviors (Dodge, et al., 2003) and/or developing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Little & Garber, 1995), thereby perpetuating a cycle of social and emotional dysfunction. Considering these data, the criteria posed by Schneider of “…without causing harm to anyone…” is an especially important consideration in defining social competence (Schneider, 1993). Developing social competence not only paves the way for further success in relationships but also helps to facilitate positive overall functioning.

The Development of Social Competence

The execution of socially competent behavior necessitates the interaction of emotional (self) regulation, social cognition, and positive communication behaviors (Brophy-Herb, Lee, Nievar, & Stollak, 2007). But how are these behaviors developed and how does one learn to use them effectively? As with other aspects of human behavior, it is presently understood that these develop through multiple pathways. Semrud-Clikeman (2007) also emphasizes the interdependence of social and emotional
skills and the importance of developing social and emotional competence in tandem. The foundational skills for regulation, cognition, and communication evolve as the individual matures, and socially-relevant skills and behaviors are modified as the person interacts with others and with the environment. A complete review of the development of social competence is not necessary, given the scope of this study; however, a summary of the key processes in the relevant developmental stages is presented to provide a context for this investigation.

*Infancy and Early Childhood*

A child’s first social experiences occur in infancy through interaction with his or her parent(s). Multisensory interactive experiences facilitate the development of primary relationships with parents and caregivers (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). The nonverbal and vocal behaviors that infants display evoke responses from others. As the parent responds to the needs of the child, the child begins to develop an awareness of others that leads to the formation of a bond. This responsive interaction leads to an increase in the cognitive, emotional and communicative skills essential for socialization. Furthermore, the nurturing, responsive interactions serve to strengthen the bond between parent and child (Landry, Smith & Swank, 2006). The formation of secure bonds in these early stages of development is seen as an important antecedent to social competence (Bohlin, Hagekull, & Rydell, 2000).

As children enter early childhood (ages 3-6), there is an increased demand to demonstrate behavior that meets the expectations of the situation and of other people. Children begin to learn how to manage their own emotions in the course of sharing with others, expressing assertiveness, and managing conflict. Semrud-Clikeman (2007)
Parenting Influences on Social Problem Solving

emphasizes emotional regulation as a key task of preschool social development. In addition to an awareness of one’s own feelings, peer relationships begin to require the ability to understand other’s emotions (Eisenberg, 2001). These complex aspects of interaction call for the child to be able to recognize the appropriate cues. The ability to attend to these cues is an important foundational skill. Social interactions also require the ability to modulate behavior and emotions according to the needs of the situation (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). Social exchange demands a linkage between these skills, to the degree that a child must recognize and identify the important cues, and then activate or inhibit an appropriate emotional-behavioral response. Children who are more effective at self-regulation are more likely to be accepted by their peers and to be viewed favorably by adults (Spinrad, Eisenberg, Cumberland, Fabes, Valiente, Shepard, et al., 2006).

Emotional awareness, attention and regulatory ability are some of the skills that young children need in order to begin experiencing social success.

Middle Childhood

In the middle childhood years (generally considered ages 7 to 12), basic social skills become increasingly important (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). This happens as the child’s social world widens and peer relationships become more self-initiated, as opposed to being parent-driven. Although initiation of social interaction can be highly influenced by characteristics of temperament such as affective regulation and sociability, social skills and shared interests seem to play a greater role in the process of maintaining friendships. The ability to take turns, to listen to others attentively, and to converse with others are skills by which sociability is measured (Herbet-Myers, Guttentag, Swank, Landry, et al., 2006). One’s ability to enter into and adapt to an ongoing social exchange
is highly respected by others. Other valuable aspects of interpersonal relationships include a sense of humor and the skill for handling playful teasing. During this developmental period the ability to handle conflict significantly contributes to how a child is perceived and accepted by the peer group (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007; Dodge & Price, 1994). This requires the accurate assessment of the level and nature of the conflict as well as the process of developing and implementing a solution (Dodge et al., 1986; Crick & Dodge, 1994). Children who are able to integrate basic behavioral and affective skills in a social context are more apt to be accepted by their peers and considered socially competent.

Adolescence

The period of development, spanning the time from approximately ages 13 through 18, is known as adolescence. During adolescence, peer relationships take on more importance as the individual’s social circle widens and he or she gravitates away from the family as a social center. In the early adolescent period, the skills of empathy and perspective-taking develop. These skills enable the adolescent to see the world through another person’s eyes and to understand how others may feel. This ability elevates social relationships to a level in which the give-and-take is mutual. In this way, friendships develop a deeper meaning. Adolescents seek friends who are able to do more than simply play with them; they enjoy friendships based on trust and shared emotions as well as shared interests. As in early and middle childhood, girls and boys who are sociable tend to be more easily accepted by peers, and during adolescence, peer acceptance is often a primary concern. In relation to the social world of the adolescent, the role of parents shifts from one that facilitates interactions (setting up play-dates,
arranging sports and arts activities) to one that supports the development of social autonomy. The establishment of secure parental attachments and prosocial skills earlier in childhood often predicts a higher level of social competence in adolescence (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007)

**Parenting and Social Competence**

Although the influence of temperament and other biological factors cannot be underestimated, the interaction between the child and his or her parent(s) provides foundation for the development of social skills and relationships. Where social competence is concerned, the manner in which parents influence children’s peer behaviors has been the subject of much investigation. This research highlights the role of mediational aspects of parent-child relationships such as modeling of affect and behavior (Isely, et al., 1999, Leve & Fagot, 1997), parent and child cognitions, beliefs, and attitudes (Burks & Parke, 1996; Haskett & Willoughby, 2006; McDowell, Parke & Spitzen, 2002; Runions & Keating, 2007), as well as parenting practices and interaction styles (Domotrivich & Bierman, 2001, Haskett & Willoughby, 2006; Hasan & Power, 2002). Therefore, in embarking on the present investigation of the connections between parenting and social problem solving, it seems relevant to understand how the aspects of modeling, cognitions, parenting practices and interaction styles shape the child’s social world.

Theories of relational and behavioral learning offer a context for appreciating the complexities of interpersonal development. Specifically, the theory of attachment offers an understanding of the importance of the relational connection between parent and child. The family environment is the atmosphere in which children first experience
interpersonal interaction. In this context, children learn what to expect from others, how to engage with others in order to satisfy wants and needs, and how to maintain connections that provide mutual emotional nurturance. Likewise, a child’s interactions with parents and siblings may enable that child to practice his/her developing social skills before interacting with other children. It is important to be mindful that interactions are reciprocal. Patterns of interaction are shaped not only by prior experiences but also by experiences in the moment. Some brief background about the attachment perspective is provided to help establish the groundwork for this investigation.

*Attachment Theory*

Bowlby (1969/1982) described attachment as a pattern of behavior that is characteristic to most species and that helps to sustain survival. Attachment behavior is instinctual and is mediated by the individual’s behavioral systems. A secure attachment is believed to be a necessary condition for the development of social competence. Secure attachments between parents and children are strongly associated with positive social adjustment when children become of school age. The nature of one’s parental attachment even influences future adult relationships (Bohlin, et al., 2000).

Attachment theory holds the premise that healthy development results in affectional bonds between a child and parent that will endure throughout one’s life. The child’s objective in developing attachment is to maintain proximity to the attachment figure (typically a caregiving parent), creating an affectional bond (Bowlby, 1982). Intense emotions are experienced by both parent and child in the processes of formation, maintenance, disruption and renewal of the attachment bond. This bond builds up slowly over the years of immaturity and is a relatively accurate reflection of the individual’s
experiences with the attachment figure. The attachment bond is activated when needed, such as in unfamiliar or frightening situations, and is disengaged in familiar environments, such as when attachment figure is available. As the individual grows and matures these patterns will continue to be activated in times of distress, but the attachment figure toward which the feelings are directed may be different (i.e. an adult’s partner or spouse). As the child approaches adolescence, the ultimate goal of this development is the creation of a “goal corrected partnership” in which there is a balance between meeting the needs and desires of the child while maintaining the overall feeling of warmth and trust in the relationship (Bowlby, 1982).

In addition to the security and the fulfillment of needs, the process of attachment involves trauma and the mourning of loss (Bowlby, 1980). The individual’s earliest experiences of this loss are in infancy when child is separated from the mother. In these instances, the child typically protests, cries, trembles and anticipates her return. If the separation is extended, the child despairs and becomes apathetic and withdrawn. However, secure attachment enables the individual to be confident that his/her attachment figure will be accessible and available when needed. Thus, the child who has developed trust in the attachment bond will be able to sustain a period of separation. Theoretically, the beginning stages of attachment provide experiences through which the child learns to regulate affect through proximity to the mother. The child assimilates the behavior patterns that the mother uses to soothe or stimulate the child, setting a foundation for the development of emotional regulation (Bowlby, 1980).
Quality of Attachment

The parent also makes a significant contribution to the development of attachment through his or her reactions to the attachment behaviors of his/her child (Main, 1996). The development of attachment is reciprocal in that specific actions of the mother or primary attachment figure elicit attachment behavior from the child. Through the mother’s signals, the child receives reinforcement or negative consequences to his or her attempts to touch and interact with his or her parent. Although children primarily direct their attachment behavior to their mothers, they will also develop attachment behaviors in relation to other significant individuals in certain situations. Patterns of interaction can be observed between parents and children. These patterns can be used to categorize the quality of attachment as secure (the child who is able to use mother as a secure base for exploration yet shows appropriate behaviors upon separation and reunion); avoidant (the child who actively distances himself or herself from the parent and shows little distress when separated; ambivalent/resistant (the child who is unable to find comfort in the parent’s contact and is often upset, angry or passive in the parent’s presence (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) or disorganized/disoriented, the child who shows confusion, disorientation, fear of the parent, stereotypic or unusual movements, and a general lack of goal directive behavior (Solomon & George, 1999). These patterns of attachment generalize to other relationships and are manifested throughout childhood, adolescence, and adult life (Bohlin, et al., 2000, Schneider, Atkinson & Tardif, 2001).

Parental Attachment and Social Competence

Through the process of attachment, the child begins to form a template or internal working model for interpersonal relationships and the world. These models serve as a
basis for what the child expects of others in a relational context and they are modified through actual experience (Bowlby, 1980). This concept enables us to infer that if a person is able to establish a bond with one other person, then it is likely that he or she will establish bonds with others. Similarly, if the experience with that person is a positive and successful one, the child may come to expect that interactions with others will also be positive and successful. Schneider, Atkinson and Tardif (2001) conducted a review of the data from studies which set out to identify a connection between parent-child attachment and peer relationships. Their investigation found a strong relationship between parental attachment and the development of peer friendships, supporting the notion that secure attachments pave the way for other secure relationships. Internal working models guide the process through which this generalization of social skills transpires.

The skills needed for social competence, however, include more than simply the ability to form friendships. When considering level of competence, the interest in social interaction and the ability to initiate interactions with others regardless of friendship status are indicators of a broader level of social development. Considering multiple markers of social competence including interest, initiative, observed social behaviors and social status, Bohlin, Hagekull and Rydell (2000) found fairly reliable connections between the security of attachment and the level of the child’s overall social competence. Children whose attachments were secure in infancy and in early childhood demonstrated higher levels of socially competent behavior and better social relationships as they approached middle childhood. Conversely, children whose attachment status was described as ambivalent or avoidant, were noted as displaying more problematic social behaviors and were viewed as less successful in social relationships. Despite these
Parenting Influences on Social Problem Solving

convincing connections, attachment security is only one of several factors that influence the development of peer relationships. Attachment security and internal working models of social relationships are also influenced by the qualitative aspects of parenting such as the balance of autonomy and control between children and parents, and behavior modeled by parents (Schneider, Atkinson & Tardif, 2001). It is important to consider the pathways through which these qualities make their way from the parent-child relationship to the broader social context.

**Parenting Qualities and Children’s Social Competence**

The literature is replete with evidence that children develop negative social behavior as a result of attachment problems, as well as through observing or experiencing aggression and hostility within the parent-child relationship (Hill, 2002; Weiss, Dodge, Bates & Petit, 1992). Physical discipline, such as spanking, models aggressive behavior and in some instances may be termed abusive. Effects of these experiences can be associated with the imitation and perpetuation of aggressive behavior. Children whose parents use punitive discipline practices show a greater propensity toward aggressive and disruptive behavior (Stormshak, Bierman, McMahon, Lengua, & Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2000). From a theoretical perspective, the learning of negative social behavior appears to be somewhat direct – behaviors that are observed are incorporated into one’s repertoire and used when needed.

However, the route by which children learn to display behavior that is more socially acceptable and effective seems more complex (Haskett & Willoughby, 2006; Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001). Simply observing parents who behave in socially appropriate and effective ways does not guarantee that children will act similarly. The
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Qualitative aspects of parent-child relationships make a difference in the ways that children interact with their peers and solve social problems. Parents serve as implicit and explicit models of appropriate social behavior for their children (Bandura, 1986). In addition to the modeling of behavior, parents serve as models of emotional expression (McDowell, Kim, O’Neill & Parke, 2002). Several parenting qualities have been identified throughout the literature as important to the development of children’s social and emotional behavior. These qualitative aspects of parenting behavior build a foundation for the understanding of how and when and why social behavior is displayed. Parental warmth, support, nurturance, involvement, control and supervision are noted to be adequate and necessary components of parent behavior (Jacob, Moser, Windle, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber 2000). Warmth (Domitrovitch & Bierman) and responsiveness (Landry, et al., 2006) are terms often used to group the affective characteristics of parent behavior. Parental involvement, including time spent with the child, and availability to the child, is also perceived as a meaningful component of a good parent-child relationship (Renk & Phares, 2007). Furthermore, the ways in which parents manage discipline and control within the parent-child relationship can be positive, particularly when rules and autonomy are balanced (Hasan & Power, 2002).

Parental Warmth

Parental warmth is also strongly associated with positive behavior and positive responses by their children. Warmth is a term used to describe empathic support and sensitivity on the part of the parent. “Warm” parental behavior might be defined as the display of positive affect congruent with supportive verbal and nonverbal communication. Children whose mothers displayed supportive parenting practices are
likely to display prosocial behavior more frequently and are more likely to use prosocial problem-solving strategies and lower levels of aggressive behavior (Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001). In conducting their research on the paths by which such parent behaviors exert influence on children’s social behaviors, Domitrovich & Bierman (2001) relied on the constructs of social learning theory. According to this model, parental influence is indirect. Children who experience their parents as warm and supportive begin to construct representations of relationships with others as warm and supportive. From an attachment perspective, this quality in a parental relationship helps the child to form an internal working model of others as warm and supportive. This sets the foundation for the child to construct similar views of peers. It follows then, that when children view others in a favorable way, they would behave in ways that have a greater likelihood of preserving the positive nature of the relationship (Domitrovich & Bierman 2001).

**Parental Responsiveness**

The development of attachment in infancy hinges on the ability of the caregiver(s) to be responsive to the needs of the child. Responsiveness is noted to be a critical qualitative aspect of parenting (Landry, et al., 2006). Responsive parental behavior plays a role in the development of self-regulation, attention and language development, all of which are important factors in social behavior and problem solving. Landry et al. (2006) examined the responsiveness of mothers to their infants and found that multiple facets of responsive parenting behavior have a significant impact on infant development and socialization. Behaviors that are considered responsive included verbal and nonverbal actions that help to direct the infant’s attention to relevant stimuli. Parents’ responsivity is also demonstrated when they meet their child’s social attention with positive affect and
verbalization. These responses need to be contingent and consistent, in that (?) order. When mothers engaged in responsive parenting practices from early infancy, more growth was observed in the infant’s emerging use of language and social cooperation along with an increase in positive affect (Landry, Smith & Swank, 2006).

**Parental Control**

In an effort to manage and control their child’s overly emotional reactions or inappropriate responses, parents typically employ disciplinary strategies. The challenge for parents and children is in negotiating the level of power and control within their relationship; disciplinary responses are one manifestation of this aspect. Parental disciplinary responses are also another vehicle through which the child internalizes the parent’s values of appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior. The quality of both parenting behaviors and parent-child interactions, particularly the use of punishment or abusive/neglectful treatment can foster aggressive behaviors (Hill, 2002). Physical discipline, such as spanking, models aggressive behavior and in some instances may be termed abusive. Effects of these experiences can be associated with the imitation and perpetuation of aggressive behavior (Weiss, et al., 1992). Children whose parents use punitive discipline practices show a greater propensity toward aggressive and disruptive behavior (Stormshak, et al., 2000). These behaviors reflect poor social problem solving and can result in social rejection or isolation.

Although the parent-child power balance is often reflected in the disciplinary practice of the parents, it is manifested in daily life. For example, parents who provide more frequent opportunities for their children to make choices or try new things would be seen as allowing their children to have a higher degree of autonomy. Additionally, the
practice of granting autonomy also extends to selection of friends, activities, and may reflect fewer rules and restrictions. Children, whose parents exert a moderate degree of control and allow them to have a greater degree of influence in the choice of friends and activities, tend to manifest higher levels of optimism (Hasan & Power, 2002). Given these findings one might expect that children who are more optimistic in general would carry this attitude into their peer relationships. Additionally, parents who are more moderate in their control may have children who are more confident in their ability to handle social situations on their own.

Parents’ Attributions

Research has firmly established the role of attributions as a key factor in determining how people interpret and respond to situations, particularly in the course of social events (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Parents who hold negative expectations of life events tend to have children who hold similar beliefs about their future (Hasan & Power, 2002). Similarly, it would stand to reason that parental optimism should influence their children’s optimism, but there is not yet sufficient support for this. Attributions may be viewed as more specific manifestations of optimistic or pessimistic expectancies. Attributions are inferences that individuals make about the reasons why things happen the way they do. In the course of social interaction, the attributions that individuals make about the cause of the situations or the intent of the other person affect the course of the interaction. People make judgments about situations and use these judgments in making decisions about their own courses of action. For example, in the case of a child who is bumped by a passing peer, the child may have differing interpretations, depending on whether or not he or she infers that the child purposefully bumped into him or her, versus
whether or not he or she inferred that the bumping was accidental. This interpretation will then impact how the child chooses to respond.

Furthermore, research has offered support for the idea that individuals have a tendency to be biased in their attributions of others’ actions. These biases are often consistent with one’s attributional style, or the pattern in which one tends to view things. Attributions can be global (pervading all situations) or specific (applied to one situation or type of situation), stable (the same all the time) or unstable, and internal (caused by something within the person) or external (caused by someone or something outside of the person). Attributional style has been strongly linked to mood, especially depressed mood (Peterson, et al., 1982). Individuals who experience depression tend to have an attribution style that interprets negative life events as having internal, stable and global causes, making them seem more difficult to change. Children experiencing depression symptoms have a tendency to view others’ actions as having a hostile intent (Quiggle, Garber, Panak & Dodge, 1992). Also, children who demonstrate aggressive behavior have a greater propensity toward making hostile attributions of intent. Parents may also have a tendency to respond to their child in ways that are consistent with their own attribution style. Considering the premise of social learning theory, it is possible that children learn certain styles of attribution through interaction with and observation of their parents’ behavior. These attributions in turn impact on how children view the actions of their peers in the context of social situations and subsequently how they resolve social conflicts.

Parental Facilitation of Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is recognized as an important determinant of a child’s ability to demonstrate prosocial behavior (Ackerman & Izard, 2004). Interactions
between parents and children help to facilitate the development of emotional awareness throughout middle childhood. When parents talk with children about situations, the process of conversation helps children to understand and to represent negative and positive events mentally (Burch, Austen & Bauer, 2004). Some conversational mechanisms that impact this process include eliciting the child’s input in an open-ended manner, affirming the child’s recollections of the events, and responding in ways that sustain the conversation. McDowell, Kim, O’Neill and Parke (2002) found that children’s emotional expression and behavior is influenced by certain qualities of parental interaction. In particular, children were more likely to demonstrate negative behaviors when parents demonstrated a lower level of positive affect when interacting with the child. Conversely, when parents displayed more positive affect, children displayed positive behavior more frequently. Children of parents who tended to focus on the child as the being a key part of the problem may experience increased levels of anger and sadness. Similarly, children of parents who displayed a more controlling interactive style were more likely to show aggressive behavior with their peers (McDowell, et al. 2002).

Social Information Processing

There are several models of how individuals solve problems, however, Dodge’s social information processing model (Dodge et al., 1986; Crick & Dodge, 1994) describes the unique, yet simultaneous, mental processes that an individual engages in assessing a social situation and determining a response. This model provides a framework for understanding the cognitive underpinnings of children’s problem solving in the social context. Furthermore, this model has been widely researched in terms of its applicability
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in assessing children’s social competence (Dodge, et al., 1986; Moore, et al., 1992; Dodge, et al., 2003). The social-information-processing model mirrors, in many ways, the original social learning theory model as formulated by Bandura (1977). Both models emphasize an interactive process in which the processing of social information is influenced by extrinsic and intrinsic factors as well as by cognitions and emotions.

Social information processing is believed to occur in a step-wise manner. However, the entire process is determined within the individual and occurs repeatedly as the individual interacts with his or her environment. An individual’s behavioral response is determined following: the 1) encoding of external and internal cues, 2) interpretation and mental representation of those cues, 3) clarification or selection of a goal, 4) the construction or accessing of plausible responses, and 5) the choices of a specific response (Crick & Dodge, 1994). When encoding and interpreting events, the individual selectively attends to and remembers specific aspects of the events. Through mental representation, the individual ascribes meaning to the events so that these can be retained in memory. Additionally, the individual makes inferences and judgments of the other individual’s intentions and motives in the situations and in evaluating his/her own personal ability to navigate the situation. Goal clarification helps the individual to move in the direction of resolution. Individuals may have a propensity toward certain types of goals; however, these may be adjusted to the unique nature of the presenting situation. During the step of response accessing, mental representations become associated with a behavioral or emotional response. The individual is then required to evaluate the acceptability and appropriateness of the response, based on values and possible outcomes in order finally to select a response that is translated into a behavior (Crick & Dodge,
1994; Dodge & Price, 1994). The most recent formulation of the model considers memory for past events, acquired social knowledge and social schemas, as well as the understanding of implicit social rules, as cognitive factors that shape information processing at each step (Crick & Dodge, 1994). It is in developing these foundational knowledge structures that parents may have the greatest impact.

As children’s cognitive skills develop so, too, do their skills for social problem solving; first and foremost, is the child’s fund of social knowledge. Naturally, as children are exposed to and encounter different social contexts, their understanding of the social world is increased. Parents can have a direct impact on this knowledge structure through the social experiences that they facilitate for their children (McDowell, Parke & Spitzer, 2002). As their repertoire of social situations broadens, children will likely have a larger and more varied bank of social responses and strategies to draw upon. Furthermore, as children’s cognitive skills and knowledge structures increase, their social awareness and social goals become more sophisticated, and they are better able to make social judgments and determine the appropriateness not only of their own, but also of other’s behavior (Crick & Dodge, 1994). It is also plausible that as parents provide guidance to their children, they can shape their repertoire of social responses. Recent research has established a link between cognitive flexibility, attention and executive functions in social information processing (Üçok, et al., 2006; McGee, Fryer, et al., 2008) and the importance of these skills in the development of social competence (Herbert-Myers, et al., 2006).
Emotions and Social Information Processing

In the course of social problem solving, the role of emotional processes cannot be understated. There is strong evidence that when processing social information, cognitions and emotions are entwined. Lemerise and Arsenio (2000) pose an integrated model of social information processing that reflects the interweaving of emotion and cognitive processes. At each point in the process, emotion provides information and feedback that influences how the information is interpreted, encoded and used. Relational aspects such as familiarity and emotional connection with the other individual can impact one’s perception of the event. Additionally, mood, arousal and preexisting emotions can bias one’s interpretation of the situation. Social goals may be chosen for the purpose of maintaining or regulating an emotion or that may be driven by desires for a specific outcome such as an object that the individual wants or needs. Goals are also impacted by the emotional cues in the situations, for example, when the interaction has a positive feel, the individual may be more likely to choose to maintain a connection with the person and select a positive relational goal. The individuals’ ability to cope with and regulate their own emotions, read emotions in others, and feel empathy toward others also mitigate the formulation of goals, as well as the choice of strategies. Children who are able to regulate their emotions are less likely to jump to conclusions and are more likely to consider the many facets of the situation, including potential outcomes. The test of a child’s processing is his or her behavioral response as well as the outcome. When the result is affectively positive, the child gains a sense of competence. Through the assistance of their parents, children develop emotional knowledge and regulation and in
this way aspects of parenting can impact the child’s social competence (Isley, et al., 1999).

Outcomes of Social Information Processing

Children who display internalizing behavior (withdrawal, depression, or anxiety) show clear differences from their non-internalizing counterparts, in the way they process social information and solve problems. These processing differences are evident in their encoding of social cues, attributions about the actions of others, the generation of possible responses and in their ability to enact a conflict resolution strategy successfully. Research highlights the idea that these children do not seem to perceive the social information accurately as a result of executive functioning deficits or mood related bias and therefore, the encoding of such information is flawed. Withdrawn, depressed and anxious children typically develop fewer strategies for solving problems and these strategies are often indirect, passive or avoidant, thus rendering them ineffective. As is consistent with other research on attention bias as related to mood, it is common for depressed children to attend more closely to negative events and information and to predict negative outcomes. Similarly, anxious children exhibit a bias toward threat, and attend to and interpret information consistent with this perspective. All three categories of children tend to lack confidence in their ability to solve problems and to develop an expectancy of failure that pervades their social environment and maintains a low level of social competence. (Gifford-Smith & Rabiner, 2004).

Just as children with internalizing problems show unique social information processing patterns, so do children with externalizing problems. Crick and Dodge (1996) examined social information processing in aggressive children and found that children
who had a tendency toward reactive aggression demonstrated a clear, hostile bias. Similar to their anxious counterparts, they were more likely to attend to signals of threat and to misinterpret unclear cues in a more hostile way. Thus their strategies and responses are generated in response to these faulty interpretations. Children who were more proactive in their use of aggressive behavior had a tendency to view aggressive responses as right or appropriate. Their social goals were more often focused on obtaining a specific, desired outcome rather than on maintaining positive relations. Although reactive children do not typically have the expectation that aggression will be effective, proactively aggressive children do believe that this is an effective means to an end (Crick & Dodge, 1996).

Gifford-Smith & Rabiner (2004) summarize the distinct ways in which the social information processing patterns of socially competent children can be distinguished from less competent peers. In terms of encoding, these children tend to be more accurate in the encoding of social information. The socially competent child is less likely to make attributions of hostile intent and even when provoked, he or she is more likely to interpret this more neutrally. Furthermore, socially competent children tend to be less bothered by peer conflict and more likely to choose goals that are focused on the relationship rather than on a goal of obtaining a specific desired outcome. In the course of problem solving, socially competent children easily recognize and typically create their own positive, prosocial strategies more often than creating aggressive, hostile strategies. Ultimately, the ability to process social situations and respond in a manner that maintains amicable relationships with others is a major determinant in social success and competence (Schneider, 1993; Gifford-Smith & Rabiner, 2004).
Links from Family Experiences to Social Competence with Peers

In general, research supports the assumption that there are multiple pathways through which children’s social abilities are developed; however, parents and families are major influences. Research has pointed to social information processing as one mechanism by which relationship-related cognitions, emotions and behaviors are transmitted from the family context to the peer context. (Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001; Schultz & Shaw, 2003; Ziv, Oppenheim & Sagi-Schwartz, 2004; Haskett & Willoughby, 2006; Runions & Keating, 2007; Rah & Parke, 2008). Ziv, Oppenheim, and Sagi-Schwartz (2004) argue that the internal working model, developed through the parent-child attachment, serves as a cognitive template that guides the child’s social information processing. This idea appears to be supported by their findings. When the social information processing of children was examined and compared with their attachment status, it was evident that children with secure attachment relationships were better at assessing potential response behaviors in conflict situations. The task of evaluating and selecting response behaviors requires that the child be able to assess the behavioral and emotional impact of the choice both on themselves and on others involved. Furthermore, these children were more positive in their interpretation of the context cues and opted for solutions that preserved the positive nature of the interpersonal relationship. Thus the children who had the experience of affirming and secure parental relationships were more highly focused on proliferating these characteristics in their relationships with peers.

Haskett and Willoughby’s investigation (2006) identifies parenting qualities as key mechanisms through which parents impact children’s social information processes, specifically. Theirs is a path model which presupposes that parents’ own emotional
health, as well as their beliefs about their children, shape parenting qualities. In turn, these parenting qualities have an impact on the development of children’s social cognitions; thus, parenting can be viewed as a predictor of children’s subsequent adjustment. The authors point to aspects of parenting such as sensitivity, warmth, child-related attributions, discipline practices, and parental mental health as important linkages. Within the study, these aspects were measured and analyzed to determine the nature of their relationship to children’s social information processing and social adjustment. Children with an average age of 7.2 years and one parent (primarily the mother) participated in this study. Major findings suggest that when parental emotional health is characterized by distress, this aspect is manifested through in the expression of parenting behaviors. That is, parents under stress demonstrate less effective parenting skills. Results further established that parenting quality predicted children’s social adjustment as indicated by the evidence that insensitive and harsh parenting predicted social information processing impairment for the child. These outcomes offer support for the authors’ hypotheses about the linkage between parent qualities and children’s social adjustment. The researchers emphasize the idea that although their study could not confirm the specific factors that influence parenting quality, there are recognized links between children’s social functioning and the genetic, social learning, and attachment elements of parent-child relationships (Hasket & Willoughby, 2006).

*The Impact of Gender Differences*

In a family structure consisting of two parents, each parent may assume differing roles and responsibilities. In a traditional family, the tasks of parenting have been historically divided in accordance with gender related expectations. For example, mothers
have been typically designated the caretakers, providing attention to the nurturing and
daily needs of the child; whereas, fathers have been characterized as the parent who
provides financially for the family but is less involved with the child on a day-to-day
basis. Although this may be the case for some families, parenting responsibilities are
shared very differently in dual-career families, in single-parent families, and in same-sex
families. Furthermore, research has identified the fact that males and females differ in
their styles of interaction and problem solving (D’Zurilla, Maydeu-Olivares, & Kant,
1998; Vuchinich, Angelelli & Gatherum, 1996). These differences are manifested in the
way mothers and fathers act with their children. Not only do mothers and fathers tend to
act differently, but their behavior and interaction styles have a differential impact, based
on the gender of the child.

Differences in Quantity of Interaction

With respect to parenting, one parent is typically more involved with the daily
caretaking of the child than the other parent. The division of these responsibilities likely
dictates the amount of time that parent and child spend together. It may also affect the
nature of the parent-child interaction. Research has typically identified mothers as being
in the caretaking role most often. One study found that the amount of time that mothers
and fathers spent with their children differed significantly. Renk and Phares (2007) noted
that mothers reported spending on average about 5.26 hours per day on weekdays,
whereas fathers reported an average of 3.74 hours per day (Monday through Friday). The
overall parental average time spent with children on weekend days was 7.29 hours.
Another study (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001) found that the average
time fathers spent with or were accessible to children was a little more than an hour a day
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during the week and about three hours per day on the weekends. Generally, this suggests that mothers spend more time with the child, however, the nature of the parent-child interaction may be more task-oriented, e.g., doing household tasks, going to and from school or other activities, homework, etc. Where play is concerned, mothers are more likely to engage in activities such as reading, game playing, arts and crafts, whereas fathers’ engagement is often more active such as sports or rough and tumble play. Ideally these differences offer the child a variety of opportunities, experiences, and interactions that support their overall development.

Differences in Quality of Interaction

The parenting differences between mothers and fathers extend beyond the quantity and type of interaction. Parenting qualities as displayed by mothers and fathers seem to have differing effects on children’s social competence, particularly depending on the child’s gender. The two major areas in which parent qualities differ are in the qualities of affect and control/autonomy. Isely, O’Neil, Clatfelter and Parke (1999) examined the connection, as viewed by teachers, between children’s social competence and their parents’ expressions of affect. They found that, overall, when mothers and fathers expressed a positive affect in interaction with their children, these children expressed more positive affect and were rated as demonstrating better social competence. When the interactions of fathers and their sons were examined, fathers who demonstrated more negative affect had sons who were viewed as less socially competent. Regarding mother-daughter interactions, girls whose mothers demonstrated positive affect were more likely to display positive affect in return and were rated as having better social relationships. Similar findings were evident for mothers and sons; however, the impact of
fathers was greater overall and accounted for more variance in the rating of social competence. The study yielded an interesting and unexpected finding. When parents displayed a greater amount of positive affect with their same gender children, the children were more apt to be viewed as less socially competent. Isley et al. (1999) offered the explanation that noncontingent positive affect or inappropriate affect may be displayed by parents who show high levels of positive affect. Children who are exposed to this may begin to model the inappropriate affect or may not appropriately learn how to regulate affect. They also suggest that noncontingent positive affect from parents may be interpreted as a lack of sensitivity to the child and therefore contribute to the child’s insecurity (Isley, et al., 1999).

As parents and children struggle to negotiate control and autonomy in their relationship, mothers and fathers tend to demonstrate differences in their styles of discipline. Mothers have a greater tendency to be instructive and rational in their discipline, whereas fathers have a tendency to wield more power in the course of discipline (Hart & Robinson, 1994). Research suggests that fathers may have a greater tendency to focus on the negative behavior of the child as opposed to providing guidance and instruction where behavior is concerned. When mothers do assert power in the course of discipline, children may interpret their actions as rejection. This sets a foundation for expectations of rejection which may be carried into the social realm. However, when a positive emotional climate has been nurtured in the parent-child relationship, children seem more able to demonstrate higher levels of social-emotional competence (Towe-Goodman & Teti, 2008).
There are indications that parental responsiveness is associated with the level of the child’s social engagement. When parents take the time to engage in social problem-solving with their children, they are being responsive to the child’s need for support and development in this area. Children who are observed by teachers to be more socially withdrawn tend to have fathers who report less involvement in problem solving with their children. However the findings are not indicative about whether or not this lack of involvement leads to withdrawal or, if as a result of being withdrawn, parents engage less with the child (Miller, Murry & Brody, 2005). In particular, fathers may be less likely to engage with their sons whom they perceive to be withdrawn.

Variations with Child Gender

Not only do collective parenting responses impact children’s emotional regulatory skills, but there appears to be a differential impact, depending on the gender of the parent and the gender of the child. Research conducted by McDowell et al. (2002) parses out the responses of the child in relation to the interaction style of each parent. They found that when fathers were more controlling with their daughters, the girls had a tendency to be more aggressive in their response. In contrast, in the case of boys who demonstrate more aggressive tendencies, it was the mother’s controlling response that was more highly correlated. Furthermore, the quality of the parents’ affective responses (positive vs. negative) toward the child emerged as a significant factor. When fathers were more positive with their sons, the child’s responses were also more positive. When fathers were more highly focused on the child as the source of the problem, there was a tendency for boys to endorse sadness more readily. However, when fathers were less positive and focused on the child, boys were more avoidant in their response. Boys who expressed
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more sadness and anger tended to have mothers who were more blaming. Girls whose mothers were more positive in their interaction style had the tendency to respond in a positive manner and showed less negative emotion. When mothers were more controlling and demonstrated a “child (as the problem) focus,” girls tended to demonstrate more negative emotion (anger, sadness, nervousness) (McDowell et al., 2002).

*Impact of Family Structures*

Much of the research on parenting and gender assumes that a family structure consists of one parent of each gender, male and female. However, this is the case in little more than fifty percent of families. Cavanaugh (2008) stresses the fact that recent statistics point to the prevalence of less traditional and more fluid family structures. For example, children whose parents divorce are likely to have one or more step-parents and similarly, children who have a single parent may, at some point, gain another parental figure if that parent enters into a relationship. Statistics from the 2000 US Census show that 21% of children live with their mothers only, 6% live with their fathers only, and 6% live with neither of their parents, but rather with another parental figure, such as a grandparent. There are children who, despite this fluidity, adjust successfully, developing meaningful and positive social relationships. Cavanaugh (2008) further stresses the need for a life course perspective in understanding the impact of family structure for children’s development. This perspective takes into account the mutability of the family constellation. One may question how it is that children attain positive social development in the face of parenting inconsistencies and differences. The study of the qualitative factors of parenting offers a partial explanation.
Research has identified several qualitative factors that describe behaviors demonstrated by parents which are correlated with specific child outcomes. However, most of these studies reflect a specific point in time, and therefore the results reflect factors that are influential at that specific time as opposed to factors that have been influential over the child’s life course. Despite the fact that children are exposed to various caregivers, there are aspects of each of these relationships that have a positive impact on children. Relationship factors are deemed to be the common factor for children who are well adjusted, regardless of their family constellation (Wainwright, Russell & Patterson, 2004). Also, relationship factors have been shown to serve as a protective mechanism for children who come from unstable family units (Cavanaugh, 2008).

*Same-Sex Parents and Their Families*

Cavanaugh’s research highlights the impact of the variability of traditional family structures; however, it does not address families and children of gay and lesbian parents. Census figures show that about 6% of children live with parents who are unmarried and same-sex parent households make up about 1% of all “coupled” households, including married and unmarried parents (US Census, 2000). There has been criticism toward such families, stemming from traditional beliefs that one parent of each gender is imperative for healthy child development. Furthermore, opponents such as The Family Research Council and Focus on the Family rely heavily on religious or cultural beliefs that exposure to same-sex relationships will somehow hinder the appropriate social and personal development of the child. Fortunately, the research of Patterson and colleagues (as summarized in Patterson, 2006) has helped to establish the fact that children of gay
and lesbian parents develop as well as children of heterosexual parents. In fact, when two groups of adolescents were compared with regard to their social adjustment, school functioning and even their own sexual and romantic behavior, there were no differences between the groups (Wainwright, et al., 2004). A growing body of research supports the fact that there are aspects beyond the makeup of the family and the gender/sexual orientation of the parent(s) that lead to the positive social development of a child.

The findings of the study by Wainwright, et al. (2004) support the understanding that relationship processes between parents and children are more important predictors of children’s adjustment than is the structure of the family. For children of same sex-parents, the research on the impact of qualitative factors of parenting mirrors that of children with heterosexual parents. With regard to attachment, children of same-sex parents, regardless of whether or not they are biologically related to one parent, develop secure attachments with their parent and establish satisfactory relationships with peers (Erich, Kanenberg, Case, Allen, & Bogdanos, 2009). Furthermore, parental warmth and high levels of autonomy in the parent-child relationship are noted to be contributory factors to the successful social adjustment of children of same-sex parents and heterosexual parents. There is also research to suggest that even when same-sex parent relationships change, other adults, such as grandparents, extended family and family friends serve as providers of support and modeling for the social development of the child (Patterson, Hurt & Mason, 1998).

*Implications for Children’s Social Competence*

The findings of Patterson, Hurt and Mason, (1998) somewhat parallel those of Canavaugh (2008), who emphasizes the idea that it is the cumulative effect of the adult
connections that children experience which makes the difference for their psychosocial adjustment. This idea requires that we look beyond the structure of the family and even the gender of the parents to examine further the qualitative factors that contribute to the development to children’s social competence. In looking at children with same-sex parents and children with heterosexual parents, there is reason to expect that although gender may be a factor that influences the relationship between children and parents, it is not a determining factor for the overall social competence of the child. The present research will aim to determine which qualitative factors are most strongly connected to social problem solving as an indicator of positive social adjustment in children regardless of the family structure in which they are raised.
Chapter Three

Two basic assumptions are relied upon in the course of this investigation. The first is that parenting qualities can be measured and are shown to be important aspects of the parent-child relationship regardless of family structures (Jacob et al. 2000; Domitrovich & Bierman 2001; Landry, Smith & Swank, 2006; Renk & Phares, Hasan & Power, 2002; Wainwright et al., 2004; Cavanaugh, 2008). Second, social information processing has been established as a reliable predictor of social adjustment (Crick & Dodge, 1990; Dodge & Price, 1994; Burks, et al., 1999; Dodge, et al., 2003; Lansford, et al., 2006). This study will identify a system of coding qualitative aspects of parent behavior in order to assess these aspects within a problem-solving situation. This coding system will be used to examine the effect of parenting qualities on the positive outcomes of children’s problem solving. The second purpose of this study is to estimate effect sizes in order to determine the power necessary to conduct a larger study. Third, preliminary analyses will be run to examine the differences between same-sex (lesbian parent only) families and opposite-sex parent families. These analyses will test the following hypotheses:

*Statement of Hypotheses*

1) There will be no difference between the social information processing outcomes of children from same-sex and children from traditional families.

2) In all families, some parenting qualities will be more predictive than others of a child’s prosocial responses in social information processing.
3) There will be no difference between same-sex and traditional families in the parenting qualities that predict a child’s prosocial outcomes of social information processing.

4) There will be a difference between the qualities that mothers and fathers from traditional families display when problem solving with their child individually.

5) Mothers from same-sex parent couples will demonstrate qualities that are different from the mothers in opposite-sex parent couples when interacting with their children.

Research Support

Observation and behavioral coding is an accepted method for conducting research on the aspects of the interrelationships of human beings that may not be otherwise captured through other methods of data collection (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). Coding systems are also used when corroboration of reported data is necessary. Often coding systems are developed to meet the specific needs of the researcher. In the development of the present study, several existing coding systems were reviewed including the Family Interaction Coding System (Hetherington, et al., 1992), the Georgia Family Q Sort (Wample, Halverson, Moore & Walters, 1989), and the Dyadic Parent Child Interaction Coding System (Eyberg & Robinson, 1981). These systems cover a wide range of parent and child behaviors; however, there is no single system that addresses the specific areas of inquiry in this study. In an effort to define, capture and measure the effects of specific parenting qualities, it seems prudent to develop a coding system that will be valid and appropriate and potentially useful for future research.
The first hypothesis, “There will be no difference between the social information processing outcomes of children from same-sex and children from traditional families” is supported by the research of Patterson (2006), Wainwright, et al., (2004), Erich, et al. (2009). These studies highlight the positive social adjustment of children of same-sex parents and the lack of any notable adjustment difference between these children and their counterparts who are raised in traditional families.

The second hypothesis “In all families, some parenting qualities will be more predictive than others of the child’s prosocial responses in social information processing” looks more closely at the processes that are predictive of children’s prosocial behavior. Several studies have established the link between specific parenting qualities and the social behavior of children. An investigation by Papp, Cummings and Goeke-Morey (2005) supports the understanding that there are direct links between parenting qualities and children’s adjustment; and that the expression of these qualities is reciprocally influenced by the interaction of the child. In the examination of mediational factors and pathways of influence between parent-child relationships and child-peer relationships, various studies have selected specific parenting qualities to examine and found these to be related to a child’s social competence. When mothers and fathers display a positive affect in difficult situations, children are more likely to demonstrate more positive responses to the situation. When parents attempt to exert more control over the child’s behavior, the child is less likely to respond in a positive manner (McDowell & Parke, 2005). Furthermore, parenting characterized by harsh responses toward the child can negatively impact the child’s processing of social situations (Haskett & Willoughby, 2006). It seems that when parents provide a moderate amount of structure and allow their
child to have some autonomy over their own behavior, the child has more opportunities
to practice control and decision making and therefore build a higher level of self-efficacy
which carries over into social relationships (Hasan & Power, 2002).

Support for the third hypothesis “There will be no difference between same-sex
and traditional families in the parenting qualities that predict a child’s prosocial outcomes
of social information processing” is derived from the research of Wainwright and
colleagues (2004). Their findings emphasize the fact that the qualitative aspects of the
parent-child relationship in same-sex parent families are greater predictors of adjustment
than the configuration of the family. The same types of factors that characterize
supportive parent-child relationships in traditional families are also observed in same-sex
parent families. In both family structures, parents who convey warm and loving feelings
toward their child and support their child’s sense of autonomy were found to have more
harmonious family relationships and the child was able to function effectively in the
personal and social realm outside of the family (Wainwright, et al., 2004; Hasan &
Power, 2002; Patterson, 2006). These findings may be extrapolated to support the
understanding that the quality of the relationship between parent and child is of greater
influence for the child’s social development than the family structure, gender, or sexual
orientation of the parent.

The gender literature offers support for the fourth hypothesis that “There will be a
difference between the qualities that mothers and fathers from traditional families display
when problem solving with their child individually.” The inclination to identify certain
behaviors with mothers and other behaviors with fathers comes from history as well as
research. Although some behaviors are more closely gender associated, others may be
more role-defined. Mothers and fathers vary in the emotionality of their interactions with children, in the types of activities in which they engage and often in the time they spend with their children (Isley, et al., 1999). Given the fact that these two groups of parents may behave differently in their daily lives, they will likely show differences when interacting with their children during a structured problem solving situation.

Gender literature findings would also suggest that regardless of family type, mothers would appear, on the whole, similar to one another. However, the fifth hypothesis, posing differences in qualities between mothers from same-sex parent couples and mothers in opposite-sex parent couples when interacting with their children, is surmised, based on the literature on family constellations. This body of research posits that children are the recipients of behavioral qualities displayed by the various adults in their lives regardless of the makeup of the nuclear family (Cavanaugh, 2008, Wainwright et al., 2004). This also assumes that each person, regardless of his or her role or relationship, embodies different qualities. In addition to speculating that there would be differences between mothers and fathers in opposite-sex parent families, it is also postulated that the behaviors of mothers from same-sex parent families will be different from the mothers of opposite-sex parent families. As mothers of traditional families are only one part of the parental unit, mothers in same-sex parent families make up the complete parental unit. It may be assumed that the behaviors displayed by same-sex parents represent the range of essential parenting qualities as are exhibited by mother and father groups combined.
Chapter Four

Design

The current investigation is an observational design comparing two categories of families (traditional families and same-sex parent families specifically consisting of lesbian couples only) examining the following categories of variables: parenting dimensions/qualities, parent gender, and social information processing responses of both parents and children.

Participants

Selection and Recruitment

The participants were selected from a community based sample. Archival data collected for a previous study (Markulin, 2009) were used for the traditional families represented in this study. These families were obtained, based on a process of respondent-driven sampling. Although this process provided a substantive group of participants, there were limitations to the diversity of the sample (Heckathorn, 2002). Each family selected was asked to provide the recommendation of another family. Recruitment of same-sex families was initiated through the organization Philadelphia Family Pride (PFP). PFP is a voluntary social organization of families with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender parents and or children. A letter was sent to all member families via the organization’s electronic mailing list requesting volunteer families. A follow-up email containing the letter was also sent to families who met the criteria of the study, based on the demographic information they provided to the organization membership listing (Appendix C). Two families responded to the email and each of these families
provided the names of two other families. The two other families found out about the
study through word-of-mouth and agreed to participate.

In all, data from 23 families were used for this study; these consisted of archival
data for seventeen (17) traditional family triads consisting of a mother, father and child
who were recruited for a previous study and original data from six (6) same-sex family
triads (lesbian parents only – mother, mother and child) - 69 individuals in all. Primary
inclusion criteria was that the child in the study was between the ages of 9 and 12;
children younger than 9 and older than 12 were excluded. Parents in the family were
required to be married and/or living together with the child in the study. Traditional
families in which parents were divorced, remarried with stepchildren, or in which the
child was adopted were excluded from the original study. Same-sex parent families who
had a child who was biologically related to one of the mothers, or lesbian parents with
adopted children were acceptable for the purposes of this study, because adoption is a
primary vehicle for gay and lesbian couples to have children.

_Informed Consent_

The volunteering or recommended family was contacted by the investigator to
determine their interest in participating in the study. If inclusion criteria were met and the
family was interested, an appointment was made to conduct the observation and data
collection in their homes. At the time of the scheduled appointment, both parents were
asked to give consent for their participation and the child was asked to give assent to
his/her participation (Appendix I). The statement of informed consent provides a
description of the study and allows the participants to provide written agreement to be
part of the study (Appendix H).
Measures

Demographics

Demographic information about the family was collected using a questionnaire (Appendix D). This allowed the family to provide the age and gender of all family members as well as race, ethnicity, and number of family members. Parents were also requested to indicate their levels of education, employment status, occupations, and family income levels. Finally parents were asked to estimate the number of hours per day (average per week day and average per weekend day) that they spend with the child who is being studied.

Parenting Qualities

Although there are many different measures that attempt to assess dimensions or qualities of parenting, none was sufficient for the scope of this study. Therefore, various measures were used to assess the specific qualities being examined.

The Parenting Dimensions Inventory - Short Version (PDI-S). The Parenting Dimensions Inventory- Short Version (PDI-S) is a self-report questionnaire that measures eight dimensions of parenting: The areas of nurturance, responsiveness to child input, and nonrestrictive attitude assess parental support; the areas depicting type of control, amount of control and maturity demands assess parental control, and parental structure is assessed through the areas of consistency and organization (see Appendix F). There are eleven scales on the PDI-S. They include measures of nurturance, consistency (related to discipline), organization, permissiveness, and type of control used (relating to the use of consequences such as physical punishment, material/social consequences, reasoning, scolding, and reminding) (Power, 2002). There are four groups of responses on the
instrument. Two groups consist of statements that are rated on a 6-point Likert scale. A third section requires the choice of one of two statements that best describes the respondent and the fourth section consists of short scenarios to which the parent is asked to indicate the likelihood of responding in a specific way.

The instrument was initially developed as a longer version. Research has helped to identify the scales that are most reliable and valid (Power, 2002). The reliability of the instrument was established through several studies. The first (Slater & Power, 1987) examined the instrument as administered to parents of children ages 6 through 12 and of middle-class socioeconomic status. An extension of the study utilizing a sample of American families and a sample of Japanese families also found reliability (Power, Kobayashi-Winata, & Kelley, 1988). Along with other colleagues, Power (1988) later examined a sample of mothers from a low-income population and was able to obtain sufficient stability over three years of repeated ratings. The initial studies of the PDI showed the scale to be a valid predictor both of child behavior problems and of child social competence, using the Child Behavior Checklist as a predictor variable (Slater & Power, 1987). Other researchers have used the PDI to assess and predict the relationship between qualities of parenting and children’s symptomatology (Hasan & Power, 2002) and coping and problem solving (Hardy, Power, & Jaedicke, 1993).

The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ). The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) is a self-report instrument that assesses an individual’s attributional style for good and bad events that may be encountered. Drawing from the literature on cognitions associated with depression, three causal dimensions are evaluated: internal versus external, stable versus unstable, and global versus specific (Peterson, et al., 1982;
see Appendix G for ASQ). The ASQ poses 12 hypothetical events addressing the goal of affiliation and achievement. Six of the events are positive and six are negative. The respondent is asked to consider the event and write down one possible major cause of the event. The individual is then directed to rate the cause along a 7-point scale for each of the causal dimensions. Scores are calculated for each of the three dimensions (internality, stability and globality) plus a composite. These scores are derived separately, for negative events and for positive events.

The reliability and validity of the ASQ is sufficient. Peterson et al. (1982) assessed the psychometric properties of the scale through a survey of 130 college students. Five weeks after the initial rating, 100 of these students completed the ASQ again. The internal reliability for each subscale (positive events vs. negative events was good (coefficient alpha of .75 for good events and .72 for bad events). Consistent with the literature of correlates of depression, the relationship between the scores for the negative events on the ASQ and depression was more robust. The attributional styles associated with good versus bad events were significantly different from each other. In looking at the stability of the measure the test-retest correlations of .65 and .69 was respectably high. Furthermore, attributional styles for negative events were more consistent than for positive events (Peterson, et al., 1982).

*The Social Problem Solving Inventory-Revised.* The Social Problem Solving Inventory-Revised-Short Form (SPSI-R:S) is a 25 item self-report questionnaire developed to measure problem solving orientation and interpersonal problem solving skills (D’Zurilla, Nezu, & Maydeu-Olives, 2002). This measure is intended to assess social problem solving processes to determine an individual’s strengths and deficits
within problem solving. The respondent is asked to read each item and rate how true each item is for him or her. The ratings are on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (not at all true of me) to 5 (extremely true of me). There are five major scales: (1) positive problem orientation (PPO), (2) negative problem orientation (NPO), (3) rational problem solving (RPS), (4) avoidant style problem solving (AS), and (5) impulsivity/carelessness style (ICS). Each scale contains five items measuring the five different problem solving dimensions.

The SPSI-R:S has been shown to have good reliability and validity (D’Zurilla et al., 2002). Measuring a sample of 583 individuals D’Zurilla and colleagues found significant correlations for the major problem solving dimensions ranging from .80 for PPO, .92 for NPO, .95 for ICS, and .89 for AS. The stability of the measure is demonstrated through high test-retest correlations ranging from .72 for PPO, .88 for NPO, .82 for RPS, .78 for ICS, and .78 for AS. The scores used for these correlations included several age groups, including adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults and elderly adults from four different samples. The SPSI-R:S demonstrates good concurrent, predictive, convergent and discriminant validity among diversified samples (D’Zurilla et al., 2002).

Children’s Qualities

*Children’s Attributional Style Questionnaire-Revised (CASQ-R)*. The Children’s Attributional Style Questionnaire-Revised (CASQ-R) is a 24-item self-report inventory that measures children’s causal attributions for negative and positive events (Thompson, Kaslow, Weiss, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; see Appendix E for CASQ-R). This scale was developed to be a shorter version of the original 48-item Children’s Attributional Style
Questionnaire. On the CASQ-R there are 24 forced choice items, 12 of which depict positive outcomes and 12 others that depict negative outcomes. The 12 positive outcome statements include seven items that focus on stable and unstable causal dimensions; three items related to internal and external causal dimensions, and two items that tap global and specific dimensions. The 12 negative outcome statements include six items that evaluate stable versus unstable dimensions, three items related to internal and external dimension, and three items addressing the global and specific dimensions. Each response selected is given one point and the response scores yield three composite scores: a positive composite, a negative composite and an overall composite.

Research shows that the reliability and validity of the CASQ-R ranges from good to fair (Thompson et al., 1998). Thompson and colleagues (1998) examined 1,086 children, 9 to 12 years old, enrolled in elementary and middle school, through archival data from mental health screenings conducted by schools to determine counseling services needs. Scores from the initial rating completed by the child were compared with a second rating taken six months later. The CASQ-R and the Vanderbilt Depression Inventory (VDI) were the primary measures used. With regard to criterion related validity, the scores from the CASQ-R were found to predict scores on the VDI, with higher scores on the negative composite and lower scores on the positive and overall composites relating to higher depression scores. The findings yielded moderate internal consistency reliability for positive, negative and overall composite scores with the note that internal consistency was higher for Caucasian as opposed to African-American children. The test-retest reliability was significantly correlated at time 1 and time 2 suggesting that the reliability of the three composite scores is fairly stable over time.
Parent and Child Interaction Qualities

Observational Coding: Behavioral coding is an accepted procedure for collecting observational data in the course of qualitative research. The purpose of using a coding system or coding scheme is to help the researcher capture variations of behavior that are interactive in nature. In addition to providing information about behavior in situ, coding systems can also serve to corroborate other forms of data such as subjective questionnaires (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). The development of a coding system requires a process of defining variables and categorizing observations to measure the desired behaviors in a clear and focused manner. Bakeman and Gottman (1997) view the development of an appropriate coding system as an informal hypothesis in itself, the test of which is the ability of the system to provide distinct and interpretable results.

Coding systems have been widely used, relating particularly to parent-child or family interactions (Burks, 2001 – unpublished manuscript). However, since it is the intent of coding systems to meet the needs of the researcher, no one coding system appropriately met the requirements of this study. Furthermore, although the literature refers to the basic components and process of standardizing coding, authors do not fully define the criteria for the behavioral variables (Hetherington, et al., 1992). Therefore, in developing the coding system for this study, the investigator referenced existing coding systems and the research base to denote and define behaviors that characterize the qualitative aspects of parents’ interactions with their child.

Development of the Coding System

In an effort to capture the qualities deemed important for this study, a global coding system was developed. Six categories of behavior were selected: Autonomy-
promoting behaviors, Affect, Warmth, Task Focus, Responsiveness and Attributions. These areas were chosen to measure the qualitative areas identified by the literature as critical in parent-child interaction. The area of Autonomy-promoting behaviors and Task Focus were intended to capture aspects of control and power between parent and child that may be evident in a brief interaction.

Each behavioral category was rated on a five-point scale, with a score of 1 indicating negative behaviors or no evidence of positive behaviors and a score of 5 indicating strong evidence of the positive behavioral characteristics of each category. Examples of the positive behavioral evidence used to rate these qualities are described below (see Appendix J for the actual coding system).

**Autonomy-promoting behaviors:** behavioral evidence of the parent promoting or affirming the child’s assertiveness and independence in thinking, allowing the child to speak and complete his or her thoughts, praising the child’s idea and supporting them.

**Affect:** demonstration of positive affect toward the child, a smile, laugh, pleasure or approval expressed verbally or nonverbally, as well as the use of affective language or promotion of further discussion of emotions or with the child in discussing the scenario.

**Warmth:** demonstration of warm and loving behavior toward the child such as sitting comfortably close, making eye contact with the child, using appropriate gentle touch, a warm tone of voice, use of nicknames etc.

**Task Focus:** behavioral and verbal indications that the parent is attentive to the topic and task, asking probing questions related to the main
question, moving from question to question at a pace that seems comfortable to the child, addressing each question and completely discussing each question.

**Responsiveness**: behavioral and verbal indication of the parent acknowledging and responding to the child’s cues such as answering questions appropriately, providing feedback to the child at appropriate times, picking up on child’s nonverbal cues and responding appropriately etc.

Similar codes were established to rate the child’s behavior in the interaction. These included:

- **Autonomy related behaviors**: behavioral evidence of the child asserting his or her own ideas and taking responsibility in the interaction, such as stating his or her own opinion, disagreeing respectfully with the parent, using complete thoughts that support the ideas expressed with plausible reasons.

- **Affect**: demonstration of positive affect toward the parent’s smile, laugh; pleasure or approval expressed verbally or nonverbally, as well as the use of affective language or discussion of emotions with the parent in talking about the scenario.

- **Task-focus**: behavioral and verbal indications that the child is attentive to the topic and the task, asking questions to probe or clarify the main question, and completely discussing each question.
**Responsiveness**: behavioral and verbal indication of the child’s acknowledging and responding to the parent’s cues such as answering questions appropriately, accepting feedback from the parent appropriately, picking up on parent’s nonverbal cues and responding appropriately, etc.

For both the parent(s) and the child, Attributions were coded. The verbalizations expressed in the course of discussing the questions following each vignette were used to gather indications of the cognitive attributions underlying the individual thought process about the scenario. These were rated on a scale of 1 to 5 and reflected the dimensions of external vs. internal, specific vs. global, and unstable vs. stable. These correspond to the dimensions assessed through the ASQ and the CASQ. In developing the coding process, the Content Assessment of Verbatim Explanations (CAVE) coding system was referenced in order to analyze the verbal responses of the subjects effectively and determine the direction/category of the attributions (Peterson & Seligman, 1984; Schulman, Castellon & Seligman, 1988).

In responding to the question “What would you do if this happened to you?” children’s responses were coded as positive/prosocial, neutral or negative. Positive responses were characterized by a description of the intent to do something that would attempt to preserve or potentially advance the peer relationship; for example, a response such as “I would talk to the kid and find out why they did it” or “I would laugh with them” would be considered positive/prosocial. Neutral responses were characterized by responses that described passive behavior or inaction such as “I would just walk away.” These responses could have no effect on the peer relationship or they could be interpreted either positively or negatively. Negative responses were coded, based on their potential to
Parenting Influences on Social Problem Solving

...detract from the positive quality of the peer relationship or are antisocial in nature. Responses such as “I would kick the ball back at him” or “I’d yell at the kid” were considered negative.

In addressing the issue of reliability, another person was used to assist in the development of the coding criteria and in separately coding 30% of the videos. The individual who assisted in the study was a doctoral candidate who also had training as a social worker. There were three face-to-face meetings between the investigator and the coder to discuss and clarify the codes. One preliminary video was coded, and codes were compared and discussed to refine the criteria. A second video was coded by the investigator and coder separately then compared for reliability. The percent of coder agreement for each category was as follows: Autonomy: 82%, Affect: 91%, Warmth 87%, Task Focus: 83%, and Responsiveness: 89%. A Cohen’s Kappa coefficient was used to assess the inter-rater reliability for the rating of children’s responses. The results suggest moderate agreement between raters (κ = .448). All of the 23 videos were coded by the investigator; the coder rated 6 of the videos for reliability purposes (4 of traditional families, 2 of same-sex parent families). These were compared with the investigator’s codes and where there was a discrepancy, a discussion was held and a code was assigned based on a consensus between the two raters.

Procedure

Observations were done in each family’s own home. Upon arriving at the home, the investigator first introduced herself and thanked the family for agreeing to participate in this study. Using detailed instructions (Appendix A), the investigator provided an overview of the tasks and expectations for the meeting. Second, the investigator provided...
a copy of the informed consent/assent form to the family, explained the document and responded to any questions that family members had.

The investigator explained that each person would need to complete various questionnaires. The child was asked to complete the Children’s Attributional Style Questionnaire- Revised (CASQ-R). Each parent completed the Demographic Questionnaire, the Parenting Dimensions Inventory: Short (PDI: S), The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ), and Social Problem Solving Inventory–Revised: Short (SPSI-R: S). Each family was assigned a number or letter which was used to identify the family on the questionnaires in order to maintain confidentiality. In traditional families, mothers were indicated by #M and fathers by #F. For lesbian parent participants, families were identified as Family A, B, C and so on, and parents were identified as “Parent a” or “Parent b”. While the family worked on the questionnaires, the investigator set up the video camera in the area of the home where the filming was to take place. After the child completed the CASQ, and the camera was ready, the first dyad or the triad was brought into the taping area. The order in which the parent-child pairs and the triad group were videoed was counterbalanced throughout the study.

The first group was given a paper with two problem-solving vignettes and questions for each vignette (see Appendix B). The investigator stated the directions for the task, turned on the tape and left the room while the parent(s) and child talked through the vignettes. They were asked to notify the investigator when they were finished and the investigator returned to the room to stop the camera. The directions were repeated for the second parent and the next group was provided with a paper describing two different vignettes. The procedure was repeated for the final grouping and they received yet
another set of different problem vignettes to discuss. The parents had the opportunity to complete the questionnaires during the time in which they were not being videotaped, and if needed, after the videotaping was complete. After all three groupings of family members were taped, the family was debriefed. Any questions or concerns from family members were fielded by the investigator, at that time. When the questionnaires were complete, they were collected. The family was again thanked for their participation and the investigator left the home.

The videos were transferred from tape to a DVD. The materials gathered for the study data (videotapes and questionnaires) were maintained in a safe location determined by the investigator.

*Risks to the Participants*

Because there was no experimental manipulation involved in this study, the risks to the participants were judged to be low. It was possible, however, that completing the questionnaires might have generated emotional responses that could have been uncomfortable for the participants. Similarly, partners engaging in discussions of problem-solving with each other and their child may have also given rise to interactions that could be difficult or unpleasant. Debriefing was provided following the data collections session to address any concerns that may have arisen. Participants were also assured that if, as a result of these situations, they did not wish to continue with the study, their participation would be terminated and their input excluded.
Benefits for the Participants

There were no direct benefits to the participants in the study. None of the families or family members was compensated for their participation and there was no specific information provided to the participants about their responses for the study.

Benefits for Others

The benefits of this study for others include a better understanding of the influence parents have on the development of children’s problem-solving. In particular, this study is intended to be an addition to the literature that examines the social adjustment of children from same-sex families. This study may provide information that other researchers can use and expand upon in further investigations.

Results

Data Analysis

Data from parents and children were grouped according to three groupings: fathers and their children (n = 17), mothers from opposite-sex parent families and their children (n =17) and mothers from same-sex parent families and their children (n=12). These groupings facilitated the analysis of the data in a manner that helped to evaluate the hypotheses of this study and allowed for comparisons between parents and children according to the gender of the parent and the family type. The observational coding system developed for this study was used to measure parent’s and children’s behavior during the videotaped problem solving interactions. Data from the observational coding were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the mean codings of qualities. Additionally, data from the subjective measures administered (PDI, ASQ and SPSI-R:S for parents and CASQ for children) were analyzed in the same
manner. Of the subjective measures, only the PDI yielded findings that evidenced any significant differences. Therefore the analysis of the ASQ, SPSI:R and CASQ are not presented for further discussion here. The PDI was used as an additional measure of parental relationship quality. The association between these scores and the children’s social problem solving outcomes was analyzed using a Pearson product moment correlation.

Demographics

Data from twenty-three families were included in this study. Seventeen of these families were traditional, consisting of opposite-sex parents and one child, and six of the families were same-sex families, consisting of two mothers and one child. In total there were 46 parents (17 fathers, 17 mothers from opposite-sex parent couples, and 12 mothers from same-sex couples) and 23 children (17 from opposite-sex parent families and 6 from same-sex parent families). The average age range of all three groups of parents was between 30 and 39 years. There were no differences in the average family size of each family type (average family members: traditional: 4, same-sex – 3.7). With regard to education, same-sex parents reported a higher level of education than opposite-sex parents, with greater tendency to have completed their education beyond a four-year college degree (same-sex parents M = 4.67, opposite-sex couples mothers M = 3.67 p = .01, F = 7.36.). Across the parent groups, there was no significant difference in salary range. Parents from both family types reported an average household income in the range of $80,000-100,000.

The families were surveyed about the amount of time they spent during the weekdays and on weekends with the child in the study. The responses to these items
ranged greatly. On the whole, mothers from both family types reported spending more time with their children than fathers, with greater variability reported from mothers in opposite-sex parent families. Mothers in traditional families reported spending a greater number of hours during the week with their children than mothers from same-sex parent families or fathers do (fathers $M = 7.38$, mothers from opposite-sex parent families $M = 12.82$; mothers from same-sex parent families $M = 8.0$). However, mothers from same-sex parent families report spending a greater amount of time with their child on the weekends (fathers $M = 10.20$, mothers from opposite-sex parent families $M = 12.93$; mothers from same-sex parent families $M = 14.08$).

Regarding ethnicity, the parents from traditional families were primarily Caucasian. One parent reported being Native American and two others reported an ethnicity of “other.” There was more diversity in the sample of same-sex parent families. Four of the same-sex parents were African American and the other eight were Caucasian. Two of the children were African American, and one of the children was of Cambodian descent. The children ranged in age from 9 to 12, with all ages represented (one child aged 9, two children aged 10, one child aged 11 and one child aged 12). The average age of children from traditional families was 11.06 and the average age of children from same-sex parent families was 10.67.

Because the study included only traditional families who were married with at least one biological child, data regarding the amount of time spent as partners and as a parent couple were not collected from these families. However, because the inclusion criteria for the same-sex families were more open, this information was collected. Of the six, same-sex parent families who took part in the study, the number of years that couples
reported being together ranged from 3.5 to 20 years with an average of 12.25 years. The number of years the couples reported being co-parents to the child in the study ranged from 1 year to 11 years. In the families that reported co-parenting for 1 year, one of the parents had been a consistent parent figure for the child in the previous years.

*Parent Behaviors with Their Children*

Looking at all three groupings of parents, the observation ratings, overall, were globally positive (mean ratings above 3.5) in each of the five qualitative areas (see Table 1). Mothers from same-sex parent couples demonstrated a higher level of autonomy-promoting behavior in interacting with their children \((M = 4.54)\) than either mothers from opposite-sex parent couples \((M = 3.79)\) or fathers \((M = 3.56)\). Regarding warmth, all parents appeared equally warm with their children. Similarly, no differences were found between parent groups in which the qualities of affect and task focus with the child were concerned. In terms of responsiveness toward the child, mothers from same-sex parent couples demonstrated a higher level of responsiveness toward their children \((M = 4.33)\) than mothers from opposite sex parent couples \((M = 3.71)\) or fathers \((M = 3.59)\).

In addition to the observational coding, the *Parenting Dimensions Inventory* was administered to each parent to obtain an objective measure of self-reported parenting behaviors that may not have been captured in the videotaped interaction. The data from this scale were analyzed in the same manner as observational coding data, yielding three groups for comparison: fathers with their child, mothers from opposite-sex parents with their child and mothers from same-sex parent families with their child (see Table 2).
Table 1

*Comparison of Mean Observational Codes of Parent Behavior in Dyadic Interaction*

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<tr>
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<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Mothers (same-sex parent couples)</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

* (a) p = .01, F = 7.4; (b) p = .06, F = 3.91

Again, a one-way ANOVA was utilized to evaluate the data. Parents from all three groups rate themselves as equally nurturing. Both mothers and fathers from opposite-sex parent families rate themselves as more inconsistent in parenting practices (mothers M = 2.87; fathers M = 2.92) than the mothers in same-sex parent relationships do (M = 2.27). Mothers from both family types rate themselves as more likely to follow through with disciplinary practices (mothers from opposite-sex couples: M = 4.266; mothers from same-sex couples: M = 4.216) than fathers (M = 3.703). Similarly, mothers from both family types present themselves as having a more structured and organized household (mothers from opposite-sex couples: M = 4.279; mothers from same-sex couples: M =
than fathers ($M = 3.615$). There were no differences in the amount of control parents feel they do have, or should have, where their children’s behavior is concerned. All three groups endorsed a preference toward a higher level of parental control. When given several options of responding to problem behavior, all parents across the groups rated themselves as most likely to attempt to reason with their child. The parent groups on the whole were least likely to let problem behavior go. The three groups rated themselves very similarly on all but one response category, the use of scolding. Mothers from opposite-sex parent couples and their male counterparts, were equally as likely to respond to their child’s problem behavior by scolding ($mothers M = 1.344$, $fathers M = 1.316$), whereas mothers from same-sex parent couples were not as likely to respond in this manner ($M = 0.779$). Across the three groups, parents reported a greater tendency to remind their child of the rules rather than use physical punishment or material or social consequences.

**Children’s Behavior with Their Parents**

As with the parent coding data, children’s observational codes were analyzed using a one way ANOVA to compare the mean codings for children in three groupings: children with fathers alone, children with mothers from opposite-sex parent couples alone and children from same-sex parent families with each of their mothers. Table 3 depicts the summary of this data. Overall the mean ratings for each qualitative area reflect generally positive trends in interactions (mean scores greater than 3). In looking specifically at the children’s behaviors, the children who displayed the most autonomous behavior were those from same-sex parent families interacting with their mothers ($M = 4.79$). Children from opposite-sex parent families were equally autonomous with their
## Table 2

Comparison of Mean PDI Scores for Parents in Three Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PDI Scale</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers (same-sex parent couples)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Through Organization</td>
<td>3.70$^a$</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>4.27$^a$</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Control</td>
<td>3.62$^b$</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>4.28$^b$</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Disciplinary Response Tendency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers (same-sex parent couples)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let it Go</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Punishment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers (same-sex parent couples)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material-Social Consequences</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scold</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>1.34$^c$</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>0.78$^c$</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) $p = .06$, $F = 4.07$; (b) $p = .01$, $F = 8.37$; (c) $p = <.01$, $F = 8.79$
mothers ($M = 3.82$) but less autonomous when interacting with their fathers ($M = 3.5$). In terms of affect as displayed in the dyadic interaction, there was a fairly significant difference between how much affect children from opposite-sex parents displayed with their parents. Children were somewhat less likely to express affect with their fathers ($M = 3.29$) as opposed to expressing affect with their mothers ($M = 3.71$). There was no difference regarding affect between children and their (opposite–sex parent) mothers and children with same-sex parent mothers. There were no significant differences between the children in dyad groupings with respect to task focus. Similar to the area of affect, children from opposite-sex parents showed less responsiveness to their fathers in interaction ($M = 3.62$) than toward their mothers ($M = 4.03$). Children’s interactions with their mothers, regardless of family type, were very similar.

**Children’s Response Findings**

As part of the problem solving process, parents and children were asked to respond to the question: “What would you do if this happened to you?” The child’s response was selected for each vignette and coded as positive/prosocial, neutral, or negative. For statistical purposes, the categories of “neutral” and “negative” were collapsed into one group. Looking at the children’s response tendencies across the three parent groupings (see Table 4), children of same-sex parents had a significantly greater tendency to give a positive or prosocial response than to give neutral and negative responses combined. In opposite-sex parent families, children gave a higher proportion of neutral/negative responses when working with their mothers. When with fathers, the amount of positive and neutral/negative responses was about equal.
In the attempt to determine if there was a connection between parenting qualities and children’s response tendencies, a Pearson product moment correlation was used. An analysis of observational codings and response categories showed no correlation. The Parenting Dimensions Inventory results and response categories were also analyzed in the same manner, revealing few statistically significant correlations along with some trends that are worth noting for the purpose of this study.

When looking at the connections between fathers’ PDI data and children’s responses, there were some significant relationships (see Table 5). An interesting but
Table 4

Comparison of the Proportion of Children’s Response Types by Parent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s responses</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(opposite-sex parent couples)</td>
<td>(opposite-sex parent couples)</td>
<td>(same-sex parent couples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Negative</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

unusual finding is that the more nurturing fathers reported themselves to be, the more likely the children were to give neutral/negative responses \(r = .70, p > .01\) over positive responses \(r = -.72, p > .01\). Fathers who endorsed reminding their children of the rules as part of a disciplinary response were more likely to have children who provided positive responses \(r = .60, p > .05\), and significantly less likely to have children who gave neutral/negative responses \(r = -.67, p > .01\). Other trends show that higher levels of control reported by fathers may be related to a lower frequency of neutral/negative responses \(r = 29\). Similar to the area of nurturance and similar to the mothers in opposite-sex parent families, fathers who endorsed a tendency to follow through on discipline had children who were somewhat less likely to give positive responses \(r = -.41\) and more likely to give neutral/negative responses \(r = .42\).

The relationship between mothers from both family types showed less defined trends. As noted in Table 6, children from opposite-sex parent families whose mothers report higher levels of nurturance were less likely to provide neutral/negative responses
Table 5

*Correlation of PDI Ratings for Fathers to their Child’s Response*

**Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PDI Scales</th>
<th>Neutral/ Positive Response</th>
<th>Neutral/ Negative Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>.72**</td>
<td>.70**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Through</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Control</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Disciplinary Response Tendency*

| Let it Go                   | -.43                       | .34                       |
| Physical Punishment         | .27                        | -.25                      |
| Material-Social Consequences| -.30                       | .32                       |
| Reason                      | -.07                       | .10                       |
| Scold                       | .13                        | -.10                      |
| Remind                      | .60*                       | -.67**                    |

*p = .01  **p = .05

(r = -.40) and somewhat more likely to give a positive response (r = .29). Mothers who endorsed a higher level of follow-through on discipline had children who were less likely
to provide positive responses ($r = -.35$). In terms of disciplinary actions, mothers’
tendency toward the use of material and social consequences may be related to fewer
positive responses ($r = -.39$) and more neutral/negative responses ($r = .32$). The children
who provided fewer neutral/negative responses tended to have mothers who endorsed the
use of scolding ($r = -.42$).

Table 7 shows the correlations between same-sex mother’s PDI scores and their
children’s responses. Similar to mothers from opposite-sex parent couples, mothers from
same-sex parent couples who rated a higher level of nurturance had children who tended
to respond more positively ($r = .37$). However, those mothers who endorsed a higher level
of control, had children who were less likely to respond positively ($r = -.33$).
Furthermore, mothers’ endorsements of physical punishment and scolding were
somewhat consistent with higher levels of negative responding (physical punishment:
$r = .44$; scolding: $r = .55$) and higher levels of negative responding.
Table 6

Correlation of PDI Ratings for Mothers from Opposite-Sex Parent Couples to their Child’s Response Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PDI Scales</th>
<th>Children’s Responses</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Response</td>
<td>Neutral/ Negative Response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Through</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Control</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disciplinary Response Tendency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplinary Response Tendency</th>
<th>Positive Response</th>
<th>Neutral/ Negative Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let it Go</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Punishment</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material-Social Consequences</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scold</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>-.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Correlation of Parenting Dimensions Inventory Ratings for Mothers from Same-Sex Parent Couples to their Child’s Response Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s Responses</th>
<th>Positive Response</th>
<th>Neutral/ Negative Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PDI Scales</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Through</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Control</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disciplinary Response Tendency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let it Go</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Punishment</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material-Social Consequences</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scold</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Children’s Responses

The findings of this study do not seem to support the primary hypothesis that “there will be no difference between the social information processing outcomes of children from same-sex and children from traditional families.” but rather suggest that differences do exist between children from same-sex parent families and children from traditional families with regard to social processing outcomes. When the children’s responses were compared according to the parent with whom they solved problems, the children of mothers in same-sex parent families gave an overwhelming portion of positive responses. This finding is notable and refutes the primary hypothesis. Children from traditional families provided a larger portion of positive responses when with their fathers; however, in general, there was a tendency for these children to provide fewer positive responses than neutral/negative ones. Although solutions to social problems are only one aspect of social functioning, this finding speaks to the idea that these children may be influenced by different factors and are possibly engaging in a different thought process about social conflict. These data also suggest that there may be differences in the ways parents and children interact when working to solve social problems.

Parent Comparisons

The second part of this study entailed the comparison of parent groups – fathers versus mothers from opposite sex-parent couples versus mothers from same-sex parent couples. In looking at these groups of parents, on the whole, parental qualities and characteristics appear very similar regardless of family type. However, some differences
are observed between mothers from same-sex parent families and their traditional family counterparts. When engaged in problem solving with their children, mothers from same-sex couples appeared to show greater responsiveness toward their children. Additionally, they were more likely to demonstrate behavior that showed support for their child’s independent, self-directed thinking within the session. In turn, their children showed a higher level of autonomous behavior than children from opposite-sex parent couples. These results are supportive of the fifth hypothesis, revealing modest differences between the mothers in same-sex parent couples and those in opposite-sex parent couples.

In looking at the self-report of parenting behaviors \((PDI)\), differences between the parents groups are more evident along gender lines. Mothers from both family types present themselves similar to each other, but different from fathers in some areas. In particular, mothers portray themselves as more likely to follow through on discipline than do fathers. Also, mothers report maintaining a higher level of structure and organization to the household than do fathers. These differences support the findings of the gender literature suggesting that mothers and fathers may assume role-defined responsibilities for specific tasks of parenting. In the present study, the mothers from same-sex couples were grouped together in order to make comparisons between the parent groups. Further study would be helpful to assess whether or not these same types of role-defined parenting differences are present in same-sex couples. For example, additional research could examine whether one mother has a greater tendency toward disciplinary follow-through than her parent counterpart or whether one mother is more likely than the other to maintain the structure and organization of the household.
There were also differences among the parent groupings where disciplinary responses were concerned. Almost all parents leaned toward preferring a higher level of control over their child’s behavior tempered by the use of reasoning and reminders when problem behaviors arose. Interestingly, parents from traditional families endorsed a greater likelihood of scolding their children than did mothers from same-sex parent families. These findings suggest that, overall, this group of parents seems to lean toward a more authoritative approach to discipline, a style that is supported by the literature as being most effective.

*Prediction of Child Responses*

The third part of the study addressed the connections between parents’ and children’s responses. The self-report of parental qualities (*PDI*) showed a greater correlation to the children’s social problem-solving responses than the observational data. The reason for this is unclear; however, it may be an artifact of a difference in the type of data. The “child’s response” for this study consists of a thought generated in response to a cognitive process, or a response to a question. It is not a measureable behavior. Although the research supports the understanding that the process through which a child solves problems can be a good predictor of social behavior, it is not a guarantee that the child will behave in that manner. In a future examination of this topic, it may be more valuable to attempt to compare the observations of parent behaviors with the observations of the child’s behavior in the context of a social setting.

In looking at the connection between the direction of child responses (positive or neutral/negative) and parent qualities, there were some interesting findings particularly between fathers and their children. The most significant finding is that higher paternal
nurturance seems to predict a lower chance of positive responding. This is contrary to what might be expected, given the existing literature extolling the positive benefits of warm, nurturing parenting. However, coupled with the finding that fathers also present themselves as less likely than mothers to follow through on discipline, it may be that fathers view leniency as one aspect of a nurturing relationship. Supporting this idea, when fathers let problem behavior go unresolved, their children were more likely to respond in a less positive manner. In contrast, a greater tendency toward positive responding was seen for fathers who endorsed a preference for a higher level of control over children’s behavior. In mothers from both groups, higher reported levels of nurturance were modestly predictive of an inclination toward fewer neutral/negative responses.

Another complex finding is that in opposite-sex parent families, the tendency to follow through on discipline was somewhat more predictive of a lower probability of positive responding. Again, there may be a connection to the preferred method of disciplinary response. Parents in traditional families endorsed scolding more frequently than did same-sex-parent couples. It is possible that scolding could be interpreted negatively by the child and therefore, some foundation for learning and repeating the pattern of negative responding may have been established. However, the data from mothers in opposite sex couples do not support this reasoning, because scolding from these parents is more highly correlated with fewer neutral/negative responses.

Children of same-sex parents were less likely to respond positively when their parents endorsed higher levels of control. This finding is different from the information about traditional families. However, the aspect of control for this group may be more
closely related to the understanding of the need to balance control and autonomy. When with their mothers, these children appeared more autonomous in the interactive decision making process, but their mothers were also observed as supporting them in the demonstration of this autonomy. If in their daily lives these children are more accustomed to having a higher level of autonomy, they may experience parental control in a more negative manner. As a result, the children may acquire a negative response tendency when sensing the parent’s attempts to have control over their behavior.

Conclusions

This study combines two veins of research – one being the work of Dodge and others on the role of social information processing in the social development of children; the other is based on the work of Patterson and colleagues, which highlights the normality of adjustment for children from same-sex parent families. The findings of the present study lend some support to both of these avenues and the understanding that the quality of the parent-child relationship, regardless of the sexual orientation or gender of the parent, is an essential element in children’s social problem solving. Additionally, it would support a growing body of literature that describes the positive adjustment of children from differently structured families (Cavanaugh 2008).

Although there are no definitive results that showed a clear prediction of response tendencies, this study does offer some insights into the similarities between families. Overall it is a positive finding that when looked at separately, parents and children from both family types behave fairly similarly. When parents are nurturing and they respond consistently and firmly to misbehavior, children are more likely to generate positive social responses. It can be theorized that indeed, children from same-sex parent families
are functioning as well as children who come from traditional, opposite-sex parent households. This finding parallels the research of Patterson (2006) and is consistent with the vein of research that seeks to contradict conservative beliefs that same-sex parents could be in someway harmful to children. The fact that children in the same-sex parent families responded with a larger proportion of positive responses than did children with each of their parents in opposite-sex parent families is a very surprising finding. This appears indicative of qualitative relationship factors between these parents and their children that may influence the direction of children’s responding.

It is also a positive finding that children from same-sex parent families were more apt to offer positive resolutions to conflicts. Although this may be associated with some aspect of their interactions with their parents, it may also be influenced by the type of educational program these children are involved in, as well as other ideas that are communicated to them over the course of their lifetimes, not simply in one parent interaction. As is often encountered by children with racial, ethnic or other differences, hurtful remarks or discriminatory behaviors are also directed toward children whose parents are sexual minorities. It may be that in an effort to deal with these potentially discordant situations, these children may have developed a tendency (supported by their parents) to try to deal with conflict in a more positive manner. In an attempt to help their children deflect prejudice, there may be a greater effort on the part of these parents to empower their children to manage the convergence of differences in a constructive manner.

The parent group comparisons and correlational analyses further support the understanding that qualitative factors of the parent-child relationship are very important.
Not only do children learn how to behave by observing their parents, they learn by talking through the situation. The talks that occur between parents and children can be a highly effective learning tool for helping children to navigate problems with their peers. These discussions help them to look at situations differently, to consider different options and to learn from their mistakes. The findings of this study seem to indicate that the actions of parents in a discussion situation may not directly relate to the child’s response; however, the qualitative aspects of the interaction are important (Haskett & Willoughby, 2006). Looking at mothers and same-sex parent families, it appears that when parents were more responsive and supported their child’s independent thinking, the child was more likely to take an active role in problem solving and exert some responsibility and control. Facilitating the child’s responsiveness to the discussion enables the child to be open to considering the parent’s ideas and opinions. Additionally, by allowing the child’s own ideas to be heard, that child may feel validated in the discussion. These may be the factors that contributed to the higher proportion of positive responses from children of same-sex-parents. As long as children feel that their parents are open and supportive, they may be more likely to seek out their support when struggling with a future conflict or problem.

The reasons why same-sex parents showed these differences are not clear. The same-sex parents who participated in this study tended to have higher levels of education. It could be argued that individuals who are better educated may be more autonomous themselves. Alternatively, there may be other reasons why same-sex parents are more responsive and supportive of independence in their children. It could also be posed that lesbians manifest a higher level of independent thinking and autonomous behavior in
relation to their minority status. Sexual minorities, as well as other minorities, are viewed as being different and are often discriminated against. In the process of defining ones’ self, a certain level of autonomy is necessary for an individual to become comfortable with acting and thinking differently, as well as with making choices that are nontraditional. Furthermore, there are more challenges for these individuals to become parents. Same-sex parents must plan thoughtfully about how they will build a family. In many cases, the journey to welcome a child is much longer than a year. Indirectly, same-sex parents may themselves develop higher levels of autonomy and they may seek to shape these skills for their children in order to facilitate their adaptation to the challenges of being a minority.

Limitations of this Study

The applicability of the findings of this study is limited by the sample size and the selected population (lesbian couples as parents). This study does not include enough subjects of either family type to detect critical similarities or differences in the populations. It should be underscored that the data for children, maybe more so than the data on parents, are likely impacted by the difference in the numbers of participants in each group (children from opposite-sex parent families $n = 17$, children from same-sex parent families $n = 6$). Groups that are more similar in size would enable a more definitive comparison; however, the current finding is promising. In the future, a larger scale study which would involve a greater number of traditional and same-sex families, including the participation of two-father families (gay male couples) may help to emphasize the positive findings and allow generalization of the findings to a broader population of same-sex families.
The selection of participants involved some limitations that are inherent to the process used to obtain participant families for this study. The process of having participants refer other participants for this study increased the chances that the participants would be more homogeneous than not (Heckathorn, 2002). The summary and comparison of the demographic results bear that out. The limited diversity in the traditional family group and the similar SES between the two groups reduce the ability to generalize the findings. Although there was more diversity in the same-sex family group, the limited number of participants is a problem. Subsequent studies would benefit from a method of recruitment that is more likely to draw from an increased number and variety of participants.

Other limitations are found in the measures. It was disappointing that the observational coding data did not correlate with the children’s responses. The possible explanations for this problem are varied. The first consideration would be the sensitivity of the coding system. It was the intent of the coding system to capture a global impression; however, in the process of coding the vignettes, the coders noted some overlap in the categories. It also appeared that there were aspects of the parent-child interaction that were not captured by the coding system. Furthermore, there was less consistency and reliability to the coding of attributions evident in the verbal discussion content. In the process of coding, there were several instances in which parents and children did not offer enough of their own thoughts and ideas to gain a sense of attributional style. Therefore it seemed prudent to rely on the parent and child self-reports of attributions (ASQ and CASQ), which in the end did not appear to correlate with the children’s outcomes. Although efforts were made to ensure that the results were reliable,
the biases of the investigator may also have impacted the findings, particularly through
the coding. Because the coding was completed primarily by the investigator, it is possible
that the interests of the investigator influenced the coding of behavior in a direction that
supported the findings. If observational coding is utilized for the study of this topic in the
future, a more specific coding system would be necessary to encapsulate the important
aspects of the parent-child interaction during a problem-solving discussion. Having
coders who do not have a specific interest in the research would help to make the
behavioral coding more valid. Also, a different type of activity may offer and broader
sample of verbalizations that would make the coding of attributions more accurate.
Additionally, prospective work on this topic may be better served by using observations
of children in social interactions with peers as a measure of children’s social problem
solving.

Future Directions

As previously emphasized, future work in the area is needed to validate and
extend the modest findings of this current study. There appear to be positive ways in
which children from same-sex families differ from those in traditional families. It would
be fascinating to look not only at the messages that same-sex parents impart to their
children about dealing with conflict, but also how these messages may differ from those
conveyed in other types of families. It would be interesting to look at a similar group of
gay men who are fathers to see what similarities or differences exist between them and
the groups in this study. It may also be helpful to better define and more accurately
measure qualitative parent factors. The addition of observational data for children’s social
behavior may help to identify more links to parent influences. Larger samples of families
would give greater weight to the evidence that same-sex families and traditional families are not all that different. Likewise, the children from these families are no better or no worse simply by being in one type of family or the other. Rather, parents are good parents because they provide nurturance, support, limits and other positive qualities for their children. Eventually, research may help us to go beyond looking at parenting roles as gender-defined and see them as defined more accurately by the qualities essentials for the development of children.
References


Parenting Influences on Social Problem Solving


Appendix A

Detailed Instructions for the Families

“As you know from our discussion over the phone I am here to study the ways in which the three of you work together to solve some problems that might come up in everyday life. I am going to want to see Mrs. ___________ work with ___________ (child), and to see Mr. ___________ work with ___________ (child) (reverse order for counterbalancing) and then all three of you together. Before we do that, we need to figure out what kinds of problems are the ones that bother you the most. Therefore we’re going to start with a questionnaire that all of you will all do separately. Once that is completed, you will each take turns working out some problems in the combinations I just mentioned. I will let you know who should go and when. Whoever is not working on the problems with ___________ (child) will be working on the computer on a few more questionnaires. When we switch, it will be the other person’s turn to use the computer. Does anyone have any questions?

“Oh this sheet of paper you will find two problems. I would like you to start by reading the first one out loud. Then you will find some questions about the problem. Please read those out loud as well and work together to come up with solutions or answers to the questions. Once you are both happy with the answers to all the questions after the first problem, you can move on to the second problem. You are not being timed. I want you to work together as you normally would when faced with these problems in your daily lives. I will be ___________ if you have any questions about your task.”

“Oh this sheet of paper you will find two problems. I would like you to start by reading the first one out loud. Then you will find some questions about the problem.
Please read those out loud as well and work together to come up with solutions or answers to the questions. Once you are both happy with the answers to all the questions after the first problem, you can move on to the second problem. You can take your time. I want you to work together as you normally would when faced with these problems in your daily lives.”

*After all three complete the task and after everything is packed up, the family is debriefed. The family is thanked and asked if they have any questions or concerns about anything they just did.*
Family Social Problem Solving

Dyad #1

Pretend that you are walking to school and you’re wearing brand new sneakers. You really like your new sneakers and this is the first day you have worn them. Suddenly, you are bumped from behind by another kid. You stumble into a mud puddle and your new sneakers get muddy.

Work together to answer the following questions:

1) What do you think happened in this story?
2) Why do you think it happened?
3) How would it make you feel if it happened to you?
4) What would you do if it happened to you?
5) Do you think that would stop them from doing it next time?

Pretend that you are standing in the hallway one morning at school. As you are standing there, two kids from your class walk by. As they walk by you, the two kids look at you, whisper something to each other and they laugh.

Work together to answer the following questions:

1) What do you think happened in this story?
2) Why do you think it happened?
3) How would it make you feel if it happened to you?
4) What would you do if it happened to you?
5) Do you think that would stop them from doing it next time?
Pretend that you are on the playground. You and some other kids are having a race. Another kid is standing on the side, bouncing a basketball. The next thing you realize is that the kid has bounced the ball and it rolls under your feet, making you fall. You skin your knee and someone else wins the race.

Please work together to answer the following questions:

1) What do you think happened in this story?
2) Why do you think it happened?
3) How would it make you feel if it happened to you?
4) What would you do if it happened to you?
5) Do you think that would stop them from doing it next time?

Pretend that you are in the bathroom one day after gym. While you are in there, two other kids come in from your class and start talking to each other. You hear one of the kids invite the other one to a birthday party. The kids say there are going to be a lot of people at the party. You have not been invited to the party.

Please work together to answer the following questions:

1) What do you think happened in this story?
2) Why do you think it happened?
3) How would it make you feel if it happened to you?
4) What would you do if it happened to you?
5) Do you think that would stop them from doing it next time?
Family Social Problem Solving
Dyad #3

Pretend that it is your first day at school. You don’t know a lot of the other kids and you would like to make friends with them. You see some kids playing a game so you walk up and say “Hi” but no one answers you.

Please work together to answer the following questions:

1) What do you think happened in this story?
2) Why do you think it happened?
3) How would it make you feel if it happened to you?
4) What would you do if it happened to you?
5) Do you think that would stop them from doing it next time?

Pretend that you are walking down the hallway at school. You’re carrying your books in your arm and talking to a friend. Suddenly another kid bumps you from behind. You stumble and fall and your books go flying across the floor. The other kids in the hall start laughing.

Please work together to answer the following questions:

1) What do you think happened in this story?
2) Why do you think it happened?
3) How would it make you feel if happened to you?
4) What would you do if it happened to you?
5) Do you think that would stop them from doing it next time?
Appendix C

Dear PFP Member:

I am a member of PFP and a doctoral student in clinical psychology at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM). As a part of my program, I am doing an investigation of children and families. Specifically, I am looking at how parents and children solve problems. Dr. Virgina Salzer, Ph.D. of PCOM is serving as the principal investigator on this research project.

For this investigation, I am seeking volunteer families consisting of lesbian couples living together with a child between the ages of 9 and 12. Participation in this study would require about an hour and a half of your time. Each parent and child will be asked to complete several questionnaires, read some stories, and engage in a discussion about difficult social situations that children typically encounter.

For the purposes of the investigation the stories and discussions will be videotaped. The names of the participants and all information gathered during the study will be kept confidential in a secure location and viewed only for the purposes of the study.

If eligible and able to participate, each parent and child will be asked to give consent to be part of the study. There is no direct benefit of being part of this study, there will be no monetary compensation for families or children however, the information that we collect will help us understand better how parents might help children to handle difficult situations with friends. We do not anticipate any risks involved in participating. However, it is possible that answering some of questionnaires and engaging in these discussions may be uncomfortable. If you begin the study, you can withdraw at any time.

If you would like more information or are interested in participating, please contact me directly by email at kitpcom@comcast.net or by phone at 215-805-6017.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Karen Taratuski
Appendix D

Demographics Questionnaire
Please circle the appropriate responses for the following questions:

1. What is your age?
   20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70+

2. What is your gender?
   Male Female

3. What is your race or ethnicity?
   African American
   Caucasian
   Hispanic
   Asian American
   Native American
   Middle Eastern
   Other __________________________________________

4. What is your primary language?
   English Spanish French Other __________________________

5. How many family members live in the home?
   2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. How many children do you have?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

7. How old are your children?________________________________________________

8. What is the gender of the children?
   Male How many?
   Female How many?

9. What is the age and gender of the child participating in the study?______________

10a. What is the average number of hours per day (Monday through Friday) that you
     spend with the child participating in the study? ____________________________

10b. What is the average number of hours per day (Saturday and Sunday) that you spend
     with the child participating in the study? ____________________________

11. What is your highest level of education?
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<th>High School</th>
<th>Vocational/Technical</th>
<th>Some College</th>
<th>College Graduate (4 years)</th>
<th>Masters Degree</th>
<th>Doctoral Degree</th>
<th>Other</th>
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12. What is your current household income in U.S. dollars?
   10,000-20,000   20,000-40,000   40,000-60,000   60,000-80,000
   80,000-100,000  Over 100,000

13. What are your occupations?______________________________
Appendix E

Children’s Attributional Styles Questionnaire-Revised

1. You get an “A” on a test.
   a. I am smart
   b. I am good in the subject that the test was in

2. Some kids that you know say that they do not like you.
   a. Once in a while people are mean to me.
   b. Once in a while I am mean to other people.

3. A good friend tells you that he or she hates you.
   a. My friend was in a bad mood that day.
   b. I wasn’t nice to my friend that day.

4. A person steals money from you.
   a. That person is not honest.
   b. Many people are not honest.

5. Your parents tell you something that you make is very good.
   a. I am good at making some things.
   b. My parents like some things I make.

6. You break a glass.
   a. I am not careful enough.
   b. Sometimes I am not careful enough.

7. You do a project with a group of kids and it turns out badly.
   a. I don’t work well with people in that particular group.
   b. I never work well with groups.

8. You make a new friend.
   a. I am a nice person.
   b. The people that I meet are nice.
9. You have been getting along well with your family.
   a. I am usually easy to get along with when I am with my family.
   b. Once in awhile I am easy to get along with when I am with my family.

10. You get a bad grade in school.
    a. I am not a good student
    b. Teachers give hard tests.

11. You walk into a door and you get a bloody nose.
    a. I wasn’t looking where I was going.
    b. I have been careless lately.

12. You have a messy room.
    a. I did not clean my room that day.
    b. I usually do not clean my room.

13. Your mother makes you your favorite dinner.
    a. There are a few things that my mother will do to please me.
    b. My mother usually likes to please me.

14. A team that you are on loses a game.
    a. The team members don’t help each other when they play together.
    b. That day the team members didn’t help each other.

15. You do not get your chores done at home.
    a. I was lazy that day.
    b. Many days I am lazy.

16. You go to an amusement park and you have a good time.
    a. I usually enjoy myself at amusement parks.
    b. I usually enjoy myself in many activities.

17. You go to a friend’s party and you have fun.
    a. Your friend usually gives good parties.
    b. Your friend gave a good party that day.
18. You have a substitute teacher and she likes you.
   a. I was well behaved during class that day.
   b. I am almost always well behaved during class.

19. You make your friends happy.
   a. I am usually a fun person to be with.
   b. Sometimes I am a fun person to be with.

20. You put a hard puzzle together.
   a. I am good at putting puzzles together
   b. I am good at many things.

21. You try out for a sports team and do not make it.
   a. I am not good at sports.
   b. The other kids who tried out were very good at sports.

22. You fail a test.
   a. All tests are hard.
   b. Only some tests are hard.

23. You hit a home run in a ball game.
   a. I swung the bat just right.
   b. The pitcher threw an easy pitch

24. You do the best in your class on a paper.
   a. The other kids in my class did not work hard on their papers.
   b. I worked hard on the paper.
THE PARENTING DIMENSIONS INVENTORY (SHORT VERSION)

For the questions that follow, you will be asked about your attitudes and behavior toward one of your children. This child must be the child who is participating in this study. Please answer all questions in regard to this child.

I. The following statements represent matters of interest and concern to some parents. Not all parents feel the same way about them. Circle the number which most closely applies to you and your child.

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<tr>
<th>Not at all Like Me</th>
<th>Not Much Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>Pretty Much Like Me</th>
<th>Very Much Like Me</th>
<th>Exactly Like Me</th>
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1. I encourage my child to talk about his or her troubles
2. I always follow through on discipline for my child, no matter how long it takes.
3. Sometimes it is so long between my child’s misbehavior and when I can deal with it, that I just let it go.
4. My child and I have warm intimate moments together.
5. There are times I just don’t have the energy to make my child behave as he or she should.
6. Once I decide how to deal with a misbehavior of my child, I follow through on it.
7. I encourage my child to be curious, to explore, and to question things.
8. My child can often talk me into letting him or her off easier than I had planned.
9. I find it interesting and educational to be with my child for long periods.
10. I make sure my child knows that I appreciate what he or she tries to accomplish.
11. I believe that once a family rule has been made, it should be strictly enforced without exception. 

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<th>Not at all Like Me</th>
<th>Not Much Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>Pretty Much Like Me</th>
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12. I respect my child’s opinion and encourage him/her to express it. 

13. My child convinces me to change my mind after I have refused a request. 

II. For each of the following statements, circle the number which indicates how often the statement is true of your family. 

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once in a While</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
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1. We have a regular dinner schedule each week. 

2. Our house is clean and orderly. 

3. Our family is organized. 

4. We get everything done around the house that needs to be done. 

III. Listed below are pairs of statements concerning parents’ attitudes toward childrearing. For each pair, read both statements. Then determine which statement you agree with most, and circle the letter in front of that statement. Circle ONLY ONE letter per item. 

1. A. Nowadays parents place too much emphasis on obedience in their children. 
   B. Nowadays parents are too concerned about letting children do what they want. 

2. A. Children need more freedom to make up their own minds about things than they seem to get today. 
   B. Children need more guidance from their parents than they seem to get today. 

3. A. I care more than most parents I know about having my child obey me. 
   B. I care less than most parents I know about having my child obey me.
4. A. I try to prevent my child from making mistakes by setting rules for his/her own good.
   B. I try to provide freedom for my child to make mistakes and to learn from them.

5. A. If children are given too many rules, they will grow up to be unhappy adults.
   B. It is important to set and enforce rules for children to grow up to be happy adults.

IV. Listed below are several situations, which frequently occur in childhood. You may or
may not have had these experiences with your child. Imagine that each has just occurred
and rate how likely it is that you would do EACH of the responses listed below the
situation.

1. After arguing over toys, your child hits a playmate. (Circle a number for EACH response.)

   a. Let situation go
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   b. Take something away (e.g., no dessert, no TV)
      or add an additional chore (e.g., clean up toys)
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   c. Send to room or isolate by sitting in a chair
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   d. Spanking or hitting
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   e. Talk to the child (e.g., discuss alternatives,
      discuss your reasons for wanting the child to
      do or not to do something)
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   f. Scold the child
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   g. Remind your child of the rule or repeat
      the direction
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

2. Your child becomes sassy while you discipline him or her. (Circle a number for EACH
response.)

   a. Let situation go
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   b. Take something away (e.g., no dessert, no TV)
      or add an additional chore (e.g., clean up toys)
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |

   c. Send to room or isolate by sitting in a chair
      | Very unlikely | Very likely |
      | 0 1 2 3       | 0 1 2 3     |
d. Spanking or hitting 0 1 2 3

e. Talk to the child (e.g., discuss alternatives, discuss your reasons for wanting the child to do or not to do something) 0 1 2 3

f. Scold the child 0 1 2 3
g. Remind your child of the rule or repeat the direction 0 1 2 3

3. You receive a note from your child’s teacher that your child has been disruptive at school. (Circle a number for EACH response.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Very unlikely to do</th>
<th>Very likely to do</th>
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</table>
a. Let situation go | 0 1 2 3 |
b. Take something away (e.g., no dessert, no TV) or add an additional chore (e.g., clean up toys) | 0 1 2 3 |
c. Send to room or isolate by sitting in a chair | 0 1 2 3 |
d. Spanking or hitting | 0 1 2 3 |
e. Talk to the child (e.g., discuss alternatives, discuss your reasons for wanting the child to do or not to do something) | 0 1 2 3 |
f. Scold the child | 0 1 2 3 |
g. Remind your child of the rule or repeat the direction | 0 1 2 3 |

4. You catch your child lying about something he or she has done that you would not approve of. (Circle a number for EACH response.)

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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Very unlikely to do</th>
<th>Very likely to do</th>
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</table>
a. Let situation go | 0 1 2 3 |
b. Take something away (e.g., no dessert, no TV) or add an additional chore (e.g., clean up toys) | 0 1 2 3 |
c. Send to room or isolate by sitting in a chair 0 1 2 3
d. Spanking or hitting 0 1 2 3
e. Talk to the child (e.g., discuss alternatives, discuss your reasons for wanting the child to do or not to do something) 0 1 2 3
f. Scold the child 0 1 2 3
g. Remind your child of the rule or repeat the direction 0 1 2 3

5. You see your child playing at a busy street that you have forbidden him or her to go near for safety reasons. (Circle a number for EACH response.)

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<th>Response</th>
<th>Very unlikely to do</th>
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<td>a. Let situation go</td>
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<td>b. Take something away (e.g., no dessert, no TV) or add an additional chore (e.g., clean up toys)</td>
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<td>c. Send to room or isolate by sitting in a chair</td>
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<td>d. Spanking or hitting</td>
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<td>e. Talk to the child (e.g., discuss alternatives, discuss your reasons for wanting the child to do or not to do something)</td>
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<td>f. Scold the child</td>
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<td>g. Remind your child of the rule or repeat the direction</td>
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ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions:
1) Read each situation and vividly imagine it happening to you.
2) Decide what you believe to be the one major cause of the situation if it happened to you.
3) Write this cause in the blank provided.
4) Answer the six questions about the cause by circling one number per question. Do not circle the words.
5) Go on to the next situation.

SITUATIONS

1. You meet a friend who compliments you on your appearance.
   a. Write down the one major cause:

2. Is the cause of your friend’s compliment due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?
   - Totally due to other people or circumstances
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Totally due to me

3. In the future, when you are with your friend, will this cause again be present?
   - Will never again be present
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Will always be present

4. Is the cause something that just affects interacting with friends, or does it also influence other areas of your life?
   - Influences just this particular situation
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Influences all situations in my life

YOU HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR A JOB UNSUCCESSFULLY FOR SOME TIME.

5. Write down the one major cause:

6. Is the cause of your unsuccessful job search due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?
   - Totally due to other people or circumstances
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Totally due to me

7. In the future, when looking for a job, will this cause again be present?
   - Will never again be present
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Will always be present

8. Is the cause something that just influences looking for a job, or does it also influence other areas of your life?
   - Influences just this particular situation
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Influences all situations in my life

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YOU BECOME VERY RICH.

5. Write down the one major cause:

10. Is the cause of your becoming rich due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?

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Totally due to other people or circumstances

Totally due to me

11. In the future, will this cause again be present?

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Will never again be present

Will always be present

12. Is the cause something that just affects obtaining money, or does it also influence other areas of your life?

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Influences just this particular situation

Influences all situations in my life

A FRIEND COMES TO YOU WITH A PROBLEM AND YOU DON'T TRY TO HELP HIM/HER.

13. Write down the one major cause:

14. Is the cause of your not helping your friend due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?

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Totally due to other people or circumstances

Totally due to me

15. In the future, when a friend comes to you with a problem, will this cause again be present?

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Will never again be present

Will always be present

16. Is the cause something that just affects what happens when a friend comes to you with a problem, or does it also influence other areas of your life?

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Influences just this particular situation

Influences all situations in my life
YOU GIVE AN IMPORTANT TALK IN FRONT OF A GROUP AND THE AUDIENCE REACTS NEGATIVELY.

17. Write down the one major cause:

18. Is the cause of audience's negative reaction due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?
   - Totally due to other people or circumstances: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Totally due to me: ____________________________ 

19. In the future when you give talks, will this cause again be present?
   - Will never again be present: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Will always be present: ____________________________ 

20. Is the cause something that just influences giving talks, or does it also influence other areas of your life?
   - Influences just this particular situation: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Influences all situations in my life: ____________________________ 

YOU DO A PROJECT WHICH IS HIGHLY PraISED.

21. Write down the one major cause:

22. Is the cause of your being praised due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?
   - Totally due to other people or circumstances: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Totally due to me: ____________________________ 

23. In the future when you do a project, will this cause again be present?
   - Will never again be present: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Will always be present: ____________________________ 

24. Is the cause something that just affects doing projects, or does it also influence other areas of your life?
   - Influences just this particular situation: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   - Influences all situations in my life: ____________________________
YOU MEET A FRIEND WHO ACTS HOSTILELY TOWARDS YOU.

25. Write down the one major cause:

26. Is the cause of your friend acting hostile due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?
   - Totally due to other people or circumstances
   - Completely due to me
   - Somewhere in between

27. In the future when interacting with friends, will this cause again be present?
   - Will never again be present
   - Will always be present
   - Somewhere in between

28. Is the cause something that just influences interacting with friends, or does it also influence other areas of your life?
   - Influences just this particular situation
   - Influences all situations in my life

YOU CAN'T GET ALL THE WORK DONE THAT OTHERS EXPECT OF YOU.

29. Write down the one major cause:

30. Is the cause of your not getting the work done due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?
   - Totally due to other people or circumstances
   - Completely due to me
   - Somewhere in between

31. In the future when doing work that others expect, will this cause again be present?
   - Will never again be present
   - Will always be present
   - Somewhere in between

32. Is the cause something that just affects doing work that others expect of you, or does it also influence other areas of your life?
   - Influences just this particular situation
   - Influences all situations in my life
YOUR SPOUSE (BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND) HAS BEEN TREATING YOU MORE LOVINGLY.

33. Write down the one major cause: ________________________________

34. Is the cause of your spouse (boyfriend/girlfriend) treating you more lovingly due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?

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<th>People/Circumstances</th>
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35. In future interactions with your spouse (boyfriend/girlfriend), will this cause again be present?

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<th>Cause</th>
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36. Is the cause something that just affects how your spouse (boyfriend/girlfriend) treats you, or does it also influence other areas of your life?

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YOU APPLY FOR A POSITION THAT YOU WANT VERY BADLY (E.G., IMPORTANT JOB, GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSION, ETC.) AND YOU GET IT.

37. Write down the one major cause: ________________________________

38. Is the cause of your getting the position due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances?

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39. In the future when you apply for a position, will this cause again be present?

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40. Is the cause something that just influences applying for a position, or does it also influence other areas of your life?

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Parenting Influences on Social Problem Solving

Parenting Influences on Social Problem Solving

I 2 5 6 7

12. In the case of your getting a raise, will this cause again be present?

I 2 4 5 6 7

14. In the future, when you are dziuing, will this cause again be present?

I 2 4 5 6 7

14. In the case of the date going badly due to something about you or something about

I 2 5 6 7

11. Write down the one major cause:

You Go Out on a Date and It Goes Badly.
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF STUDY

Joint Problem Solving with Parents and Children

TITLE OF STUDY IN LAY TERMS

Parents Working Through Stories of Social Problems With Their Children

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to observe how parents talk with their children about how to handle difficult situations with their friends. Your family is being asked to be in this research study because you have a child between the ages of 9 and 12. If you do not have a child in this age range, your family can not be in this study.

INVESTIGATOR(S)

Principal Investigator: Virginia Salzer, Ph.D.
Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine
Department: Psychology
Address: 4170 City Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19131
Phone: 215-871-6476

Responsible (Student) Investigator: Karen Taratuski

The interview your family is being asked to volunteer for is part of a research project.

If your family has questions about this research, you can call Dr. Salzer at (215) 871-6476.

If your family has any questions or problems during the study, you can ask Dr. Salzer, who will be available during the entire study. If you want to know more about Dr. Salzer’s background, or the rights of research subjects, you can call the PCOM Research Compliance Specialist at (215) 871-6782.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURES

If your family decides to be in this study, you will be asked to first complete several questionnaires. Parents will each complete three questionnaires while children will complete one. You will do this in privacy.
Next, one parent and your child will go to a separate room to read out loud a couple of short stories and discuss a couple of questions while the other parent waits in another room. The stories will be about children who are facing some difficult situations with their friends. The questions will be things like, “What would you do if that happened to you?” This should take about 10 minutes and we will be videotaping these sessions.

After the first parent-child pair has had a chance to answer the questions, the other parent-child will do the same thing.

Finally, all three of you will be given a new set of stories and again asked to answer a couple of questions. This again should take about 10 minutes. Your family will be videotaped while answering these questions.

The study will take no more then 1 ½ hours today and this will be the only session that will be necessary.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

There will likely be no direct benefits to you for your participation today. However, the information that we collect today will help us to further understand how parents might help their children handle difficult situations with their friends.

Your family may not benefit from being in this study. Other people in the future may benefit from what the researchers learn from the study.

**RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

We do not anticipate that there will be any discomforts or risks from participating in this study. However, it is possible that answering the questionnaires and engaging in these discussions may make you uncomfortable. If this happens, you and your child may stop the discussion and end your participation or you may ask for clarification or guidance from the investigator.

**ALTERNATIVES**

The other choice is to not be in this study.

**PAYMENT**

Your family will not be paid for being in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information and records relating to your family’s participation will be kept in a locked file. Only the researchers, members of the Institutional Review Board, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will be able to look at these records. If the results of this study are published, no names or other identifying information will be used.
REASONS YOUR FAMILY MAY BE TAKEN OUT OF THE STUDY WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT

If health conditions occur that would make staying in the study possibly dangerous to you and your child, or if other conditions occur that would damage you and your child’s health, the researchers may take your family out of this study.

In addition, the entire study may be stopped if dangerous risks or side effects occur in other people.

NEW FINDINGS

If any new information develops that may affect your and your child's willingness to stay in this study, your family will be told about it.

INJURY

If your family is injured as a result of this research study, you will be provided with immediate necessary care.

However, you and your child will not be reimbursed for care or receive other payment. PCOM will not be responsible for any of your family’s bills, including any routine care under this program or reimbursement for any side effects that may occur as a result of this program.

If your family believes that you and your child has suffered injury or illness in the course of this research, you should notify the PCOM Research Compliance Specialist at (215) 871-6782. A review by a committee will be arranged to determine if the injury or illness is a result of your and your child's being in this research. You should also contact the PCOM Research Compliance Specialist if your family believes that they have not been told enough about the risks, benefits, or other options, or that you and your child are being pressured to stay in this study against your and your child's wishes.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your family may refuse to be in this study. Your family voluntarily consents to be in this study with the understanding of the known possible effects or hazards that might occur during this study. Not all the possible effects of the study are known.

Your family may leave this study at any time.

If your family drops out of this study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which your family is entitled.
I have had adequate time to read this form and I understand its contents. **I have been given a copy for my personal records.**

Please check ALL that apply:

- [ ] I agree to participate in this study.
- [ ] I agree to be videotaped in this study.
- [ ] I have witnessed my spouse sign this consent form.

**Signature of Parent:______________________________**

Date: ____/____/______ Time:___________AM/PM

- [ ] I agree to participate in this study.
- [ ] I agree to be videotaped in this study.
- [ ] I have witnessed my spouse sign this consent form.

**Signature of Parent:______________________________**

Date: ____/____/______ Time:___________AM/PM

Signature of Investigator or Designee______________________________

(circle one)

Date: ____/____/______ Time:___________AM/PM
Appendix I

Assent Form

Person in charge of the study: Virginia Salzer, Ph.D.
Telephone Number: 215-871-6476

What is the study about?

We want to learn more about how parents and their children talk about different kinds of problems kids might face with their friends. If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to write your name on this form.

You do not have to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, that is OK, too. Don’t put your name on the form if you don’t want to be in the study

What will happen to you if you are in the study?

(1) First, you will be asked to fill out one piece of paper with questions about how you feel about yourself.
(2) Next, you and one of your parents will go into another room to read out loud a couple of short stores and you will be asked to talk about a couple of questions. The stories will be about children who are facing some difficult situations with their friends. The questions will be things like, “What would you do if that happened to you?”
(3) You will then do the exact same with your other parent.
(4) Finally, you will do the exact same thing with both of your parents together.

How long will the study take?

The study will last for not more than 1 ½ hours. If you say yes now and change your mind later, you can stop at any time. Just tell me that you want to stop. Nobody will be angry with you if you say no now or later.

What if you have questions?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later.

I understand what ______________________ has told me. I want to be in the study.

____________________________________

Child’s Printed Name

____________________________________

Child’s Signature

Date _________________________
Appendix J

Coding System

**Instructions:** Raters are to use anchor behaviors listed to help determine a global rating for each qualitative area. All qualitative ratings for parent and child should focus on the interaction between the parent(s) and child while discussing all of the questions. Ratings of 1 and 5 are not meant to reflect “ideal” levels of the quality being rated but rather a high level of that quality. Also, the consistent observation of one behavioral indicator of the quality does not necessarily yield a high or low rating. Raters are to use observations of behavior to select a score that is inclusive of the range of parent behaviors demonstrated in the video of the vignette.

In the dyad situation, each vignette is coded separately, yielding two codes for each parent and child. In the triad situation, again each vignette is coded separately, and each parent is coded separately. The child is coded once on each variable for each vignette (two codes total). Parent A is identified as the parent who appears first in the dyad. Ratings for Parent A in the dyad and Parent A in the triad should be of the same person.

When coding Attributions, if there is no observable information to support rating a particular dimension, select the code IN for insufficient evidence. If there is some evidence, use CAVE coding guidelines to determine a plausible rating.

The only specific response to discussion questions that is rated is the child’s *Selection of Response* for the question “what would you do if this happened to you?”
Rating each variable for each vignette separately.

**Autonomy:**
1. Parent directly inhibits autonomy or controls the child’s response
2. Negates child’s ideas
3. Parent promotes autonomy or affirms child’s assertiveness
4. Parent allows child to talk, allows child to complete thoughts
5. Praises child’s ideas, supports them

**Affect:**
1. Frown, scowl, anger or displeasure
2. Disapproval expressed verbally or nonverbally
3. Use of affective language
4. Smile, laugh etc.
5. Use of affective language

**Warmth:**
1. Sitting apart, lack of eye contact
2. Cold flat voice tone
3. No personal reference
4. Ignoring a person
5. Sitting in close proximity or leaning on appropriate touch (i.e. shoulder pat, hug)
6. Warm tone of voice, encouragement, use of nick name; positive talk
7. At child’s level, eye contact

**Task focus:**
1. Parent is off topic
2. Distracts child from task; or is over focused “Task master”
3. Parent is on topic
4. Asks appropriately what’s next
5. Asks supportive probing questions can you think…
6. Allows appropriate time before moving on
7. Responds to child’s need to move on
8. Completely discusses each question

Karen Taratuski - Dissertation coding system March 2010
### Responsiveness:
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<tr>
<td>Ignores requests</td>
<td>Ignores child’s input</td>
<td>Talks over child</td>
<td>Does not pick up on obvious nonverbal or verbal cues</td>
<td>Positive feedback to child for effort</td>
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### Attributions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(due to others/outside circumstances)</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific</strong></td>
<td><strong>Global</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(influences just this situation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unstable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>(won’t be that way again)</td>
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</table>
Rate each variable for each vignette separately.

**Autonomy:**

<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeats parent’s ideas</td>
<td>Assert own opinion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acquiesces to parent’s suggestions</td>
<td>disagrees respectfully with parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allows parent to do the talking</td>
<td>Talks – uses complete thoughts</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not speak or “yes mom/dad”</td>
<td>Supports ideas with plausible reasons</td>
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**Affect:**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frown, scowl,</td>
<td>Smile, laugh etc..</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger or</td>
<td>pleasure or approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapproval</td>
<td>expressed verbally or nonverbally</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed verbally</td>
<td>gestures, thumbs up, high five</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or non verbally</td>
<td>Use of affective language</td>
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**Responsiveness:**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ignores requests</td>
<td>Accepts feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignores parent’s input</td>
<td>Answers parent’s questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talks over parent</td>
<td>Picks up parent’s nonverbal</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not pick up on obvious</td>
<td>or verbal cues - responds</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>nonverbal or verbal cues</td>
<td>appropriately</td>
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**Task focus:**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child is off topic - distracted</td>
<td>Child is on topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distracts parent from task</td>
<td>Asks appropriately what’s next</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Over focused”</td>
<td>Asks probing/clarifying questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misses or insufficiently</td>
<td>Completely discusses each question</td>
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<tr>
<td>answers a question</td>
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</table>

Karen Taratuski - Dissertation coding system March 2010
### Attributions

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<td>(due to me or something about me)</td>
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<td>(influences just this situation)</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>(influences all situations)</td>
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<td>(will always be that way)</td>
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### Rating of child’s selection of response: “What would you do if this happened to you?”

+ Positive/Prosocial  
O Neutral  
- Negative/  
Detracts from social relationship
## Coding Summary

**Family:** ________________  **Rater:** _____________________________________________

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