ASSESSING THE MEANINGFUL SOCIAL BEHAVIORS OF GIRLS IN A STRUCTURED LEISURE TIME ACTIVITY

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The purpose of this study was to identify those skills that help demonstrate social competency in a structured leisure time activity. By using a contextual assessment approach to identify social behaviors that are valued by multiple stakeholders in Girls Scout troops, it may be possible to develop social skills interventions for children involved in Scouting who are experiencing social difficulties in that setting.

Data were collected from Scouts, troop leaders, and parents in three Brownie and Junior Scouts troops for a total of 15 Scouts, 3 leaders and 2 or 3 parent participants from each Scouting level. Grounded theory was used to analyze the data and develop a template of meaningful social behaviors for girls participating in Scouting. To ensure the fidelity of the conclusions drawn from the data, a member check, peer reviews, and triangulation were completed.

Two social behaviors, helps others and respects others, were agreed upon by participants across both age levels and participant categories in Scouting and would have high social validity as targets for interventions in the groups studied. Eight additional behaviors were agreed upon by the majority of participant categories and groups, and would also be expected to have high social validity as they were indicated by the majority of stakeholders. Future research is needed that not only identifies social behaviors with
high social validity using a contextual assessment approach, but also expands on the research by conducting and monitoring the results of social skills interventions using the behaviors identified through the contextual assessment.
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could I not do the same? I look forward to seeing what wonders await you in the future as you pursue your own educational goals.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The study of children and their social relationships has been of interest to psychologists and those involved in the study of child development since the beginning of the 20th century. There was a strong surge of interest in children’s social skills and their relationships in the 1930s with influential developmental psychologists such as Piaget and Moren breaking new ground with studies of children’s social behavior (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998). During the years following World War II, the political climate of the time focused research and financial resources away from the needs of children and more towards those of adults and national security issues (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998). In the 1970s, attention once again turned towards children and their social relationships as longitudinal research identified a potential link between adult social disorders and children’s peer relationships (Ladd, 2005).

Since the resurgence of interest in children’s social competence skills in the 1970s, researchers have demonstrated the negative implications for youth with social competence deficits. Children who experience deficits in social competence can face difficulties both during their school years and into adulthood (Parker & Asher, 1987). Research has shown that such deficits negatively impact peer acceptance, school performance, and employment (Coe, Lochman, Terry, & Hyman, 1992; McQuade & Hoza, 2008; Parker & Asher, 1987; Vogel & Forness, 1992; Wentzel, 1993). Because social competence deficits are noted characteristics in many high incidence disabilities affecting children (e.g., developmental disabilities, emotional disturbance, learning
disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder; Gresham, 2002), the need for effective interventions to improve social competence is critical.

In light of the negative implications for youth with social competence deficits, many interventions and training programs have been developed to attempt to teach social skills to youth. To date, the overall effectiveness of interventions to improve social competence is equivocal (Forness & Kavale, 1996; Kavale & Mostert, 2004; McIntosh, Vaughn, & Zaragoza, 1991). Maag (2005) noted that at the present time social skills training is best viewed as an “experimental intervention” (p. 41). A number of reasons have been suggested to account for the limited results obtained in social skills interventions. These include: (a) intensity of training; (b) assessment issues; (c) lack of treatment fidelity; (d) etiology of social skills deficits; and (e) generalization (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Kavale & Mostert, 2004; Maag, 2005; Vaughn, Sinagub, & Kim, 2004). Sheridan, Hungelmann, and Maughan (1999) further suggested that social skills interventions are not effective due to the failure of researchers to employ approaches that address environmentally relevant and child-specific behaviors.

In this literature review of social competence, a justification is provided that demonstrates the need for continued research on social skills assessment methods that provide data for interventions that are socially valid and environmentally relevant for children. More specifically, this review delineates the need for additional research on the use of a contextual assessment process using template matching to identify meaningful
social behaviors in natural social contexts that can lead to socially valid interventions for youth with social competence difficulties (Hoier & Cone, 1987; Sheridan et al., 1999).

**Definitions of Social Competence**

**Behavioral Definition**

During the 1970s and early 1980s, researchers identified key characteristics using sociometrics, which provide a method to study the social dynamics of a group by gathering information from the group members (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998) that were associated with positive or negative peer responses. From these studies, a behaviorally oriented definition of social competence evolved that stated that a socially competent child was one whose behaviors were seen as promoting social ties and friendships whereas a socially incompetent child’s actions were more likely to produce negative social outcomes (Ladd, 2005).

Foster and Ritchey (1979) questioned the use of focusing on the negative aspects of a child’s social behaviors and instead promoted a definition of social competence that reflected the positive aspects of children’s behavior. They felt that focusing upon sociometric techniques that identified socially competent children versus incompetent peers and observations that were geared towards identifying adaptive social functioning were not as effective as building upon a child’s positive responses instead of only eliminating undesirable behaviors. Their definition of social competence described socially competent behaviors as “those responses which, within a given situation prove effective, or in other words, maximize the probability of producing, maintaining or enhancing positive effects for the interactor” (Foster & Ritchey, 1979, p. 626). In this
definition, social competence was measured in terms of social success with other significant individuals rather than focusing upon the child’s deficits.

Clarification of Social Skills Versus Social Competence Definition

Prior to the 1980s the terms social skills and social competence were used interchangeably. In the 1980s delineation was made between the concepts of social skills and social competence (McFall, 1982). McFall distinguished between the two by suggesting that social skills were the specific behaviors an individual performed, whereas social competence was a summary term that reflected the social judgment about the general quality of an individual’s performance in a given situation. Future definitions of social competence reflected the consideration of social skills being encompassed under the construct of social competence.

Peer Acceptance Model and Social Competence Correlates Definition

During the 1970s two other definitions of social competence, the peer acceptance model and the social competence correlates definition, were developed (Gresham, 1997). In the peer-acceptance definition of social skills, a child was considered socially skilled if he or she was popular with peers and accepted by significant others. Peer nominations and peer rankings, two sociometric techniques, were used to obtain ratings of peer acceptance or popularity to gauge which children met the criteria for social competence. Criticism of this approach focused upon the inability of the definition to clarify what specific skills were needed to ensure peer acceptance or popularity (Elliott & Gresham, 1987).
The competence-correlates definition defines social competence in terms of social behaviors that correlated with indices of peer acceptance such as skills in friendship making (Gresham, 1997). These correlates were derived from hypothetical or role-play situations. Critics of this approach noted that reliance upon correlates derived from hypothetical situations might not be equivalent to actual social situations (Elliott & Gresham, 1987).

**Dimensional Model Definition**

In the 1990s definitions of social competence reflected the growing study of children’s social cognitions and their role in social relations along with a greater emphasis on identifying specific socially valid skills for remediation (Ladd, 2005). A two-dimensional model of social competence proposed by Gresham and Elliott (1990) emphasized the role of interfering or competing problem behaviors on social competence. This model focuses on the importance of linking social skills assessment results to intervention targets. Gresham stated that social skills are defined as “learned behaviors that enable individuals to interact effectively with others and avoid or escape socially unacceptable behaviors exhibited by others” (Gresham, 1998, p. 20).

**Hierarchical Model Definition**

Social competence has also been defined as a superordinate construct with multiple subcomponents (Cavell, Meehan, & Fiala, 2003). In this hierarchical model, three tiers of subcomponents comprise social competence: (a) social adjustment, (b) social performance, and (c) social skills. Social adjustment is the extent to which children are achieving socially determined developmentally appropriate goals. Social
performance is the overall quality of a child’s responses within social situations, and social skills are the specific abilities that children use to produce a given social response. The hierarchical nature of this model specifies that children who have a vast repertoire of social skills will have higher levels of social performance and therefore, higher levels of social adjustment. However, it is important to note that “social performance is seen as a necessary but insufficient determinant of social adjustment and social skills are seen as a necessary but insufficient determinant of social performance” (Cavell et al., 2003, p. 435). Social adjustment is not merely a product of social skills and social performance. Overall many outside factors that can contribute to a child’s peer acceptance can impact social adjustment. The child’s environment, gender, motivation level, skills, and talents all play a role in determining his or her acceptance by a peer group.

A review of 15 definitions of social competence revealed three elements that were common among most of the descriptions of the construct (Nangle, Grover, Cassano, Holleb, & Fales, 2010). First, effectiveness was at the center of most definitions. Second, effectiveness was typically defined by considering it with in a social context. And third, the definitions were focused on the behavior of the individual. In critiquing the definitions, the authors stated that there was a lack of operational criteria to define concepts such as effectiveness or appropriate to fully understand the concept of social competence.

**Summary of Definitions**

Although the definitions of social competence have changed over time, the importance of considering the responses of peers and significant others to an individual’s
social behavior has remained a constant. Over the ensuing years, while the performance of specific social skills is still an important consideration in defining social competence, significance has also been given in the definitions to judging the effectiveness of such skills depending upon the context in which they were performed.

**Rationale for the Study of Social Competence**

Early studies of the relationship between low social competence and later life outcomes focused upon a main-effects model (Ladd, 2005). This model stated that a child’s early negative behavioral disposition was a relatively stable construct and that the propensity for less positive interactions was played out into the future with negative effects in later life. As research into social competence began to acknowledge the role of environment in children’s social adjustment, the main effects model diminished in favor of a viewpoint that emphasized the role that peer relationship experiences play along with a child’s behavioral disposition towards social adjustment (Parker & Asher, 1987).

Studies of the impact of social competence on later psychopathology, peer acceptance and academic competence provide a strong rationale for the continued study of social competence in children.

**Psychopathology and Peer Rejection**

Over the years researchers have sought out ways to identify if a relationship exists between poor social adjustment in childhood and psychopathology in adulthood. A longitudinal follow-back study provided some of the initial data to ascertain if a relationship existed between social adjustment in childhood and psychopathology in adulthood (Cowen, Pederson, Babijian, Izzo, & Trost, 1973). The researchers collected
Class Play nomination scores from a group of third grade students. The Class Play nomination assessment is built around a hypothetical class play where children nominate their classroom peers for 20 described roles. Half of the roles are positive in nature and half of the roles are negative in nature. Data were obtained from peer nominations as well as from teacher ratings of peer adjustment. Thirteen years later, the researchers reviewed the records of the Monroe County Psychiatric Register to determine who among the original class of third graders had received mental health services. It was found that individuals who received mental health services had more negative peer nominations from their classmates in the Class Play ratings than did individuals who did not receive mental health services. The peer class play ratings were superior to the teacher adjustment ratings in predicting later adult adjustment.

Parker and Asher (1987) were also interested in the relationship between childhood social behaviors and adjustment in adulthood. They conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between peer-related difficulties in childhood, specifically aggression, social withdrawal, and peer rejection, and later personal positive adjustment found that although there was some evidence to suggest a relationship between adult psychopathology and behavior style in childhood, further research needed to be conducted to strengthen the tie (Parker & Asher, 1987). Specifically when looking at follow-back comparison studies to assess predictive accuracy, Parker and Asher noted that many maladjusted adults had experienced peer-relationship difficulties in childhood. However, due to the variety of methods used to gauge peer-relationships and the unproved validity of the teacher measures used, it could not be considered a predictive
relationship. Overall, it was concluded that the literature pertaining to the link between early peer-relations and later adult psychopathology was conflicted and incomplete and that further studies would be needed to fully establish a significant relationship.

In an attempt to further the research base on the relationship between early social adjustment and later psychopathology, a longitudinal study to determine whether childhood aggression and peer rejection were significant predictors of adolescent disorder was conducted (Coie et al., 1992). The purpose of the study was to determine whether aggression and peer rejection were both predictive of later disorder, or whether one characteristic had greater predictive power than the other. Children were screened in the third grade using peer-nominations. The children were asked to select peers who were most liked, least liked, and most likely to start fights with others. Based on these ratings, three groups of children were selected representing rejected, non-rejected, and aggressive children. At the end of sixth grade, at least two teachers rated each child who participated in the study on their overall social adjustment. A representative sample of participants from each category then received parent behavioral ratings and/or adolescent interviews. Results indicated that both peer rejection and aggressiveness in childhood were predictors of disorders in early adolescence. Although both peer rejection and aggression predicted disorder, aggression was more predictive of externalizing problems whereas peer rejection was most predictive of internalizing problems.

In a study examining the relationship between social aggression and growth in antisocial behavior, it was found that social rejection by the peer group in early elementary school was associated with teacher reported antisocial behavior in both boys
and girls four years later (Dodge et al., 2003). In this longitudinal study, 259 boys and girls were followed from either grades 1, 2, or 3 to grades 5, 6, or 7 to ascertain whether peer social preference scores were correlated with later teacher rankings of child behavior problems. In this study child behavior problems encompassed behaviors such as physical aggression, disruption, and oppositional behaviors. Children who were classified as rejected based on peer sociometric ratings in the first year of the study were found to have teacher reported aggression scores that were almost twice as high as non-rejected peers. Similarly, children rejected by peers in the second year of the study were found to have teacher rated aggression scores that were three times as high as their non-rejected peers. Children who received peer sociometric ratings of rejection during both years one and two were four times greater than children who were never rejected. This was true for both boys and girls.

A second study was conducted with 585 kindergarten boys and girls to replicate the initial study and provide insight into the possible moderators of early social rejection among the children (Dodge et al., 2003). In addition to the peer sociometric ranking and the teacher rated aggression scale, teachers were asked to rate each child on a reactive-proactive aggression scale. Results of this replication study confirmed the data obtained previously with regard to the role of early social preference and later teacher rated aggression scores. A moderator of the correlation between rejection and aggression was found to be a child’s disposition towards aggression. Children in kindergarten with scores of early aggression that were below the mean, even if rejected for three years in a row, did not have high levels of teacher rated aggression four years later. In children
whose level of kindergarten aggression was above the mean, experiencing rejection from peers for even one year exacerbated the aggressive ratings from teachers in year four. It was hypothesized that in children who are predisposed to aggression that social rejection acts as a stressor that further increases aggressive behavior. Although the data is correlational with regard to the relationship between early rejection and later antisocial behavior, the data analysis does indicate that early peer rejection plays an incremental role in the development of aggressive behavior among boys and girls (Dodge et al., 2003).

In a review of personality disorders in adults, several patterns of behavior were identified that were associated with personality disorders in adulthood (Geiger & Crick, 2001). Of the seven themes identified, at least four of the themes (e.g., hostile, paranoid world view; intense unstable and inappropriate emotion; lack of concern for social norms and needs of others; and impulsivity to rigidity) clearly specified characteristics associated with poor social competence. It was suggested that children who have difficulties in social development that are reflective of the themes common in adult personality disorders could benefit from interventions that may help to prevent the emergence of psychopathology in adulthood.

**School Adjustment and Academic Achievement**

**School adjustment.** Schools are one of the primary socializing agents for children. Research on social competence in children has investigated the relationship between school adjustment and social competence by considering the views of both peers and teachers.
In a review of follow-back and follow-up studies, Parker and Asher (1987) reported that children who were not well liked by their peers were more likely to drop out of school than those children who were well liked and accepted socially. While aggressive children were also found to drop out of school at a greater rate than non-aggressive peers, this relationship was not as predictive as it was for children who were poorly accepted.

In a study to examine whether rejected and aggressive students were at risk for problems of school maladjustment (e.g., school withdrawal, suspension, retention, or truancy) and delinquency (e.g., police records), the researchers found that children in 5th grade who were rejected or aggressive were at risk for negative outcomes in 10th grade (Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990). Specifically, within the whole sample, aggression and school absences were the best predictors of students dropping out of school, whereas aggression alone was the best predictor of delinquency.

The child-teacher relationship has been shown to have a significant impact on school adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Positive child teacher relationships are related to prosocial classroom behavior and social competence (Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, & DeMulder, 1997). A study considering the joint effects of aggression and social competence on perceived teacher-child relationships was conducted by Blankemeyer, Flannery, and Vazsonyi (2002). In this study, in addition to a global social competence score, the researchers broke social competence into three indices: (a) peer preferred behaviors; (b) teacher preferred behaviors; and (c) school adjustment for analysis. A regression analysis of the results revealed that social competence scores were a
statistically significant predictor of the perceived child-teacher relationship with the school adjustment score being responsible for the significant effect. This finding was noted to differ between boys and girls. Boys with poor school adjustment scores were noted to have lower ratings on perceived child-teacher relationships than girls. Additionally, it was found that positive school adjustment may be a protective factor for aggressive children with regard to the child-teacher relationship. Those children with high aggression scores but positive school adjustment scores were found to have more positive ratings of child-teacher relationships than aggressive children with poor school adjustment ratings.

**Academic achievement.** In the classroom environment, the ability to have positive social interactions with peers and teachers is important to school success. On a daily basis children must interact successfully with their teacher and other children in the classroom to accomplish academic tasks. A child’s lack of prosocial skills can influence academic success in two ways (Elliott, Malecki, & Demaray, 2001). First, the lack of appropriate social skills may influence a child’s ability to engage in tasks needed for academic success such as listening skills, remaining on task, or asking for help. Second, a lack of positive prosocial skills may limit a child’s positive interactions with teachers and peers. This lack of positive interactions may decrease a child’s engagement in the learning process.

Evidence for the presence of a relationship between social competence and academic achievement has been found in a variety of correlational studies. Wentzel (1991, 1993) found a significant relationship between social competence and academic
achievement in two separate correlational studies of middle school (i.e., sixth and seventh grade) students. Wentzel (1991) identified a significant positive relationship between grade point average, socially responsible behavior (e.g., behavior that showed adherence to social rules and role expectations), and three components of self-regulation (e.g., social responsibility, interpersonal trust, and interpersonal problem-solving). Further analysis of the data using multiple regressions revealed that the self-regulatory processes were strong predictors of socially responsible behaviors and that socially responsible behavior was a positive predictor of academic performance in early adolescence. Similar results were found in a later correlational study (Wentzel, 1993) that looked at the relationship between academic competence (e.g., grade point average and standardized test scores) and prosocial (e.g., sharing, helps others) and antisocial (e.g., breaks rules, starts fights) behaviors. The results of the study indicated that prosocial skills were positively related to grade point average and standardized test scores whereas antisocial skills were negatively related to grade point average and standardized test scores. Antisocial behavior, it was hypothesized, deprived students of opportunities for positive interactions with peers and teachers, which put the students at risk for academic failure.

Longitudinal studies have also provided evidence of the relationship between social competence and academic achievement. A longitudinal study examined middle school student’s social competence (e.g., reciprocated friendships, peer acceptance, and group membership) to academic performance (e.g., grade point average) from their entrance in middle school in sixth grade to the end of their seventh grade year (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). It was found that for both boys and girls group membership and peer
acceptance were both positively related to grade point average in sixth and seventh grade. A second study, looking at middle school students from the start of sixth grade to the completion of eighth grade, was completed to replicate the initial findings and to discern the role that prosocial behavior, antisocial behavior, and emotional distress might have in explaining the relationship between peer relationships and academic performance. Antisocial and prosocial behaviors were assessed using peer nominations and teacher ratings and emotional distress was measured using an adjustment inventory. Results of the second study indicated that for both boys and girls, group membership was the most consistent predictor of academic achievement for the students in both sixth and eighth grade. The authors suggested that this relationship may be due to the role, either positive or negative, that the peer group may play in influencing behaviors related to academic achievement. A relationship between social competence and academic achievement was also found in a younger cohort of students. A large longitudinal study of over 2,000 students from nine elementary schools participated in the Social Development Project, a longitudinal study that tracked classroom social behavior and academic competence over an eight-year period (Parke et al., 1998). The investigators of this study concluded that there is a link between social skills and academic performance and that the linkage between the two causally influences each other over time. Third and fourth grade students participated in a longitudinal study (Malecki & Elliott, 2002) to determine if either social skills or problem behaviors were predictive of future academic functioning. Social skills were found to be the only predictor of future academic functioning.
**Summary.** It is difficult to discern the nature of the relationship between social competence and academic achievement; however, as the studies above demonstrate, a body of literature indicates that prosocial behaviors are positively related to academic achievement in school age children. Whether lower levels of academic achievement in students with social skills deficits are due to reduced engagement with the teacher, associating with a peer group that negatively influence behaviors related to academic achievement, or a myriad of other possibilities, it is clearly an area in need of further study.

**Social Competence and High Incidence Disabilities**

For many high incidence disabilities such as learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, developmental disabilities, autism, and emotional disturbance, deficits in social competence have been noted as a salient characteristic (Gresham, 2002; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). Teacher perceptions of children with deficits in social competence can also impact the child’s social standing the classroom. A brief review of the educational and social significance of teacher perceptions of students is provided to highlight the impact that it may have on students who have social competence deficits. To illustrate the nature of the social skills deficits in high incidence disabilities, a review of relevant research on learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, two of the highest incidence disabilities, is provided.

**The Role of Teacher Perceptions and Child-Teacher Relationship**

Teachers, in addition to a child’s peers, occupy a large role in the social environment of the classroom. Researchers have identified a relationship between early
teacher preference for students in a classroom and a child's peer status in later grades (Taylor & Trickett, 1989). Results showed that children in early school years who were rated by their teachers as less preferred relative to other students were more likely to be rejected by peers in a later grade level. This finding was substantiated by Taylor (1989) who noted that higher teacher preference in kindergarten and first grade were associated with lower levels of peer rejection in second and third grade. Birch and Ladd (1997) reported that children who are in a conflicted relationship with a teacher may start to demonstrate less prosocial behavior with peers. The authors hypothesize that conflicted behaviors with teachers might result in a cycle of behavioral changes in prosocial behaviors thereby limiting a child's ability to have positive relationships with both teachers and peers. The role of teacher's perceptions of a child in a classroom can possibly impact not only the child-teacher relationship, but may also impact peer's perceptions of a child as well.

**Learning Disabilities**

A learning disability is a neurological condition that interferes with a person's ability to store, process, or produce information (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2011). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate in their National Survey of Children’s Health that 8% of children in the United States have a learning disability (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010).

**Peer acceptance.** Early research in the relationship between learning disabilities and social skills deficits found that students with learning disabilities who were in mainstreamed classrooms were viewed as less competent in social skills across settings.
(e.g., home and school) and raters (e.g., teacher, parent and peers) than their non-learning disabled peers (Gresham & Reschley, 1986). Further clarification on the type of peer acceptance difficulties noted in children with learning disabilities revealed that students with learning disabilities were overrepresented in sociometric peer rating classifications of rejected and neglected (Stone & LaGreca, 1990).

From the very start of a student’s academic career in kindergarten, differences in peer acceptance have been observed for students with learning disabilities. In a longitudinal study, the peer acceptance of students with learning disabilities was reported to be lower than that of acceptance of average achieving or high achieving students as early as two months into kindergarten and prior to their being classified as having a learning disability (Vaughn, Hogan, Kouzekanani, & Shapiro, 1990). The peer ratings remained stable during a second peer likeability rating conducted six months later. Of the sociometric scores of the students who were later identified as learning disabled, 60% of the students were classified as rejected and none were in the highly accepted category. It was suggested that the presence of the low ratings so early into the academic year were not indicative of low teacher acceptance or low achievement levels. Rather, it was thought that the ratings provided support for hypotheses suggesting that processing and cognitive difficulties may have played a role in the low acceptance ratings.

A meta-analysis across 152 studies on social skills deficits and students with learning disabilities reported that peers found students with learning disabilities to be less popular, not cooperative, and less skilled in verbal and non-verbal communication
abilities (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Students without learning disabilities, it was reported, would not consider the majority of students with learning disabilities as friends.

**Teacher and parent ratings of social skills.** Teacher and parent ratings of social skills and peer acceptance were found to be similar across home and school settings (Gresham & Reschley, 1986). The ratings by parents and teachers indicated that the students with learning disabilities were significantly less skilled than their peers without a disability in task-related behaviors such as attending, completing tasks, following directions, and working independently. Additional skill comparisons in interpersonal and self-related behaviors also indicated skill deficits for students with learning disabilities as compared to their peers.

In a meta-analysis that included teacher assessments of students with learning disabilities, two characteristics were found that distinguished the learning disabled students from their non-learning disabled peers: academic competence and less social interaction (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Other assessments indicated teachers also viewed 8 out of 10 students with learning disabilities as having problems with hyperactivity, distractibility, and adjustment.

A noteworthy study conducted by Tur-Kaspa and Bryan (1994) comparing teacher ratings of social skills in learning disabled students with those of low academic achieving peers. It was found that the third and fourth grade children with learning disabilities and their low academic achieving peers both revealed difficulties in social competence. Specifically, teachers rated these students lower than their average-achieving peers on peer preferred social behavior and on school adjustment behaviors. A
further analysis of the data revealed that although teacher ratings for both learning
disabled and low achieving children were lower than average achieving peers, 36% of the
learning disabled students fell 1.5 standard deviations below the scale norm mean as
compared to 13% of the low achieving students. These results, it is suggested, indicate
that although children’s social competence may indeed be correlated with academic
achievement abilities, social competence skills are not solely related to academic
achievement.

In a similar vein, a meta-analysis of 32 research articles from 1990–2003
compared the social competence of children with learning disabilities in inclusive settings
to that of their low average and high achieving peers (Nowicki, 2003). It was reported
that students with learning disabilities were perceived by their teachers to be lacking in
social skills as compared to average achieving peers. Peer nominations also followed this
same pattern. However, low achieving peers shared the same, albeit slightly higher, low
status ratings from teachers and peers.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

One of the leading causes of referrals to mental health services for school aged
children is attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Barkley, 1997). The
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision
(DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) noted that attention-deficit
hyperactivity disorder is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.
From a young age, children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder display
behavioral problems such as overactivity, impulsivity, and noncompliant behavior
According to the National Survey of Children’s Health 9% of youth in the United States have ADHD with males outnumbering females (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010).

**Peer acceptance.** Research has shown that children with ADHD frequently are rejected by classmates and may have a negative reputation with peers in the classroom (deBoo & Prins, 2007; Hoza, 2007; Landau & Moore, 1991; Mrug, Hoza, Pelham, Gnagy, & Greiner, 2007). Although children with ADHD have often been compared on their academic and social skills to a control group, a recent study also included children referred for academic/behavioral concerns without ADHD to determine whether there was a difference between these groups (McConaughy, Volpe, Antshel, Eiraldi, & Gordon, 2011). Researchers gathered data on parent and teacher ratings of children’s academic performance and social behavior. Additionally, every child received an individually administered intelligence test (WISC-IV) and an individually administered test of academic achievement (WIAT-II). Overall it was found that there were significantly more academic and social impairments for children with ADHD than to the children referred for academic/behavioral concerns and to the control group. Results indicated that “15-55% of children with ADHD exhibited clinically significant impairment in academic performance and 26-85% exhibited clinically significant impairment in social behavior, depending on the measure” (McConaughy et al., 2011, p. 19).

**Quality of child-teacher relationships.** It has been documented that parenting children with ADHD may exacerbate parental stress and can decrease the quality of
parent-child interactions (Anastopoulos, Shelton, Guevremont, & DuPaul, 1992). This is thought to be due to the variety of socially problematic behaviors associated with ADHD such as acting without regard to consequences, making inappropriate comments, excessive talking, and not listening (Basch, 2011). A study examining whether students with ADHD were more stressful to teach found that teachers experienced significantly greater levels of stress in working with students with ADHD as compared to students in a control group. It was noted that teachers reported the greatest levels of stress in teaching students with ADHD who had oppositional/aggressive behaviors or social impairments (Greene, Beszterczey, Katzenstein, Park, & Goring, 2002). These stressful interactions may adversely impact the classroom relationship between the child with ADHD and their teacher.

It is hypothesized that the difficulties with peer relations for children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder arise from social knowledge deficits and biases, negative interactions with peers and teachers, and inappropriate social behaviors (Stormont, 2001). It has been suggested that social skills deficits for children with ADHD present a more complicated picture and may involve specific deficits in processing information, neuropsychological deficits involving executive functioning, and/or deficits in encoding social information (McQuade & Hoza, 2008). However at this point, additional research needs to be conducted to discover the potential nature of the well-substantiated deficits in social processing with children with ADHD.
**Justification for the Study of Social Competence**

Whether in an academic, family, or social setting, the ability to interact successfully with peers and significant others is essential. Research has demonstrated that children with social competence deficits may experience difficulties in all of these realms. Socially, children who are rejected by peers are at risk for maladjustment and social difficulties into adulthood (Coie et al., 1992; Parker & Asher, 1987).

Academically, children with low social competence have been shown to have lower grade point averages and lowered academic functioning (Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Wentzel, 1993). Problems with school delinquency, dropping out, and maladjustment can also be related to low social competence (Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990). The failure to identify and treat social competence deficits can have long term negative consequences for the individual and the significant others in their lives.

**Assessment of Social Competence**

The goal of social competence assessments is to provide identification and classification information or intervention/program planning data in order to provide services or support to a child (Elliott et al., 2001). As with any type of assessment involving a complex construct, the assessment of social competence should not follow a formulaic procedure; rather the assessment should be unique to each person based upon the goals of the assessment and the specific questions that need to be answered to define the areas of concern and develop interventions (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1995). Whereas identification of social competence deficits is certainly a primary goal of assessment, eventually the results of the assessment process should be able to provide the necessary
data to develop, implement, and assess the effectiveness of interventions (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998).

**General Considerations**

**Micro and macro variables.** When assessing social competence, both micro and macro level variables need to be considered when evaluating a child’s performance (Spence, 2003). Verbal and non-verbal responses in social situations are micro-level skills that can impact a child’s performance. The ability to monitor the quality and quantity of these types of responses can impact either positively or negatively on a child’s social competence (Spence, 2003). For example, in a classroom environment, a child’s ability to use his or her “inside voice” versus a loud voice that is used at recess can affect a teacher’s perception of the acceptability of the child’s social skills. Although the contact of the message may be appropriate, failure to understand the importance of the use of micro-level skills can have a significant effect on the perceptions of others in the child’s environment.

Macro-level skills involve integration of micro-level skills with more complex skills of social performance (Spence, 2003). The ability to be able to work on a group project, for instance, requires not only a knowledge of non-verbal skills such as how close to stand next to classmates and how to make appropriate eye contact, but the macro-level skills of knowing how to join into a conversation or to wait for the appropriate time to talk.

**Gender implications.** When planning and interpreting results from sociometric measures utilized in social competence assessments, it is important to consider the role
that gender plays in girls’ and boys’ social relationships and the impact that this may have on assessment results. It may be useful to have same gender classroom peers provide sociometric ratings because most children’s play activities are gender related (Combie, 1988). For instance, it would be functionally important to determine if a girl was rejected by girls in the classroom, boys in the classroom, or both. Likewise, boys tend to play more in large group settings in elementary school and their ratings of friendship choices may be less indicative of best friends, but rather a group of friends with whom they may play. Boys may therefore be less likely to receive reciprocal nominations on sociometric data than girls, who are more likely to play with a best friend. From a functional standpoint, a girl who does not receive reciprocal nominations may be more isolated socially than a boy who does not receive nominations from the boys in his larger network of acquaintances (Combie, 1988).

Validity and reliability concerns. In conducting assessments of social competence, teachers, parents, peers, and the child can all provide valuable information on the social performance of an individual. However, it is often the case that there are significant discrepancies between respondents regarding the nature of the child’s social concerns (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). In particular, children’s ratings of their own behavior often do not correlate well with reports of peers or adults in their lives. This lack of agreement between a child’s reports of his or her behavior as compared to the reports of peers or adults may be due to the child’s misinterpretation of the behaviors of others. However, the importance of the child’s perceptions should not be dismissed due to his or her lack of concurrence with significant others. Rather, it should be used as a
guide to help determine the child’s level of motivation to change as well as his or her awareness of the perceptions of others.

The situation specificity of behaviors can also prove to be problematic with regard to reliability and validity in the assessment of social skills (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). When assessing social behaviors, it is sometimes the case that a child may display a particular behavior in one setting, perhaps where there is strong reinforcement of the behavior, yet not display that behavior in another environment. A child may have the ability to produce a behavior, but other competing factors, such as anxiety, may prohibit the child from doing so. However, this fact would not be readily apparent during an assessment (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

Variations among differing cultures, peer groups, and social economic status as to what is socially appropriate behavior can also impact the validity of social skills assessments (Cavell et al., 2003). It is important to remember that a behavior that appears to be problematic in one environment may actually be well accepted in another environment. Ethnocultural factors may also impact communication styles in a manner that may affect the rating of these skills by observers from different cultural backgrounds (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998). Specifically, many aspects of communication style such as degree of eye contact, physical proximity during conversations, and affectivity may be influenced by an individual’s cultural background. Determining whether a behavior is a social skills deficit or a cultural difference in responding is a critical component of an assessment process. Failing to have an awareness of the impact of ethnocultural
influences when assessing social competence can limit the effectiveness of the evaluation and subsequent interventions.

**Assessment Approaches**

Although there are differing perspectives with regard to the content of social competence assessments, one consistent area of agreement is the importance of utilizing multiple methods across settings with a variety of respondents (Sheridan & Walker, 1999). Utilizing such an approach helps to counteract some of the inherent difficulties associated with the reliability and validity of social competence assessments (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). The voluminous amounts of data that can be acquired during a multimethod, multisource, and multisetting assessment can be problematic as well if a practitioner does not have the necessary skills and heuristic framework from which to integrate the varying sets of information into a cogent picture of the child (Merrell, 2001).

**Hierarchical Format**

**First line.** In determining the format of a social competence assessment, one approach is to utilize some elements from what Merrell (2001) characterized “as first-line,” “second-line,” and “third-line” assessment methods. Direct behavioral observations in naturalistic settings and behavior rating scales are both categorized as “first-line” methods due to their strong empirical basis of support. For social skills evaluations, it is recommended that the naturalistic behavior observations take place in the school environment where there are ample opportunities to gauge peer interaction. Ideally, such observations should take place in unstructured times such as lunch or recess.
Behavior rating scales have many benefits and are recommended for use in all social competence assessments in this hierarchical model (Merrell, 2001). Ratings scales are able to provide data on both high and low frequency behaviors, over a period of time, in a naturalistic environment and in a cost efficient manner (Merrell, 2001). A wide range of behavior rating scales is available for use in social competence assessments. In a review of six published rating scales, the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was recommended due to its strong evidence for reliability and validity along with a strong emphasis on linking assessment to interventions (Demaray & Ruffalo, 1995). A revision of the SSRS known as the Social Skills Improvement System-Ratings Scales (SSIS-RS; Gresham & Elliot, 1998) was reviewed and recommended for use due to its continued strengths in reliability and validity (Crosby, 2011).

Second line. “Second-line” assessment methods include sociometrics and interviewing. These methods are considered to be useful in providing information on a child’s social competence, but several pragmatic problems potentially limit their effectiveness and use (Merrell, 2001). Sociometric procedures such as peer nomination, peer rankings, Class Play nominations, and other similar designs are an excellent tool to assess a child’s popularity or social relationship within a classroom. However, it should be remembered that sociometry does not provide direct information on a child’s social skills or targets for interventions (Merrell, 2001). Additionally, obtaining sociometric information for one child of interest in a classroom requires a great deal of preparation on the part of the examiner to obtain parental consent for all children who are providing rankings.
Interviewing is another second line method used in the hierarchical assessment of social competence to ascertain specific information on the nature of behavioral concerns and the environments in which they take place. Interviews, both structured and unstructured, can take place with parents, teachers, and the child to obtain specific input on the child’s social functioning. While interviewing procedures can provide valuable data to the assessment process, there is not yet a clear-cut method for applying the information obtained from interviews to specific application in the assessment process. Due to the lack of data in this area, interviewing, according to Merrell (2001), cannot be considered a first-line method of assessment.

**Third line.** “Third-line” methods of assessment include projective techniques and self-report instruments. Projective techniques do not have empirical support to justify their use in the assessment process of social competence (Merrell, 2001). Although techniques such as sentence completion may be beneficial in building rapport with a child, there is not evidence to suggest that results from such techniques provide reliable and valid information on a child’s social functioning. Similarly, the use of self-report measures for use with youth with social-behavioral concerns has not been substantiated and should be considered experimental in nature.

**Summary.** Overall in this model of social competence assessments, the focus of the assessment is placed upon data gathered from behavior rating scales and naturalistic behavior observations. This information is then enhanced with data obtained from interviewing or sociometric methods. The use of projective assessments and objective self-reports can be utilized, but should never be relied upon as a primary method of
assessment. Rather, the information obtained from these sources could be used to make hypotheses about behavior patterns that could then be substantiated by either first or second line methods.

**Three Tier Model**

Another approach to the assessment of social competence, based on Cavell’s three-tier hierarchical definition of social competence, is to design assessments to evaluate a child’s social adjustment, social performance, and social skills (Cavell et al., 2003). Although social skills play an important role in a child’s overall social adjustment, focusing primarily on a skills deficit model in an assessment does not allow for a full picture of the child’s abilities, motivation level, interpersonal difficulties, or affective state which may all impact overall social adjustment.

**Social adjustment.** In the three-tier model of social competence assessments, the main goal of assessment when evaluating the level of social adjustment is to “obtain a global conceptualization of children’s functioning across important domains” (Cavell et al., 2003, p. 441). Domains can include academic, relational, emotional, and legal statuses. In order to assess these domains, record reviews of educational, medical, or social services records can be conducted to gather information on the child’s past and present levels of social adjustment.

To gain insight into the child’s viewpoint of their own level of social functioning, self-reports and questionnaires can be utilized to assess self-esteem, self-concept, perceived quality of relationships, and global behavioral and emotional status. Informal and formal interviews can augment this information as well as provide an opportunity to
directly ascertain the child’s view on their strengths and weaknesses in social situations (Cavell et al., 2003).

Gathering information from adults and teachers via rating scales or checklists of a child’s academic, social, behavioral, and emotional adjustment can provide insight into the perceptions of a child’s adjustment from the view of significant others who interact with the child regularly (Cavell et al., 2003). Again, such reports can be supplemented with interviews to provide further clarification on topics of interest. Siblings may also provide useful information on a child’s social adjustment and should also be included, when appropriate, in an interview situation. Peers are an important source of information on a child’s global level of functioning and may be assessed using peer ratings or other sociometric techniques.

**Social performance.** The goal of assessing social performance is to “identify the situations that are associated with poor performance” (Cavell et al., 2003, p. 445). Particular emphasis is given in this assessment area to evaluating the quality of the child’s social performance, identifying consistent patterns in performance, and delineating the contextual features that are typically present when ineffective social interactions occur. Knowledge of general patterns of behaving can enable a practitioner to plan into the future to anticipate the types of supports that may be needed for the child to succeed when facing new developmental challenges.

In a similar vein to the assessment of social adjustment, social performance skills can be measured by the use of self-reports, interviews, and questionnaires. These measures can be given to the child and to significant others in the child’s life to provide
data on the settings in which the child experiences difficulties. Role-pla...s choose questionnaires can be utilized to assess low frequency behaviors or provide specific insight into the nature of the child’s social performance abilities (Cavell et al., 2003). Direct observation of the child’s social performance in a setting that has been determined to be problematic for a child can aid greatly in the understanding of a child’s social performance skills.

**Social skills.** The identification of specific social skills deficits that are negatively affecting a child’s social performance is the final stage in the three-tier model of social competence assessment (Cavell et al., 2003). Role-plays are utilized in this model for the identification of specific social skills deficits because the contextual setting and the target behaviors can be individualized to provide data on specific behavioral responses. Questions regarding a child’s social cognitions can also be integrated into the role-play scenarios so that the practitioners can gain insight into the child’s attributions and ability to problem-solve in difficult scenarios. Utilizing significant others in a child’s life to rank order the importance of specific social skills and the frequency with which a child uses that skill in specific settings can also provide valuable information and targets for intervention (Cavell et al., 2003). Interviews can also be utilized to help teachers or parents narrow down the specific scenarios and settings in which a child’s social performance is not effective.

**Summary.** Overall, this three tier approach to social competence assessment relies heavily upon interviews, self-reports, rating scales and questionnaires with the child and significant others in the child’s life to assess a child’s social performance and
social adjustment. Role-plays and focused interviews are used to narrow down specific social skills, contexts, and cognitions that are problematic for a child and in need of remediation. Special consideration is given to integrating all information across the three tiers of assessment to determine a child’s overall social competence. The integration of the data with an eye towards identification of specific themes in the pattern of the child’s social performance and the function of their behavior patterns is essential to the development of interventions.

**Ecological Assessment**

In the ecological assessment of social skills, the focus of the evaluation is on the interrelationship between the child, others, and the context (Sheridan & Walker, 1999). The goal of such an assessment is functional in nature and relies upon conceptualizing social skills deficits, intervention procedures, and outcomes within a meaningful social context that will have significance to the child in their daily life (Warnes, Sheridan, Geske, & Warnes, 2005). The definition of social skillfulness in this approach states that having appropriate social skills for interacting with others is important, but these skills must be able to be used appropriately with significant others in various contexts (Sheridan & Walker, 1999).

**Child variables.** The assessment of child variables is a crucial component in understanding the child’s social abilities within different environments. Cognitive events, developmental levels, language skill, and the presence or absence of particular social skills all play a role in defining the child within his or her social world (Sheridan & Walker, 1999). Assessments to gather data in these areas can be obtained from rating
scales and behavioral checklists completed by significant others, self-reports, interviews, and skill-based direct and analogue observations.

Skill-based direct observations take place in naturalistic settings and are used to assess a specific target behavior that have been operationally defined. A structured coding system is used in tandem with observational recording to provide information on frequency of target behaviors and antecedent or consequent events that take place in the environment that may serve to reinforce a behavior (Sheridan & Walker, 1999). Role-plays, or analogue observations, can be used to supplement naturalistic observations to gather data on low frequency behaviors. Interviews with the child can provide helpful information surrounding the child’s views of his social skills, his goals and motivation level, and his views on circumstances that are problematic.

**Significant others.** Assessment of others in a child’s life are completed to determine the child’s relation to parents, peers, siblings, teachers and other people with whom the child has contact with in his daily life (Sheridan & Walker, 1999). The child’s characteristics interweave with the behaviors, cognitions, tolerance, and expectation of others in his life, which contribute to the child’s overall level of social skillfulness. To gather data on a child’s status with significant others, sociometric techniques such as peer or teacher nominations, social comparison, or rankings can be completed.

**Context.** In considering the contextual characteristics of the child’s environment, thought should be given to the physical features of the setting, the demands placed on the child, and the reinforcement or punishment that the child receives in the environment (Sheridan & Walker, 1999). Functional assessments, performance-based direct
observations, and interviews can all be used to obtain information on the context. Functional behavior assessment is used to “understand the function of specific social behaviors, as well as to explore environmental events that may be encouraging or reinforcing them” (Sheridan & Walker, 1999, p. 694). Analyzing the antecedents and consequences of specific behaviors in a child’s repertoire can provide valuable information on the environmental forces that are holding the behavior in place and may provide keys as to how to intervene by environmental manipulation to alter ineffective behaviors.

Performance-based direct observations are useful in identifying reasons why a child does not use a socially appropriate skill that is in his repertoire, but instead utilizes a less socially effective skill. Identifying the environmental conditions or factors that are associated with this pattern of behavior can facilitate the development of interventions tailored to the child’s environmental needs (Sheridan & Walker, 1999). Interviews with significant others can help to further define specific targets for behavior or environmental changes to improve a child’s social skillfulness.

**Summary.** The ecological approach to assessment focuses heavily upon the fact that social behaviors take place across a variety of settings and with a variety of respondents. The purpose of this assessment is to best determine how the child’s unique characteristics interact with the significant others in his life across various contextual settings. Identifying socially valid goals for interventions are determined by considering the needs of the child and the demands the child must meet in a specific environment.
Additionally it is important to identify factors that may be facilitating the use of less successful skills and what is reinforcing their use.

**Common Themes in Assessment Practices**

Although each of the three models of assessing social competence reviewed has original elements, some common themes resonate. As with the assessment of any complex construct such as social competence, the plan developed should involve multiple sources, multiple methods, and multiple settings (Gresham, 1995). Clearly, all of the models reviewed stressed the importance of following such a practice when conducting an assessment of social competence in children.

In each of the models, the value of using behavioral rating scales and checklists as a primary means to gather data from multiple sources and across multiple settings was evident. The use of rating scales and checklists to provide normative information, estimate the frequency of behaviors, indicate problem areas, and provide judgments by individuals familiar with the child in a natural setting, over a period of time, for a low cost make them indispensable in an assessment of social competence (Cavell et al., 2003). The strong empirical support for the use of such instruments due to their reliability and validity, especially as compared to other commonly used methods for gathering information on social competence such as interviews or analogue observations, make these items a valuable part of social competence evaluations.

Naturalistic observations are also a key feature in all of the methods reviewed for social competence assessments. While there are variations in their use, all of the models considered the inclusion of such observations to be essential. Because of the cost of
conducting multiple observations, the use of observations should be well planned in advance to ensure opportunities to see specific target behaviors of interest. Undoubtedly, Sheridan and Walker’s (1999) ecological assessment model places a greater emphasis upon the use of observations than the three-tier model of Cavell et al. (2003) to gather information on the contextual elements in the setting as well as determine what environmental or ecological factors may be impacting a child’s performance. However, all of the assessment models reviewed agree that observing a child in their natural environment can provide invaluable information on the child’s overall social functioning.

While various elements of social competence assessments, such as interviews, sociometric measures, and analogue observations, play a role in each of the models above, it is the use of rating scales and naturalistic observations that appear to be a central focus in the assessment process.

**Efficacy of Social Skills Interventions**

**Effectiveness**

Social skills training programs frequently are utilized to promote the acquisition, performance, and generalization of positive social skills of many students with disabilities (Gresham et al., 2001). Gresham (2002) identified the goals of the most social skills training programs as: (a) promoting skill acquisition; (b) enhancing skill performance; (c) reducing or eliminating competing problem behaviors; and (d) facilitating generalization and maintenance of social skills. Three main theoretical approaches are utilized to design social skills interventions: social learning, cognitive-behavioral, and operant procedures (Elliott et al., 2001). Each of these procedures can be
teacher directed, peer-directed, or both peer and teacher directed. As might be expected, many social skills training curriculums combine elements from each theoretical approach to provide a comprehensive treatment model.

The study of the effectiveness of social skills programs has provided mixed results (Gresham et al., 2001). A review of 79 outcome studies on social skills training between 1942 and 1987 found an effect size of .40 indicating a moderate effect (Schneider, 1992). In a review of 49 studies of social skills training programs from 1981–1990, covering a variety of child disability categories and treatment methods, it was noted that even where there were noted gains in short-term findings (ES .47), long term generalization results were limited (Beelmann, Pfingsten, & Losel, 1994). A meta-analysis comprised of 28 peer-reviewed journal articles assessed classroom wide social skills interventions conducted between 1981 and 2007 (January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011). Results of the meta-analysis indicated a small but positive effect size of .15. In evaluating the results, it was suggested by the authors that early intervention with younger students was more successful than interventions provided for older students and that short-term interventions for social skills are unlikely to be effective. Overall, the authors concluded that, “Although social skills interventions are only minimally effective overall, the positive results are still encouraging” (p. 253). Gresham (2011), in reviewing this article in a commentary, suggested that perhaps what is needed is a mega-analysis of all of the meta-analyses in order to further ascertain inconsistencies regarding the effectiveness of social skills interventions. He further stated that additional research is needed to further understand the effectiveness of social skills interventions.
Particular attention has been paid in the literature on social skills training to children with emotional and behavior disorders and to children with learning disabilities due to the fact that social skills deficits are either a defining characteristic of the disorder or are frequently associated with the disorder (Maag, 2005).

**Learning disabilities and social skills training programs.** During the past 30 years, a great deal of research has been conducted to develop interventions to aid in the acquisition and development of social skills for students with learning disabilities. More than 200 social skills interventions have been developed to attempt to address this need (Bryan, 2005). Although there are reports of success with improving social competence in youth with learning disabilities, when the techniques of meta-analysis are used to review the effect sizes of multiple studies, the current empirical evidence on the efficacy of interventions to improve social competence in students with learning disabilities indicate low overall effectiveness (Forness & Kavale, 1996; Kavale & Forness, 1996; Maag, 2005). A few summary reports focus specifically upon the efficacy of social skills interventions for students with learning disabilities. This may be due, in part, to the narrowness of the definition of learning disabilities or due to the fact that deficits in social competence are not a defining characteristic of learning disabilities as are other disabling conditions (Maag, 2005). In a review of 22 social skills interventions for students with learning disabilities, 14 studies reported positive intervention effects (McIntosh et al., 1991). It was noted that studies that involved students in full-time learning disabilities classrooms were less effective than interventions conducted with students who were in a resource room setting. Results were reported to be more positive
for programs that lasted longer and for programs where students were selected based upon a reported need for social skills intervention versus being included in the study due to having a learning disability. Seven of the 22 studies had a follow-up component to determine training effectiveness after the program completion. Of the seven studies, five reported long-term gains in follow-up measurement. However, few reports of generalization to natural settings were specified among the 14 interventions that were deemed successful. It should be noted that few of the studies measured peer or teacher ratings of targeted students’ social acceptance after the intervention. Such indicators would provide a clear measure of the overall effectiveness of the intervention in a natural setting.

A meta-analysis of 53 studies of social skills training or intervention programs for students with learning disabilities revealed low efficacy for such training (Forness & Kavale, 1996). Overall effect size of the studies was .211, which utilizing Cohen’s (1988) classification would be described as small. In more than one out of five studies, it was found that control group gains exceeded those of students in the experimental condition. An analysis computed to determine practical significance revealed that the results failed to demonstrate practical significance (Kavale & Mostert, 2004). Although some differences were noted among respondents, no significant differences were found between respondents’ reports on the effectiveness of the training.

Unlike McIntosh et al. (1991), Kavale and Forness (1996) did not find a relationship between the length of training time and training effectiveness. Similar results were found though with regard to the lack of studies that tested for generalization.
or maintenance effects. Additionally, neither age nor quality of research impacted upon the results.

Although no significant differences were found between respondent reports on the effectiveness of the interventions, a closer analysis of the data sets provides some further insights into the perceived effects of the training among raters. The largest effect size was found when learning disabled students evaluated their perceptions of the outcomes of training with an effect size of .244 (Kavale & Forness, 1996). More specifically, subjects perceived that their social status was improved as a result of the interventions. Peers, on the other hand, did not share this perception as indicated by social status ratings, but 6 out of 10 students with learning disabilities were found to be slightly less rejected (Kavale & Mostert, 2004). Peers did indicate improvements in communicative competence of their classmates with learning disabilities. Teacher perceptions of the social skills training found slight gains in adjustment, dependency, and conduct disorder. Limited differences were noted in hyperactivity, academic competence, or increased interaction. It appears that although students with learning disabilities reported the training in social skills enhanced their status, significant others in their environments did not concur with their assessment.

On the whole, the results of meta-analyses on training programs or interventions designed to improve social competence in children with learning disabilities show limited benefits to the participants. In light of the few studies reporting follow-up or generalization data, little can be said about the long-term impact, if any, of the social competence interventions.
Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

A narrative review of 27 studies evaluating the effectiveness of social skills intervention programs for children with behavior disorders found that all but one of the studies reported some positive results on at least one outcome measure (Zaragoza, Vaughn, & McIntosh, 1991). Positive changes were least likely to be noted by peers whereas parent ratings of behavior change were found in all four studies in which they were evaluated.

Singh, Deitz, Epstein, and Singh (1991) provided a review of 28 intervention studies of the social behaviors of students who were seriously emotionally or behaviorally disturbed. The reviewed studies were analyzed for the efficacy of the treatment in controlling or increasing the target behavior by assigning a rating of 0, 1, or 2. Higher ratings indicated greater success in reducing the targeted behavior from baseline levels. The majority of the studies (57%) received a rating of 2 that indicated a 75% to 100% reduction in the target behavior. However, concerns were noted in this review regarding the failure of many authors to identify the diagnostic criteria by which the researchers evaluated the children to determine a classification of seriously emotionally disturbed or behaviorally disabled, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings.

In a meta-analysis of 35 group-design studies and 64 single-subject design studies of social skills interventions for youth with emotional or behavioral disorders, the overall results indicated that the effectiveness of the training was limited (Kavale, Mathur, Forness, Rutherford, & Quinn, 1997). In the analysis of the group-design studies the
effect size was found to be 0.199. Utilizing Cohen’s classification system (1988) this would be considered a small effect size. Evaluating the percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) to indicate an index of treatment effectiveness for the single-subject design studies revealed a PND of 62% with a standard deviation of 33%, which represents a mild treatment effectiveness.

A more detailed analysis of the group-design results indicated that neither age of the subject nor length of training significantly impacted the effect size. A slightly larger effect size was noted when teachers rated the effectiveness of social skills training versus parents; however, teacher ratings were similar to those of peers and the student themselves. When considering broad dimensions of social skills such as social problem solving, social competence, social behavior, and social relations, slightly higher effect sizes were noted ranging from .221 to .267, but only modest levels of improvement were indicated. In reviewing the effectiveness of social skills training on specific social skills variables, there was a slightly positive effect size above the 0.199 noted for interaction, cooperation, and adjustment and a positive effect for anxiety. It should be noted, however, that a limited number of effect sizes, eight in total, were utilized to calculate the mean effect size for anxiety. On the whole for the group-design studies, it was determined that the effects of training resulted in only modest improvements whereby a child receiving the training would be better off than only 58% of the children who did not receive training (Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, Rutherford, & Forness, 1999).

A detailed analysis of the 64 single subject designs revealed that for specific subgroups of participants within the emotional-behavioral disorder realm, the greatest
benefits were found for delinquent students while individuals with autism benefited the least from the training (Mathur, Kavale, Quinn, Forness, & Rutherford, 1998). Differences were also noted in instructional level of the participants. The effectiveness of the social skills instruction was found to be least effective at the preschool level with a mean PND of 55. When evaluating specific variable of the social skills training, it was found that interaction skills were more sensitive to training than were communication of social behaviors. The overall results of the analyses of the single-subject design data indicated that “social skills interventions have limited empirical support for their overall effectiveness” (Mathur et al., 1998, p. 193).

Causes of Limited Effectiveness

A number of reasons have been suggested to account for the limited efficacy of social skills interventions. These include: (a) intensity of training; (b) assessment issues; (c) lack of treatment fidelity; (d) etiology of social skills deficits; and (e) generalization (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Kavale & Mostert, 2004; Maag, 2005; Vaughn et al., 2004). Sheridan et al. (1999) further suggested that social skills interventions are not effective due to the failure of researchers to employ approaches that address environmentally relevant and child-specific behaviors that have social validity.

Intensity of training. When dealing with social concerns that have been present for a significant period of time, it may be the case that limited time frame interventions are not sufficient to bring about discernable change (Gresham et al., 2001; Quinn et al., 1999; Vaughn et al., 2004). Little is known about the optimal length of time required for
social skills training to be effective; therefore, it is not possible to determine whether
greater intensity of training would lead to improved outcomes (Kavale et al., 1997).

**Assessment issues.** An absence of socially valid outcome measures, a lack of
agreement between the skills being trained and skills being measured for outcomes, and
training programs that are not individualized to meet a child’s specific needs could all
contribute to the limited effectiveness of social skills training (Gresham, 1998; Kavale &
Mostert, 2004; Forness & Kavale, 1996; Maag, 2005; Vaughn et al., 2004). If the goal of
social skills interventions is to enhance the functioning of students with their peers and
significant others, it is crucial that the skills that are selected for inclusion in the program
have social validity. Maag (2005) stated, “there must be a clear rationale for why social
skills are being taught, which social skills are being taught, and what outcomes are
expected” (p. 40). Training skills that are not important in the child’s social environment
clearly would not lead to noticeable improvements in social acceptability by their peers
or adults in their social context.

Forness and Kavale (1996) reported that in many studies, criterion-referenced
measures were employed to measure the efficacy of the interventions in spite of the
availability of norm-referenced instruments. Furthermore, a limited number of valid
assessment measures can adequately address the issue of social competence in students
with learning disabilities (Vaughn et al., 2004). Whether the measures used to assess
change were valid and sensitive enough to measure changes in the target behaviors is
unknown, but may have affected overall results.
Interventions that are administered in a “one size fits all manner” without recognizing the individualized nature of a child’s social skills deficits may not result in positive outcomes. It has been suggested that it is important to determine the nature of a child’s deficits prior to planning interventions since differences between acquisition, performance, or fluency deficits require different types of remediation efforts (Gresham, 1998). Studies that do not differentiate among the students in the training program according to the nature of their deficit may lead to less satisfactory results.

**Lack of treatment fidelity.** Forness and Kavale (1996) reported that in their examination of studies, “monitoring fidelity of treatment was not a high priority” (p. 6). Without data reporting on the manner in which the fidelity of the implementation of the treatments was administered, it is not possible to know whether treatments were effectively implemented. This confounds the process of improving treatments because of an inability to determine whether the intervention could have been effective if the appropriate procedures had been followed during the study.

**Etiology of deficits.** Several hypotheses exist regarding the etiology of social skills deficits in children; however the exact cause of the deficit is unknown. Because researchers do not know the root cause of the difficulties, it is difficult to develop interventions to help to enhance the areas of deficits. One possibility is that depending upon which, if any, hypotheses is correct regarding the nature of the deficit, only interventions that specifically target that area of concern with sufficient intensity will result in improved functioning (Forness & Kavale, 1996).
Generalization. Although it has been over 30 years since Stokes and Baer’s (1977) article describing the passive “train and hope” method for programming for generalization, lack of generalization from controlled training settings to natural settings remains a problem in social skills training programs (Beelmann et al., 1994; Gresham, 1997; Maag, 2005; McIntosh et al., 1991).

In a review of generalization effects of commercial social skills training programs, several reasons were suggested for the lack of generalization effects in studies utilizing these programs (DuPaul & Eckert, 1994). First, there was an emphasis in programming for skill deficits, thereby limiting the effectiveness of the interventions for children with performance deficits. Second, behaviors that were targeted in the programs for intervention may not have been appropriate to the child's environmental setting. Third, training took place in contrived settings instead of in the contextual environment in which the child had social difficulties.

An alternate view of the rationale for a lack of generalization of social skills in the social skills training programs suggests that it was not that the skills taught did not generalize, but that the skills did not generalize because they were not socially meaningful within the child's social environment (Moore, 1994). In other words, selecting social behaviors for training that do not have high social validity in the child's environment are unlikely to succeed.

Another reason stated for the lack of generalization is that social skills training programs are often presented in a contrived setting without regard to the contextual nature of social behavior thereby inhibiting generalization by not allowing naturally
occurring opportunities for reinforcement of the social behaviors to take place. The lack of both teachable moments and multiple opportunities for reinforcement of behaviors from major stakeholders in the child's environment limits the acquisition and generalization of new skills (Gresham et al., 2001). Similarly, Maag (2005) noted that the failure to take advantage of techniques such as entrapment, a process whereby recently acquired skills come under control of natural reinforcers such as peers, in social skills training programs may also contribute to the lack of generalization.

Enhancing the Social Validity of Assessments and Interventions

Based on the reviews of social skills training programs to date, it is apparent that current practices in social skills training have had mixed results in achieving significant lasting results for children with social competence deficits. It has been proposed that one way to enhance the effectiveness of social skills training programs is to utilize a contextual approach to social skills assessments (Sheridan et al., 1999). In a contextual approach to social skills assessments, the environmental contexts in which the child functions are examined to determine not only the child’s perspective but also the expectations and social requirements of the environment. As is noted by Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2003) many different sets of skills, some of which are universally important and some of which are specific to a particular environment, are needed for children to negotiate their way through a myriad of social relationships through the day. Children’s peer experiences, they stated, “represent a complex ever-changing landscape, one that cannot be captured through a single lens or snapshot” (p. 275). Considering the social contexts, and the social norms and demands that are present in those contexts in
which a child is required to function, is essential to gain an understanding of a child’s social world (Sheridan, Buhs, & Warnes, 2003).

**Identification of Behaviors**

Social validity is a key concept in conducting contextual assessments and evaluating the outcomes of social skills interventions. Wolf (1978) defined social validity as the social significance of the goals, the social appropriateness of the procedures, and the social importance of the effects of an intervention. To obtain information on social validity, Wolf suggested,

> Rather than deciding by oneself the validity of the behavioral objectives of a treatment program, we can approach the consumer representatives of the relevant community and through interview or ratings determine much more precisely what the socially significant problems are. (p. 209)

Identifying social behaviors that are meaningful and relevant within a child’s social environment can afford opportunities to create interventions that will promote prosocial skills that are valued by significant others in the child’s environment and can come under the control of naturally occurring reinforcers (McConnell, 1987). According to Nangle et al. (2010), a socially valid approach to social skills training involves selecting target behaviors that are acceptable to both the child and significant others in their life and are related to successful social interactions in the child’s natural environment. Although many social skills programs teach skills that are presumed to be important to social success, little research has empirically documented the functional utility of the behaviors and demonstrated their social validity (Maag, 2005).
Furthermore, with few exceptions, rating scales, which are often utilized to garner information from sources such as teachers and peers, do not seek to establish the importance of the described behaviors (Warnes et al., 2005).

Enhancing Social Validity

In order to provide socially valid interventions to students with social skill deficits, it is important to determine what social skills are perceived to be important to success by the significant others. In an educational setting, understanding what social skills are deemed essential by educators and peers throughout grade levels would be beneficial in ascertaining what social skills are critical for success throughout a student’s academic career. Identifying the expectations that teachers and peers have for students’ social performance can be used to enhance the social validity of the interventions that are developed. Several studies are detailed below that describe the subjects, method, and resulting social skills deemed important by a variety of respondents in educational settings.

**Taxonomy of positive social skills.** A taxonomy of positive social skills for children and adolescents was created based upon an analysis of peer reviewed factor analytic research on social skills covering a 20 year period from 1974 to 1994 (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997). In total, 21 studies were selected for inclusion in the analysis to develop the taxonomy.

Several steps were undertaken to develop the taxonomy. First, the studies were analyzed to determine basic characteristics of the studies such as subject characteristics, characteristics of the methodologies used, and outcomes of the studies. It was found that
teacher rating scales were the most commonly used instrument reported in the studies and that gender was evenly divided among the 22,000 subjects that were represented in the research. Caldarella and Merrell (1997) identified and grouped similar social skills factors identified in the 21 studies together. For instance, the factor “follows directions” was grouped with the factor “follows rules,” and the factor “shares,” based upon the similarity among the factors. In order to reduce outliers, only the factors occurring in one third or more of the studies were utilized. Next, similar social skills factors were grouped together into common dimensions and a name was applied to each group. In the example provided above, for instance, the factors of “follows directions,” “follows rules,” and “shares” were placed with other similar factors in a dimension called Compliance Skills. Finally, the dimensions were rank ordered, from highest to lowest, based upon their frequency of occurrence in the studies that were examined. The resulting five dimensions that comprise the taxonomy included: (a) Peer Relations Skills; (b) Self-Management Skills; (c) Academic Skills; (d) Compliance Skills; and (e) Assertion Skills. Due to the prevalence of these positive social skills dimensions in the 20-year time span studied, it was suggested that these skills could be starting points for the development of interventions for individuals with social skills deficits.

**Teacher perspectives of critical social skills for youth.** Lane and her colleagues have conducted several studies to identify teacher expectations of student behavior from kindergarten through 12th grade. In a study by Lane, Pierson, and Givner (2003), 336 teachers rated 30 items from the Social Skills Ratings System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990) social subscale on the importance of each skill for students to
succeed in their classrooms. The 30 items in the SSRS social subscale are equally
distributed across three factor analytically derived domains: (a) self-control; (b) assertion;
and (c) cooperation skills. A 4-point Likert type scale was utilized to rate each of the 30
skills, with zero being not important and three being critical. Demographic information
on the teachers, including gender, grade level taught, experience, and whether teaching in
general education, special education or other, was also collected. Five social skills were
rated by the majority of teachers at the elementary, middle, and secondary level as
essential for success in school. These include: (a) follows directions; (b) attends to your
instructions; (c) controls temper in conflict situations with peers; (d) controls conflict
situations with adults; and (e) responds appropriately to physical aggression from peers.
All of the five social skills listed fell under the domains of self-control or cooperation
skill areas. None of the five social skills indicated as being essential for success among
the majority of elementary, middle, and high school teachers were derived from the
assertion skills domain.

When looking for significant differences in responses between general education
and special education teachers, it was found that general education teachers considered
assertion and cooperation skills more important to success in the classroom then did
special education teachers. It was hypothesized that differences among general and
special education teachers’ viewpoints of the value of assertion and cooperation skills
may be due to the general education teachers’ higher student count which requires that
students are able to make their needs known to the teacher without disrupting the
educational process. A difference in perspective regarding the importance of self-control
skills was noted at the high school level between general education and special education teachers. General education teachers rated self-control skills significantly more important at the high school level than did their colleagues teaching special education students. The authors explained this difference based on three criteria: (a) general education classes are larger than those in special education and require greater management time; (b) the consequences of aggressive behavior among high school students are more damaging than among younger children; and (c) special education teachers may have more instructional time to teach prosocial skills such as problem solving and anger management.

Lane continued her investigation of critical social skills in a study that duplicated the method of the previous study, but also sought to determine if teacher expectations vary as a function of the level of risk associated with the school’s student population (Lane, Wehby, & Cooley, 2006). In order to establish whether teacher expectations of classroom behavior varied in high versus low-risk schools, 717 teachers from seven elementary schools, eight middle schools, and four high schools in a socioeconomically diverse area, participated in the study. High risk was defined in this study as percentage of students receiving free and reduced priced lunches at a school. Results of this study identified five items that the majority of teachers across elementary, middle school, and high school levels deemed critical for school success. They include: (a) controls temper in conflict situation with peers; (b) controls temper and conflict situation with adults; (c) follows/complies with directions; (d) attends to your instructions; and (e) easily makes transition from one classroom activity to another. Four out of five of these responses are
the same as those obtained in the first study. Responds appropriately to physical aggression from peers was not indicated in this study as a critical social skills and easily makes the transition from one classroom activity to another was not indicated in the first study. Among elementary school teachers in this study introduces self to new people without being told was rated by the teachers as not being important for success in school. Middle school and high school teachers identified gives compliments to members of the opposite sex as not being important for success in school. As in the last study, no items categorized under the assertion domain were identified by the majority of teachers as being critical for success in school.

When comparing results between program type, general education teachers as compared to special education teachers, no differences were found between elementary and middle school teachers in the self-control domain. On the other hand, special education teachers in high schools rated self-control as significantly more important to school success then high school general education teachers. Within the domain of cooperation, special education teachers rated cooperation skills as significantly less important for success then did general education teachers. On assertion skills, high school teachers rated assertion skills less important to school success than did teachers in elementary and middle schools.

A significant difference was found on the domains of self-control and assertion relative to teachers at high-risk schools versus low-risk schools. Teachers at high-risk schools rated self-control and assertion skills as more critical to success than did teachers at low-risk schools. No differences were found between high-risk and low-risk schools
on their ratings of cooperation skills, with both groups rating them equally important for school success (Lane et al., 2006).

Overall, both studies (Lane et al., 2003; Lane et al., 2006) indicated that teachers placed a higher value on cooperation and self-control skills than they did on assertion skills. These are skills that the authors suggested facilitated rather than impeded instruction. Differences among teachers at high-risk versus low-risk schools on ratings of self-control and assertion were hypothesized by the authors to be due to factors at high-risk schools such as: teachers valuing self-control in order to limit the number of altercations in a high-risk environment, teachers valuing assertiveness and requesting assistance at school in order to eliminate gaps in instruction opportunities due to frequent moves, and limited extracurricular activities that would enhance a child’s knowledge base.

The results of these two studies (Lane et al., 2003; Lane et al., 2006) indicate that several social skills are seen by the majority of teachers as critical for school success as indicated by the redundancy between the top five lists of skills agreed upon by the majority of teachers. However, these skills were derived from a predetermined set of skills and results might have varied had other skill areas been included. It appears that there is a general consensus of the importance of cooperation and self-control skills throughout the grade levels with some minor variations. One of the variations is the importance that cooperation skills are valued by general education teachers and not by special education teachers. These skills would be beneficial for special education teachers to teach to their students to enhance their abilities to meet teacher expectations in
regular education settings. Additionally, when planning interventions for children struggling with social skills in the classroom environment, utilizing the information obtained in these studies regarding what social skills the majority of teachers in the study deemed critical, would add to the social validity of the intervention.

**Top 10 social skills.** The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Classwide Intervention Program lists the top 10 social skills as determined from having hundreds of teachers from across the United States rate the importance of almost 100 social skills behaviors (Elliott & Gresham, 2007). The behaviors were rated by the teachers as to whether they felt that the behaviors were Not important, Important, or Critical for classroom success. The authors reviewed the importance ratings assigned by the teachers and also considered behaviors that were known to be central to having young people manage their behavior across a variety of social situations. The top 10 social skills that arose from this process were: (a) listen to others; (b) follow the steps; (c) follow the rules; (d) pay attention to your work; (e) ask for help; (f) take turns when you talk; (g) get along with others; (h) stay calm with others; (i) do the right thing; and (j) do nice things for others. Each of these top 10 social skills falls into one of five types of skill areas such as: (a) cooperation skills; (b) self-control skill; (c) assertion skills; (d) responsibility; and (e) empathy.

**Template matching.** In lieu of determining which social skills to teach a child from a generic social skills program, the use of template matching has been proposed as a means to improve the social validity of assessments (Sheridan et al., 1999). A template matching procedure, as described by Hoier and Cone (1987), involves having a target
child identify individuals in their environment with whom they would like to play. The children who were selected by the target child are then asked to complete a Q-sort of cards with descriptors of social behaviors on them. A Q-sort is a research method that is used to study an individual’s point of view by having him rank variables on a condition. Typically, this involves sorting cards with a descriptive word into piles of similar or not similar behaviors until only the cards that are most similar to the condition being studied remain. In Hoier and Cone’s study, the condition being studied was social behaviors that are most important for a friend to do and least important for a friend to do. The top three behaviors listed by a child as most important for a friend to do comprised a template set of behaviors deemed as critical to friendships for that child. Social behaviors that are frequently identified among the potential playmates can be utilized as templates to compare with the behavior of the target child. If the child is lacking in the specified behaviors, the social behaviors in the template would be appropriate intervention targets.

In a study of this process, four girls between 8 and 9 years of age were interviewed and asked to provide descriptions of their best friends using a Q-sort procedure. The Q-sort procedure in this study involved having the girls sort through 50 descriptors of social behaviors indicated on cards. The initial 50 items were divided into increasing small categories of behavior that were “like my friend” until 10 items remained. The remaining 10 items were ranked by each child from highest to lowest representing behaviors that were most crucial to friendship. The three descriptors identified most frequently by the subjects—shares, compliments, and praises—were then manipulated by the researchers in a second study to determine the impact of these
behaviors on the same subjects in a dyadic play situation. When exposed to the behaviors by a confederate in a play situation, the subjects increased their number of template behaviors when exposed to the targeted behaviors by the confederates. Additionally, increases in social interactions between subjects and confederates were noted during the experimental phase of the study where confederates were demonstrating the targeted behaviors. Although the functional effectiveness of the template was established, subjective ratings of the confederates by the subjects did not indicate significant differences from baseline to the experimental situation. It is possible that a ceiling effect may have impacted the results since the subjects all rated the confederates as likeable in the baseline portion of the test thereby limiting the range of rating increases.

Expanding upon the procedure utilized by Hoier and Cone (1987), Sheridan et al. (1999) suggested the use of a template matching procedure whereby descriptive ratings of behaviors that are valued by children are combined with direct observations of average peers to determine what behaviors are used frequently and effectively. These behaviors could then be utilized to construct a template of “kid pleaser” behaviors. The ratings of other important individuals in the child’s environment such as teachers and parents could also be used to provide information on socially desirable behaviors in specific settings. Particular attention in observations should be paid to the form, frequency, and intensity of behaviors that are positively reinforced in average peers as they can be used to delineate target behaviors for interventions.

After gathering data from multiple sources, settings, and methods, a template can be created of those behaviors that are found across two or more methods or settings. The
cross validation of these behaviors across methods identifies them as behaviors that are important for a child’s success in the targeted environment (Sheridan et al., 1999). The discrepancies between the average peer’s performance on the behaviors identified in the template and the identified child’s performance on those behaviors can be utilized to define specific behaviors for intervention. In addition, behavioral observations may provide information on novel environmental standards that are present in a particular context. For instance, if the main activity during non-academic time in a classroom is playing with yo-yos and discussing tricks, it would be beneficial for the child targeted for social skills interventions to be conversant on the topic in order to meet the expectations of the environment.

Warnes et al. (2005) conducted an exploratory qualitative study on the use of the template matching procedure. The goal of the research project was to identify behaviors, using the template matching process, among second and fifth grade students that were needed to get along well with peers. Data were gathered from peers, teachers, and parents to provide information from multiple perspectives. Teachers and parents were asked to complete a survey form requesting their input on what specific behaviors they felt were important for children to get along well with their peers. During structured child interviews, child participants were asked to think about their good friends and “what kind of things do you see them do that let you know they are good friends?” (p. 177). Data analysis was conducted using grounded theory to code the data from the parents, teachers, and children’s responses. General themes from the data were created through axial and selective coding procedures. A card sort procedure, where two
individuals other than the researcher sorted the responses from each set of data into themes, was used to generate the core categories in the selective coding stage.

The data analysis revealed a significant overlap between the parents, teachers, and children in both grade levels surrounding behaviors that are perceived to be important for being a “good friend.” Social behaviors such as: (a) compromises, (b) empathetic, (c) doesn’t verbally hurt others, and (d) helps others with personal work, were indicated by children, parents, and teachers in both second and fifth grade. The agreement across sources and grade levels established these behaviors as being important in the participant’s social environments. Warnes et al. (2005) noted that the manifestation of these behaviors can vary depending upon the developmental level of the child. In addition to the skills indicated above that were agreed upon by all participant categories in second and fifth grade, several social skills were also agreed upon by all participant categories in either second or fifth grade. In second grade, children, parents, and teachers indicated that (a) helps others with personal work, (b) positive and happy disposition, (c) loyal and reliable to friends, and (d) outgoing and friendly were important social skills. On the other hand, all fifth grade participant categories indicated that (a) trustworthy, (b) funny, and (c) spends time together were social skills needed for social success in fifth grade. Warnes et al. indicated that many of the behaviors identified as being important were complex behaviors that were not often found in rating scales of social competence.
Identification of Meaningful Social Behaviors in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Ecological Theory

Identifying meaningful behaviors to promote social competence should not be limited to the school environment. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted, a child’s environmental experiences are embedded within a variety of microsystems. A microsystem is a setting in which an individual interacts with others face-to-face over a given period of time. Interrelationships between a child’s various microsystems, which together comprise a mesosystem, can influence a child’s perceptions and behaviors within any of the other microsystems (Thomas, 1992). A child’s microsystem would include his school, home, and peer groups. Scouting organizations are another example of a peer group microsystem in which a child might participate during his leisure time. Structured leisure activities, activities that are organized by adults around specific social or behavioral goals, such as Scouting, provide an opportunity to identify some of the meaningful social skills needed for social competence in a leisure activity for youth (Fletcher, Nickerson, & Wright, 2003).

Girl Scouting as a Leisure Time Activity

Girl Scouting, a national youth serving organization, provides a structured leisure time activity whose mission is to “build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place” (Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 2012). Juliette Gordon Low founded Girl Scouts in Savannah, Georgia, in 1912. Low founded Girl Scouts upon the principles set forth by her friends Sir Baden-Powell and his wife Olave who founded Boy Scouts and Girl Guides (Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 2012).
Girl Scouts, which are often called Girl Guides outside of the United States, are also part of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts that has over 10 million members in 144 countries.

In the United States, there are over 2.5 million girls involved in Scouting and almost a million adult members working in a volunteer capacity. The curriculum for Girl Scouts is set by the national organization (Girls Scouts of the United States of America, 2012). Regional Girl Scout councils provide support to the individual troops and leaders. Two female adult troop leaders head each Girl Scout troop and plan and participate in the recreational and social activities of the troop. In addition to troop meetings, the girls and their troop leaders participate in a number of events such as camping trips, community service projects, and cultural and learning events. The girls are able to earn awards, such as patches, badges, and charms, for their participation in various activities. Girl Scout Law denotes the fundamental qualities and characteristics that a Girl Scout should strive for such as being honest and fair, friendly and helpful, courageous and strong, and responsible for her own actions (Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 2012). The Girl Scout program is divided into Daisy Scouts (Grades K–1), Brownie Girl Scout (Grades 2–3), Junior Girl Scout (Grades 4–5), Cadette Girl Scout (Grades 6–8), Senior Girl Scout (Grades 9–10), and Girl Scout Ambassador (Grades 11–12; Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 2012).

**Impact of Participation in Scouting**

In a study of structured leisure activities in middle childhood, it was found that students who participated in structured leisure activities received higher grades and were
rated by teachers as having higher academic competence than peers who did not participate in such activities (Fletcher et al., 2003). Adolescents, who participate in uniformed groups including Scouting, received higher ratings than non-participating peers in measures of social skills, helping attitudes, and leadership (Chou, 1999). However, a study evaluating the impact of participating in the Girl Scout curriculum on improving the self-esteem of 13- to 14-year-old girls found no significant differences between girls who participated in the curriculum in either a classroom setting or in troop meetings than control groups (Royse, 1998). Concerns regarding treatment fidelity and socioeconomic bias were noted as weaknesses of the study.

A study on enhancing attitudes towards children with disabilities utilized both Boy and Girl Scout troop meetings to determine if exposure to individuals with disabilities fostered positive attitudes towards disabled individuals (Newberry & Parish, 2001). It was thought that Scout troop meetings might provide more opportunities for social interaction than a typical classroom environment. It was found that the participation of individuals with mental retardation, physical handicaps, hearing impairments, and blindness with the non-disabled population in scout meetings enhanced the attitudes of non-disabled peers towards these handicapping conditions. This effect was not found for individuals with learning disabilities.

**Rationale for Examining Meaningful Social Behaviors in Scouting**

As a structured leisure time activity, Scouting provides a unique setting in which girls can develop friendships, gain leadership skills, and work towards developing the positive character traits identified in the Girl Scout Law. As a microsystem, the structure
of the Girl Scout troop also provides a unique non-academic environment in which girls can engage in both structured activities in a troop meeting or event as well as in less structured activities such as camping or volunteering with other Scouts in community activities. As a provider of both structured and unstructured recreational and social activities to millions of girls, scouting provides a setting in which positive social skills that are critical for success in both types of activities can be identified.

**Statement of Problem**

The study of social competence in children has been the focus of a great deal of research in the past 40 years. It has been well established that deficits in social competence in youth can have negative implications such as rejection by peers, school adjustment difficulties, lower levels of academic achievement, and later mental health difficulties (Coie et al., 1992; Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987; Wentzel, 1991). Deficits in social competence are a feature or defining characteristic in many high incidence disabilities such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities, developmental disorders, autism, and emotional disorders (Gresham, 2002; Gresham et al., 2001). Understandably, a wide variety of social skills training programs have been developed in order to address social competence deficits in youth. Although reviews of individual studies and programs have reported some positive results, meta-analyses of the studies across a variety of disability categories have revealed limited results from social skills training programs (Forness & Kavale, 1996; Kavale & Forness, 1996; Quinn et al., 1999).
A significant reason noted for the limited results in social skills training programs has been the lack of generalization and maintenance of treatment effects (Beelmann et al., 1994; Gresham et al., 2001; McIntosh et al., 1991). It has been suggested that a lack of socially valid behaviors and a failure to consider the variety of contexts in which a child participates has contributed to the limited generalization of trained behaviors in social skills interventions. A contextualized approach to the assessment and development of social skills interventions whereby the participants in the environment identify meaningful and valid social skills critical to social competence in a particular setting may be a method to improve the social validity of assessments and interventions (Sheridan et al., 1999). An exploratory qualitative study of a contextual assessment to identify target behaviors for interventions using a template matching procedure was conducted to determine the efficacy of such an approach (Warnes et al., 2005). In the study, teachers, parents, and second and fifth grade students identified behaviors that were considered important in getting along with their peers. A template of meaningful social behaviors was created utilizing responses that were generated from the participants as to what social behaviors were important to social competence in the specified setting. Although this study provided insight into the viewpoints of socially important behaviors in a school environment from the perspective of peers, teachers, and parents across two grade levels, it did not utilize direct observations of the types of behaviors used by typical children that are positively reinforced by peers. Without direct observations of behaviors that are reinforced, it is not possible to conclude that the behaviors stated by the participants are actually those that are reinforced in the natural environment.
The importance of identifying meaningful social skills needed for social competence in a child’s educational environment is crucial; however, children spend significant periods of their time within a variety of settings that are not educational in nature. National youth serving organizations such as Scouting are a structured leisure time activity that provides recreational and social activities to millions of youth in the United States each year. The identification of socially valid behaviors that are needed for success in this type of setting could help to establish behaviors that are important across contexts, as well as behaviors that are unique to structured leisure time activities.

The purpose of study was to identify the meaningful social behaviors needed for social competence in Girl Scouting, across two age groupings, from the perspective of multiple informants (i.e., parents, troop leaders, Scouts) utilizing multiple methods (i.e., surveys, interviews, observations) and to generate a template of these skills. By using a contextual assessment approach to identify social behaviors that are valued by multiple stakeholders in the target setting, it may be possible to develop interventions for children participating in Scouting who are experiencing social difficulties.

**Literature Review Related to Research Design**

**Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a broad term, which encompasses a number of different types of approaches and methods for the study of natural social life (Saldana, 2011). In general, participants in qualitative research are viewed as the experts and their subjective experiences are sought out by the researcher in order for the researcher to learn about the area of interest (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The data in qualitative research may take
the form of interviews, transcripts, field notes, artifacts, photographs, video recordings, or Internet sites and are generally nonquantitative in character (Saldana, 2011). The researcher is the research instrument in qualitative research. Because of this, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge his biases, subjectivity, and ideological framework that he brings to the study (Janesick, 2000). This sensitivity to the role of the researcher and their interplay with participants and the effect that this interaction may have on the lens with which the researcher views the setting is called reflexivity and it is an essential component of the qualitative research process (Schram, 2003).

Qualitative researchers are interested in the role of culture and the impact that culture may have on context (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). This is not surprising in light of the emphasis in qualitative research on the use of naturalistic settings where the construct that is being studied is embedded in the culture and context of the location. Because of the focus on context, qualitative research can be utilized as follow-up to quantitative research to seek out the relationships and processes that underlie a theory or ways that a theory may vary for disparate groups (Creswell, 2007).

**Use of Qualitative Research**

The focus of qualitative research is on naturalistic inquiry where the researcher goes to the setting of interest so that the phenomena under study can be seen in context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Rather than utilizing methods where items are measured and counted, qualitative research seeks to question participants who are knowledgeable and learn from them to gain understanding and meaning. It is from this process of questioning and inductive analysis that theory can arise.
Conducting research in this manner can assist researchers in answering many types of research questions. Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative methods can be used in a variety of ways. Process studies where there is an emphasis on “how” questions are well suited to qualitative inquiry. Understanding the workings of a system or how an outcome was achieved can be accomplished through the use of qualitative methods.

Questions regarding program implementation and the quality with which they are conducted can also be accomplished with qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). The use of naturalistic settings and in-depth questioning can provide insights into the implementation process of programs as well as their overall effectiveness from the perspective of the participants. As well, describing particular groups or individuals who have a shared experience or phenomena of interest is a key feature of the qualitative research process (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Nastasi and Schensul (2005) discussed the value of qualitative research in answering questions that “require description of complex, multi-person interactive behaviors, and/or societal contexts” (p. 79) to understand the underlying processes. Questions that require an understanding of the idiographic nature of a situation or phenomena can be answered via qualitative research methods.

The emphasis in qualitative research on naturalistic settings and the focus on culture and context uniquely position it to answer questions that require attention to detail and depth of responses (Creswell, 2007). The focus upon the individual or small group in this type of research enables a researcher to provide thick descriptions of the area of
interest. It also allows for the researcher to have a greater sensitivity to the unique perspective of groups that may be underrepresented in traditional research studies.

**Techniques to Establish Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research studies are evaluated in terms of their trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is established when “the author demonstrates the truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality of the research finding” (Crowley, 1994, p. 59). Several techniques are available to the qualitative researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and conclusions.

**Rigor.** Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) stated that a researcher should maintain four types of rigor when conducting a study to establish trustworthiness. The first type of rigor described is conceptual rigor. Conceptual rigor requires that the research strategy that is selected for the study is consistent with the goals and purpose of the research process. Without conceptual rigor the results of a study could be questionable. Second, methodological rigor requires that the researcher provide a specific account of exactly how the study was conducted, how decisions regarding data analysis were made, how they accessed the field, and how difficult situations were handled (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). In essence, an audit trail of the research process from conception to final product should be maintained to ensure methodological rigor. Third, interpretative rigor requires that the research accurately represent the participants’ worldviews. Failing to portray the data obtained from participants in the study would lead to inaccurate interpretations. Fourth, interpretative rigor involves triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, observations, and data sources can help the researcher to attain interpretive rigor. By
using many types of data sources and a variety of methods, the researcher will be able to have confidence in the interpretation of his results (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Finally, evaluative rigor addresses the need for completion of ethics and review forms along with careful consideration of the political or social implications of the research study for the participants. Overall, these various forms of rigor help to ensure that the data that was collected and analyzed was done in a thoughtful, careful, and ethical manner.

**Substantiating participants’ perspectives.** Another approach to ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Their perspective on establishing trustworthiness involves using techniques to make certain that the researcher has an accurate view of the participants’ perspectives in the study (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). The use of techniques such as engaging in extended time in the field, persistent observation, and triangulation can be utilized to ensure an accurate understanding of the findings from fieldwork. Member checking, which entails verifying with participants the accuracy of the data and peer debriefing, where the data and analysis is shared with peers, provides a means to ensure the clarity and veracity of the information. In order to allow for others to review the work that was completed, Lincoln and Guba suggested maintaining an audit trail and archiving a portion of the data, which allows readers to review how decisions were reached during the project and analysis.

**Advantages and Limitations**

**Advantages.** There are many advantages in using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research takes place in naturalistic settings where there is sensitivity to culture and context. The emphasis on context and naturalistic settings enables a researcher to
gain authentic insights and to be able to explain what is taking place in a particular environment (Silverman, 2004). Seeing firsthand the nuances of a particular environment is especially important when a researcher is assessing the effectiveness of implementing a program or the effectiveness of a process. In-depth observations in the field can detect subtle differences in behaviors that would not be found in other research methods.

Qualitative research relies upon relatively few participants. By focusing upon a smaller number of individuals, qualitative researchers are able to capture an individual’s point of view with great detail. This depth of knowledge allows a researcher to be able to examine the constraints faced in everyday life and identify and give meaning to the phenomenon being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In a similar vein, the use of purposeful sampling allows for the targeting of participants who have first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon of interest for inclusion in the study. This process enables researchers to target groups who are marginalized or groups of individuals about who little is known to bring their viewpoints to center stage (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

The flexibility of qualitative research enables researchers to respond to changes in settings or environments based on the needs of the research. Qualitative research utilizes an inductive method of analysis so that when new information is collected about a phenomenon under study, the researcher can react to the new information and plan accordingly (Silverman, 2004). Using an inductive approach also requires that the researcher enter the field without preconceptions about what will be found. This open mindedness enables the researcher to be receptive to a variety of ways to explain a phenomenon.
The use of multiple methods of collecting data and analyzing data enables researchers to plan methods that are appropriate for the research question and setting constraints (Morgan & Drury, 2003). Without the limitations of a prescribed set of procedures, fieldwork can be altered as needed to meet the needs of the participants or settings. With the flexibility provided by qualitative research, researchers are able to gain insights into the phenomenon that may not be possible with other methods of study.

Overall, qualitative research has many advantages for researchers who are interested in answering questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The ability to utilize naturalistic settings that provide insight into culture and context are unique to the approach. Because of the flexibly in the types of methods utilized and in sampling techniques, unique insights can be gained that can provide a voice for marginalized groups. The authentic insights and depth of detail in qualitative research provides researchers with the data to explain what is taking place in the phenomena that they are studying.

**Limitations.** In spite of the numerous benefits to qualitative research, there are some significant drawbacks involved in the use of qualitative methods. The need for extended time in the field combined with prolonged observations limits the utility of qualitative research. As well, dissemination of results, which need to offer thick descriptions and great detail regarding the researcher’s analysis process, are not conducive to publication in journals where page limitations on articles are imposed.

Qualitative research methods are able to provide great detail due to the limited number of participants in studies, but the trade-off to this is the lack of generalizability of
the study due, in part, to sample size and specificity (Silverman, 2004). The results of qualitative studies cannot be generalized to situations outside of the settings in which they have taken place. This, some would say, greatly limits the value of qualitative work.

Concerns with validity and reliability also confound the qualitative research paradigm. Although qualitative research proposes the use of other terms and techniques to account for validity and reliability of results, the subjective nature of the analysis and close engagement with participants cause many to consider the field a “soft science” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Summary

Qualitative research provides an opportunity for researchers to examine phenomena in a holistic manner. The various methodologies available to a researcher, the emphasis on utilizing naturalistic settings, and the goal of seeking the worldview of the participants can provide unique insights that may not be possible with other types of research paradigms. These characteristics of qualitative research make it well suited to research in education and psychology where describing the complex intricacies of a particular setting and within individual children is important to developing and evaluating the success of services provided to children.

As with any research method, there are limitations that must be considered prior to using a qualitative approach to a study. Careful attention must be paid before beginning a study to address techniques for ensuring the trustworthiness and rigor of a study or the data obtained can be compromised. With careful planning and implementation, qualitative research can assist researchers in discovering answers to a
variety of questions that seek to understand a process, seek the meaning individuals give to a social experience, and evaluate the role of culture in a phenomenon.

**Grounded Theory**

**Framework**

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that develops theory based on data that are systematically gathered and analyzed in the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, in 1967, grounded theory has its origins in symbolic interactionism and sociology (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Symbolic interactionism suggests “experiences take on meaning as they become symbolically significant through shared interaction” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 21). Glaser and Strauss believed that theory should be developed from studying the interactions and social processes of people in their environments so that the theory that is developed would be “grounded” in data (Creswell, 2007). A main tenet of grounded theory is the assumption that theory can be derived inductively. In other words, theory can be developed from the ground up through the process of studying the social world (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process of analyzing the data is ongoing in grounded theory as the researcher studies the data to determine emergent themes that need to be further explored and examined.

The goal of grounded theory work is to develop a substantive theory or add to an existing theory that is generated from the data that is gathered. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined theory as “a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to
explain or predict phenomena” (p. 15). Theory that is developed is substantive because it is tied to the data and is focused upon the specific situation that was observed (Jacelon & O’Dell, 2005; Schram, 2003).

A wide variety of techniques may be utilized in grounded theory to obtain data, but several techniques are used more frequently than others in this type of research. In-depth interviewing, focus groups, and observations are several key methods utilized to provide data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data in grounded theory can be comprised of written transcripts of interviews, fieldnotes written by observers, observations noted by the researcher, or any other type of written material pertaining to the study. In grounded theory, data are collected until theoretical saturation has been reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical saturation occurs when new data sources no longer provide relevant data to add to a category or when the categories have enough data points to substantiate the theory.

Sampling techniques in grounded theory typically involves purposeful sampling where subjects are selected because of their knowledge of the research concern rather than using a random procedure (Creswell, 2007). This is particularly common after an initial sample has revealed new areas of interest to study and individuals with knowledge of the area need to be accessed to gain that level of information.

**Data Analysis**

On the most basic level data analysis in grounded theory is “an ongoing process of continually reviewing the data, refining questions, and re-evaluating these changes” (Jacelon & O’Dell, 2005, p. 51). Memoing, whereby the researcher writes down ideas
and thoughts about the analysis of the data, is an important process in all stages of data analysis.

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) described a six-step process to analyze data. The first two steps involve working directly with the text to filter through the myriad of data obtained to determine what portions of the text are most relevant to the research concern. Next, the researcher evaluates the subjective view of the participants and develops codes for related passages. In this process there is a constant comparison whereby the researcher reviews the data to look for similarities and differences and from this they construct categories or concepts upon which to begin further study (Schram, 2003). At the theory development level, there is a movement from the more abstract level of coding and categorizing to the grouping of constructs by themes and theory. Although the process seems to be linear, there is actually a back and forth flow between the steps as data are added to the study and new ideas and themes are evaluated (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) followed similar procedures to those suggested by Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), but the stages in the analysis of the data are more clearly specified. They suggested three stages of data analysis for grounded theory research: (a) open coding, (b) selective coding, and (c) axial coding.

**Open Coding**

The goal in open coding is for the researcher to be able to answer the question, “What’s this about?” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In open coding raw data are reviewed and initial concepts are identified. Concepts are defined and labeled as an event, object,
or interaction that the researcher believes is significant in the raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The coding of the data can take place in a number of different manners. In some cases line-by-line coding is utilized where a code is attached to each line of data. In other instances, a whole paragraph or another large section of text may be assigned a code.

After concepts are identified from the initial analysis of the data, categories are developed from the concepts. The researcher analyzes the data to search for how concepts are similar or different so that they can be grouped together into categories. Considering the properties and dimensions of items in a category can help to further specify categories, a process which takes places in the second stage of axial coding.

The properties of an item are the general or specific characteristics of a category (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). These properties are the attributes or the broad dimensions of a category (Creswell, 2007). For instance, if the category was “emotional responses,” the category might contain instances of feelings noted in the data. The dimensions of the category are defined as where along the continuum of behaviors the category might fall. Using the example above, the dimensions of the category could be “positive emotions” and “negative emotions” or perhaps “emotions directed towards self or towards others.” By considering the dimensions of a category it is possible to delineate and refine categories into more precise concepts. In open coding, the researcher is comparing the dimensions and properties of the concepts in order to build categories. At the end of open coding, the data have been pared down from individual concepts to the larger conceptual structure of categories.
Axial Coding

In axial coding, the process of searching for the relationships among categories is paramount. The researcher is seeking to study both the process and the structure to understand the phenomenon. Structure relates to why certain events take place while process refers to understanding the why of actions or interactions. Subcategories are generated as part of this process. Subcategories answer questions about the category such as when, where, why, and in what context and under what conditions does it occur (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is through this process that the data are combined in new ways and an understanding of the phenomenon develops.

The researcher can utilize a coding paradigm at this stage in coding as an organizational tool to help the researcher to understand the process the individuals have experienced and how it unfolds. A coding paradigm is comprised of three parts: conditions, action/interactions, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Conditions can be causal, intervening, or contextual. Causal conditions are categories of conditions such as events or settings that influence the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2007). Intervening conditions are those that in some way alter the causal conditions and as such cause an action/interaction to take place (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Contextual conditions help to explain why an event or action takes place. Actions/interactions specify what takes place among individuals or groups or people. Additionally, actions include a person’s thought processes, both verbal and non-verbal, that take place around a phenomenon. Consequences refer to the outcomes of the actions/interactions and how
these impact the phenomenon under study. When analyzing the data and the relationships, initial hypotheses are generated for further study in selective coding.

**Selective Coding**

In selective coding a central phenomenon, or the main theme of the research, is decided upon by the researcher from their prior analyses. The central phenomenon represents “what this research is all about” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). From this point a central story line is written which connects all of the categories around the central theme and reveals the hypotheses and states predicted relationships (Creswell, 2007). The theory that is developed is reviewed in light of the existing data to validate the findings and search for inconsistencies.

The findings from the grounded theory research are reported in a theoretical narrative that utilizes the constructs and themes detected in the analysis along with direct quotations from the participants to substantiate the work and give meaning to the social process (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The theory that is described and the task of the analysis that the researcher went through to construct the theory should be clear to the reader of the text.

**Advantages and limitations.** Grounded theory is a useful tool to gain an understanding of the processes in the social realm. The depth of understanding that can be gained and the opportunity to bring new insights and knowledge to a current theory by the use of grounded theory is a definite advantage to the methodology. The fluidity of the constant comparison process allows for the emergence of new ideas and themes that can be evaluated as the analysis is conducted (Liampittong & Ezzy, 2005). This
willingness to let the data direct the study is a definite benefit to grounded theory research.

There are limitations associated with grounded theory. As is true in all types of qualitative research methodologies, time and money constraints may prohibit the use of this form of research. Questions regarding the subjective nature of the data interpretation and the limits on the generalizability of the final narrative may also lead to reluctance to use grounded theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As stated by Jones and Alony (2011), “Selecting an appropriate research method is one of the most critical challenges presented to a doctoral researcher” (p. 95). The selection of grounded theory as a research method to study the meaningful social behaviors of girls in a structured leisure time activity was made based on several criteria. The primary reason for selecting grounded theory is that it is uniquely suited to studying the social world, which is the primary focus of this research project (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As well, grounded theory is often used to develop theory where none currently exists, as there is very little, if any, research on social skills in leisure time activities this was an important consideration in choosing this methodology. Finally, grounded theory provides a systematic method to analyze data gathered using a variety of techniques (e.g., interviews, observations, surveys) in a natural setting. Having a systematic means of analyzing data is a definite asset to any research process involving large amounts of data. The specific techniques and procedures used to gather, analyze and interpret the qualitative data in this study are provided in the following chapter.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Research Questions

The general research question that directed this study was: What are the meaningful social behaviors necessary for social competence with peers, troop leaders, and parent volunteers in Girl Scouts for Brownie and Junior Scouts? In order to answer this question, several other questions were posed to guide the research process to the desired endpoint. They include: (a) What are the social behaviors reported by both Brownie Scouts and Junior Scouts that are important for a good friend in their Girl Scout troop to demonstrate? (b) What are the social behaviors reported by only Brownie Scouts or by only Junior Scouts that are important for a good friend in their Girl Scout troop to demonstrate? (c) What are the social behaviors reported by both Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders as important for Girl Scouts to interact successfully with peers and troop leaders? (d) What are the social behaviors reported by only Brownie Scout or by only Junior Scout troop leaders as important for Girl Scouts to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders? (e) What are the social behaviors reported by Brownie Scout and by Junior Scout parents as important for Girls Scouts to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders?; and (f) What are the social behaviors reported by only Brownie Scout or by only Junior Scout parents as important for Girl Scouts to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders?
Data Collection

Permission from the Kent State University Institution Review Board (Appendix A) and the Chief Executive Officer of a regional Girl Scout governing body was obtained prior to commencing this study. This study was based upon a qualitative study conducted by Warnes et al. (2005) that examined which types of social behaviors second and fifth grade children, along with their teachers and parents, felt were essential for getting along well with the children’s peers in a school setting.

The primary investigator for this study collected several different types of qualitative data. The data collected included: (a) open-ended pencil and paper surveys, (b) semi-structured live interviews, (c) semi-structured phone interviews, and (d) direct observations. Specifically, troop leaders were asked to take part in a written survey and a follow up semi-structured interview with the principal investigator. Parent participants were asked to complete a written survey and had the option to select whether they would be willing to engage in a semi-structured phone interview with the principal investigator. A total of 15 Brownie and 15 Junior Scouts Scout participants were asked to take part in a semi-structured interview with the primary investigator. One “typical” Scout from each troop was selected by their troop leader to be observed for one 20-minute observation period during a portion of a Scout troop meeting. The observation time frame was selected to allow for an observer to see a representative sample of an activity that all Scouts in the troop participated in during the troop meeting. It was possible that a Scout could have been selected for both the interview and the observation portion of the study.
Participants were selected for this study using a variety of purposeful sampling procedures. Purposeful sampling involves choosing a case or individual for study because it highlights a feature or process that the researcher is interested in studying (Liampittong & Ezzy, 2005). The first individuals recruited to participate in the study were six troop leaders, three from Brownie Scout and three from Junior Scout troops. These troop leaders then acted as a conduit for the researcher to gain access to Girl Scouts and parents who would consider participating in this research project. As such, the primary investigator worked directly with troop leaders to send out and collect all correspondence including: (a) child interview consent form (Appendix B); (b) child interview and observation consent form (Appendix C); (c) troop leader survey and interview consent form (Appendix D); (d) parent survey and interview consent form (Appendix E); (e) child audiotape consent form (Appendix F); and (f) troop leader audiotape consent form (Appendix G). The troop leaders provided the completed forms to the primary investigator prior to any data collection.

**Participant Selection**

**Troop leaders.** Troop leaders were selected for the study through maximum variation sampling, a type of purposeful sampling. Maximum variation sampling involves selecting participants based on a criterion that differentiates them to enable the researcher to identify similarities and common patterns among participants (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the participants were differentiated by soliciting respondents from areas that contained suburban, urban, and rural settings. The inclusionary criteria for selecting troop leader participants in the study were as follows: (a) troop leaders had at
least one prior year of experience with their current troop of Girl Scouts; (b) they were leaders of either second year Brownie Scout or first and second year Junior Scout troops; and (c) they were willing to facilitate the recruitment of Scouts and parents in their troop to participate in the study. In order to collect sufficient data to achieve data saturation, it was determined that the first three Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders who met the above criteria would be selected for inclusion in the research project.

The volunteer coordinator at a local regional Girl Scout governing body emailed a participant recruitment flyer (Appendix H) to the 29 volunteer Service Unit Directors in one urban and one suburban county in a Midwestern state. The flyer was then disseminated by the volunteer Service Unit Directors, who coordinate activities for all levels of Girl Scout troops in a local area, to approximately 500 troop leaders via email or by a handout at their monthly troop leader meeting. It should be noted that it was possible that not all troop leaders receiving the emails were Brownie or Junior Scout troop leaders as volunteer Service Unit Directors may have forwarded the information directly from their email to all of their troop leaders without regard for the Brownie and Junior Scout designation.

In the flyer, the Brownie Scout and Junior Scout troop leaders who were interested in having their troop take part in the study were asked to contact the principal investigator or her advisor for more information about the project. A total of eight troop leaders inquired about having their troops participate in the study; however one was not a Brownie or Junior Scout leader and another inquiry did not return calls regarding her initial inquiry about the study. The remaining six troop leaders, three Brownie Scout
leaders and three Junior Scout troop leaders, met the aforementioned criteria for inclusion in the study and were selected for participation.

**Scout interviews.** Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit 15 Brownie Scout and 15 Junior Scout participants for the Scout interview portion of this study. Convenience sampling involves recruiting participants that the researcher can access easily to collect data (Creswell, 2007). In this case, Scouts were selected from the Girl Scout troops from which the leaders agreed to be participants in the study. The primary investigator provided troop leaders with cover letters and parent permission forms to request consent for Scouts to participate in this project. A higher number of participants were selected to receive an invitation to participate, 10 per troop, than was required for each troop. This was due to concerns with the rate of positive responses for the Scout participants. For troops with more than 10 Scouts, the primary investigator generated a random number chart identifying 10 numbers that Scout leaders were asked to select by alphabetizing their roster of Scouts by surname, and then selecting the Scouts corresponding to the random number generation. For troops with less than 10 Scouts, all Scouts were invited to participate. Ideally, five Scouts from each of three Brownie and Junior troops would participate in the study. However, due to differences in troop size and rates of positive responses for parental permission between the troops, this was not possible. Within the Brownie troops the distribution was six Scouts from one troop, five Scouts from the second troop, and four Scouts from the third troop. Within the Junior Scout troops, the distribution was seven Scouts from one troop, six Scouts from the second troop, and two Scouts from the third troop. One additional Junior Scout had
parental permission and gave verbal assent to participate; however, during the interview process the Scout indicated that she felt nervous and unsure of how to respond to the prompt that was provided. Noting her discomfort, the principal investigator reminded her that she did not have to participate and she elected not to do so. In total, 15 Brownie Scouts and 15 Junior Scouts participated in the Girl Scout interview portion of the study.

**Scout observations.** Typical case sampling, where a sample is selected due to the fact that serves as representative example of a phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994), was utilized to select Scout participants for the observation portion of this study. Within each troop, the troop leader was asked to rank their Scouts in terms of their perceptions of the child’s social skills, from highest to lowest, and select the two children who fell into the middle of their rankings. These children were then selected to receive a request to participate in the direct observation portion of the study. The primary investigator provided troop leaders with a packet of information to send home to the Scout’s parents, describing the study and requesting permission for a one time 20-minute observation of the Scout to be conducted during a Scout meeting. Two Scouts were sent forms to participate to allow for response rates although only one Scout per troop would be observed. In the event that more than one parent returned his or her permission forms to the troop leader, the parent who responded first had his or her child selected for the observation. In all cases, only one permission form was returned per troop. Thus each troop that participated had one Scout who was observed as part of this study.

**Parents.** To ensure that the parent would have familiarity with the functioning of the troops, Scout leaders were asked to select two parents who had participated in at least
two Scouting events or meetings in the past year to take part in the study. Again, although only one parent response per troop was needed for the study, two requests were made to account for response rates. If more than one parent responded to the survey, the first response received by the troop leader was selected for inclusion in the study. Each Brownie Scout troop had at least one parent indicate a willingness to participate. On the other hand, only two Junior Scout troops had a parent who indicated an interest in taking part in the study. The troop who did not have a parent willing to participate was comprised of only five Scouts and the parent of one of the Scouts was the troop leader. The two parents who met the criteria and received a request to participate in the study were unwilling to do so. Therefore, all three Brownie Scout troops and two out of three Junior Scout troops had a parent complete a survey form for the study.

**Procedures**

After the Brownie and Junior Scout troop leader participants had been selected for inclusion in the study, the troop leaders were contacted by telephone by the principal investigator to schedule a time to attend a troop meeting for data collection. All permission forms were mailed to the troop leaders well in advance of the scheduled troop meeting for dissemination to parents. In this way, parents could contact the principal investigator or advisor with any questions regarding their own or their child’s participation in the study, prior to the date that responses needed to be returned to the troop leader. At the troop meeting, the principal investigator collected the completed adult participant written surveys from the troop leader, conducted Scout interviews, and
carried out an observation of a Scout participant. A summary of the various procedural steps taken for each group follows.

**Participant Groups**

**Troop leaders.** On the written survey provided to troop leaders (Appendix I), the open-ended query was designed to develop a comprehensive list of observable behaviors that Girl Scouts need to be successful in interacting with their peers and troop leaders. The principal investigator reviewed the written survey responses to determine items that required clarification or further elaboration to provide greater depth to the responses. Next, the leader was contacted to arrange a time to meet one on one to conduct the follow-up standardized semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted by the principal investigator in a quiet setting either at the troop leader’s home or at a private space in a restaurant. One troop leader was unable to meet in person due to scheduling conflicts and a phone interview was conducted. The interviews varied in length from approximately 10 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes, depending on the verbosity of the participant’s responses to the queries and the number of items written on the initial survey form.

During the interview the troop leaders were asked to expound upon their written responses by providing examples and clarifying any information. If in the process of doing so other topics were raised relative to the study topic, then the interviewer probed these responses for examples or additional details. Troop leaders were also asked to indicate what they felt was the most important social skill for Girl Scouts in their troop to possess and whether they had any additional information that they wanted to add to their
written responses. All interviews were audiotaped and then forwarded to a third party independent transcriber.

**Scout interviews.** The principal investigator conducted a semi-structured individual interview with each Scout selected for interview participation during their Girl Scout meeting. Prior to the start of the interviews, a script (Appendix J) was followed to attain assent from the child participants. The interviews took place in a quiet location at the meeting site. In the semi-structured open ended interview, the Girl Scouts were asked to think about a friend they enjoy being with in Scouting, and to list what this Scout does that causes her to want to be her friend. The principal investigator prompted the Scouts to further delineate responses that reflected feelings about their friends rather than specific behaviors. For example, if the Scout replied that her friend was nice, the interviewer would ask the Scout to tell her what the person does that makes the Scout think she is nice. All interviews were audiotaped and then forwarded to third party independent transcriber for later data analysis by the principal investigator.

**Scout observations.** A total of six Scouts, one from each troop, were observed for a 20 minute period comprised of a 15-minute observation period, with a 5-minute warm-up time. The principal investigator observed a Girl Scout a troop meeting using an antecedent-behavior-consequences chart. Troop leaders were asked to have the troop engaged in an activity allowing for interaction with peers such as working on a craft, snack time, or other similar activity. However, this did not take place in all observations for the entire time. In four of the observations, the Scouts were engaged in a craft project during the observation period while the remaining two involved a teaching scenario with
limited social interaction time. In order to facilitate recording, a guide of positive social behaviors derived from Caldarella and Merrell’s (1997) taxonomy of positive social behaviors was used to facilitate data collection and the coding of data (Appendix K). The taxonomy identifies the five most commonly indicated positive social skills patterns as determined via a review of twenty years of factor analytic studies on social skills among youth. The five most commonly reported positive social behaviors from each of the five dimensions (e.g., Peer Relations, Self-Management, Academic Compliance, and assertion) were compiled to use as an aid for the observation portion of the study. Results of the observations were compared to social behaviors listed by study participants as important to social competence in Scouting.

Parents. Parents who were selected for participation were asked to complete an open-ended written survey form (Appendix L). This form asked the parents to list the important social behaviors that they believed were necessary for the Scouts to have to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders in Scouting. All of the parent participants indicated on their surveys that they would be willing to participate in a brief follow-up phone interview; however, only three parents, two Brownie Scout parents and one Junior Scout parent, took part in the interview process. The researcher was unable to establish contact or connect with the remaining two parents. As with the troop leader interviews, the follow-up phone interview with a parent involved having them clarify or elucidate their response to their written survey by providing additional information or examples. If the parent brought up a new topic that was relevant to the study, the
principal investigator would also explore these answers to ensure that all relevant data were collected.

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory methodology was employed to analyze survey and interview data from the troop leaders, parents, and Scouts, a synopsis of this process is provided in Figure 1. Grounded theory was selected for this study due to the emphasis on social processes and issues, and the ability to develop themes and categories as the data are collected (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is a design that is utilized when existing theory is not available to explain a process, or when the theory that is available does not pertain to the population of interest (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although an exploratory grounded theory study utilizing a contextual approach to the assessment of social skills was conducted by Warnes et al. (2005), there were several differences between the exploratory study and the current study: (a) in the exploratory study, the research was conducted in a school setting and the participants for the study were students, teachers, and parents; (b) the study utilized only written survey responses for the adult participants whereas the current study attempted to incorporate individual interviews with adult participants in the study; (c) male and female participants were included among the child and adult respondents whereas due to the nature of the activity in the current study, all but one participant in the study was female; (d) the current study included a direct observation of a child from each Scout troop.
Figure 1. Flow chart of stepwise progression of data analysis procedures
Thematic analysis (i.e., the work of coding, sorting, and organizing data; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005), incorporated the following sources of data: (a) all troop leader and parent written surveys; (b) transcripts of troop leader and Scout interviews; and (c) notes written from parent phone interviews during data collection. To enhance comparisons among the various categories of participants (i.e., Scouts, troop leaders, and parents) and between groups (i.e., Brownie Scout and Junior Scout) data sets were created by first analyzing one participant category from Brownie Scouts and then analyzing the corresponding participant category from Junior Scouts. For example, one by one all of the Brownie Scout troop leader’s data were coded followed by individual coding of each of the Junior Scout troop leader’s data. This was found to be helpful in ensuring consistency in coding similar responses between the participants from the Brownie Scout troops to the Junior Scout troops.

In order to answer the research questions regarding comparisons among groups of participants after all coding was completed, the following sets of comparisons were made and analyzed for similarities and differences between: (a) Brownie Scouts and Junior Scouts; (b) Brownie Scout troop leaders and Junior Scout troop leaders; (c) Brownie Scout parents and Junior Scout parents; and (d) all participant categories.

**Content Analysis**

Three steps were undertaken in the content analysis of the data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The goal of open coding is to “discover, name, and categorize phenomena according to their properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin,
Initial categories and relationships were developed in this study through the process of open coding to provide a preliminary analysis of the raw data.

**Open coding.** The process of open coding began with the principal investigator reading a written survey response or a transcript of an interview from one participant. After a careful review the principal investigator began to make notes regarding conceptual categories that emerged and then assigned a conceptual code to describe the phenomenon. As a code was identified, it was indicated in the text by highlighting the section of the text to be coded and then placing a handwritten code above the text. Next, another written survey or transcript from the same participant category (i.e., Brownie Scout troop leaders) was reviewed. During the review, comparative analysis was used to identify common themes between the previously coded data and the data being reviewed. If similarities existed, the same code was ascribed to both items and new codes were also identified and recorded. Topics brought up that were not related to Scouting or to the troop leader’s troop that was in the study were omitted from the coding process. The comparative analysis procedure continued until the principal investigator had coded all transcripts and written surveys.

After independent coding by the principal investigator, a coding consistency check was conducted by two doctoral graduate students in school psychology to validate the initial coding categories and themes. To accomplish this, a procedure similar to one used by Warnes et al. (2005) was utilized. After the principal investigator had assigned all of the conceptual codes, the first reviewer was provided with the coded data for verification. A decision flow chart was devised to assist the reviewer in this task (Figure
2). Upon reviewing a code, the first reviewer was instructed to determine if she agreed with the principal investigator’s code for the data. If she was in agreement, she was instructed to place a checkmark next to the text and continue with the review. If she was not in agreement with the code assigned by the principal investigator, she was directed to look at the master code list for that participant category and determine if another existing code was a better fit for the data. If this was the case, she was to highlight the text in yellow and list the code that she felt was appropriate in the right margin next to the text. If she did not feel that a code existed in the master code list that was appropriate for the data, she was to highlight the code in pink and indicate in the left margin what she thought the appropriate code should be for the data.

A second independent reviewer was utilized to resolve any disputed codes found by the first reviewer. This was accomplished by: (a) having the second reviewer affirm the category applied by the principal investigator; (b) having the second reviewer agree with the code determined by the first reviewer; or (c) having the two reviewers and principal investigator agree upon a new conceptual code. The first reviewer found eight instances where there was a disagreement with the principal investigator’s code and felt that another code that already existed for the data set was appropriate. The second reviewer evaluated these items, and in conjunction with the principal investigator, agreed with the changes.

**Axial coding.** The goal of axial coding is to systematically put the data set together in new ways to connect and relate categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to accomplish this task, a card sort procedure similar to the one used by Warnes et al.
Do you agree with the code assigned to the data?

Place a checkmark next to coded text and continue with review.

Is there an existing code in the master code list for the participant category that is appropriate?

Highlight coded text in yellow and indicate new code from master code list in right margin.

Highlight coded text in pink and indicate alternate code for text in left margin.

Disputed codes are reviewed by second independent reviewer.

Second reviewer affirms code set by principal investigator, initial code is affirmed.

Second reviewer agrees with code selected by first reviewer, the code is changed.

Second reviewer does not agree with code from principal investigator or first reviewer. Two reviewers and principal investigator meet to come to consensus on new code to be applied to the text.

*Figure 2. Conceptual coding decision flowchart.*
(2005) was utilized to further assess the relationships among the coded data. Five research assistants, all currently obtaining either a master’s or doctoral degree in school psychology, were asked to participate in the card sort procedure. The principal investigator placed on individual index cards all of the codes created during open coding for a particular participant category (i.e., Brownie Scouts, Junior Scouts, Brownie troop leaders, Junior Troop leaders, Brownie parents, and Junior parents). Six separate sets of cards were created, one set of cards from each participant category. Working independently, the research assistants were directed to sort the cards from one participant category at a time into piles of cards based on similarities or themes they noted between the codes. No minimum or maximum amounts of cards were required to make a pile, nor did any cards have to be placed into a pile if there were not similarities between them and the other cards. The research assistants were not asked to label the piles in any manner. Each research assistant completed this process for all six of the participant categories.

The principal investigator then gathered the completed sets of card sorts, six sorts in total, from each research assistant and entered the information regarding the sort results into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Specifically, each research assistant’s card sorts groupings created for a participant category were entered onto the spreadsheet. In this manner the principal investigator was able to see what codes each research assistant put together into piles. This resulted in having six separate spreadsheets, one for each participant category that documented all of the coded groupings made by the five research assistants. Each Excel spreadsheet was then sorted to determine what codes three or more of the research assistants put together in the same pile. One code was
eliminated from the data set when it was determined that the majority of research assistants did not group the code, “parents able to separate from children,” into any pile during the card sort. The spreadsheets for each participant category, indicating what codes were grouped together by the majority of research assistants, was utilized in selective coding.

**Selective coding.** In the final phase of coding, the general themes and categories for the data set are integrated and refined to develop theory (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A central category or central phenomenon is identified and theory is built around this theme. To develop themes and categories, the principal investigator utilized the coded data sets for each participant category along with the groupings agreed upon by the majority of researchers from the card sort procedure to begin to look for commonalities among the data. A set of themes was devised for each participant category. Exemplars from the coded data were used to further delineate the themes by providing a rich description of the categories.

**Comparisons between participant categories.** The principal investigator then compared codes between: (a) Brownie Scouts and Junior Scouts; (b) Brownie Scout troop leaders and Junior Scout troop leaders; and (c) Brownie Scout parents and Junior Scout parents to analyze similarities and differences in coded responses between the aforementioned groupings. A template was created to indicate all coded responses by participant category (i.e., Brownie Scout, Brownie troop leader, Brownie parent, Junior Scout, Junior troop leader, Junior parent). Next an analysis of the template was completed to identify those social behaviors indicated by the majority of participant
categories. Two sets of criteria were used to determine agreement among the majority of participant categories. First, at least four out of six participant categories had to indicate that the social behavior was important in Scouting. Second, within each of the two groups (i.e., Brownies and Juniors) at least two out of three participant categories (i.e., Scout/troop leader/parent) had to indicate that the social behavior was important for Girl Scouts. This procedure ensured that social behaviors identified as being important to the majority of participant categories were represented by the majority of participants in Brownie and Junior Scout groups. Without the second step being completed, it would be possible for a social behavior to meet the first criteria of having a majority of participant categories by having all participants in one group (i.e., Brownie) plus only one additional person from the second group (i.e., Juniors) to meet the criteria of four out of six participant categories. By adding the second criteria, the majority of participants from both groups (i.e., Brownie and Juniors) had to agree that a behavior was important to Scouts to be considered a majority.

In order to ensure the integrity of selective coding, a copy of the completed final draft of results from the study was provided to a current troop leader in Girl Scouts for verification of the content analysis. The individual selected for this member check had experience as a troop leader for two separate troops. In the first troop, she was a troop leader for one year at the Brownie Scout level and two years at the Junior Scout level. In her second troop, she was a troop leader for one year at the Daisy Scout level and for two years at the Brownie Scout level. Additionally, she is a parent to two daughters who have participated in Girl Scouts.
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

Results of the data analysis are presented in this chapter by restating the research questions and providing information obtained from the data analysis to answer the questions. The data are presented from the Scouts’ perspective whenever possible, as they are the primary criterion group for social validity in the study. A table of the results from each question is provided in addition to a written commentary. When direct quotations are used to present information by the participants, the quotations have been edited to delete utterances that were determined to be secondary to the comment’s meaning, such as “um,” “you know,” and “hmm.” Interviewer queries asking the participant to provide an example of a behavior were also omitted from quotations unless they contained information beyond restating an utterance and/or requesting an example.

Presentation of Results: Research Question 1

What are the social behaviors reported by both Brownie Scouts and Junior Scouts that are important for a good friend in their Girl Scout troop to demonstrate?

Brownie Scouts and Junior Scouts agreed upon a number of social behaviors as important qualities for a friend in Scouting. These social behaviors, reported in Table 1, are particularly meaningful as they span the age levels from Brownie Scouts, approximately 6 to 9 years of age, to Junior Scouts, who are approximately 9 to 11 years of age.
Table 1

*Social Behaviors Reported by Both Brownie and Junior Scouts as Important for a Friend in Scouting to Demonstrate*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scouts</th>
<th>Junior Scouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive/Aware of needs of others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide social/emotional support</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for friend’s feelings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives compliments</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engages others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive of others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loyal to friends</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk and play together</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthful/Honest</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive affect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind/Nice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In reviewing the common responses provided by both the Brownie and Junior Scouts, it was noted that the social behaviors were comprised of several themes: (a) supportive/aware of needs of others (i.e., helps others, provide social/emotional support, encourages others, concern for friend’s feelings, gives compliments); (b) engages others (i.e., inclusive of others, shares); (c) loyal to friends (i.e., proximity, talk and play together); (d) integrity (i.e., truthful/honest, trustworthy, respects others); and (e) positive affect (i.e., kind/nice, fun/funny). A discussion of the category content and excerpts from participant interviews follows.

Supportive/Aware of Needs of Others

Many of the social behaviors indicated by the Scouts relate to their desire to have friends who are aware of the needs of other girls and who can provide support to friends in a variety of situations. Social behaviors in this theme reflect behaviors that the Scouts engage in that show their willingness to help friends in need and support them socially and emotionally. Examples of these behaviors include: helps others, provides social and emotional support, encourages others, and gives compliments.

Helps others. One of the most frequently stated social behaviors among both Brownie and Junior Scouts was the category of helps others. The Brownie and Junior Scout participants value friends who (a) provide assistance with a task; (b) provide them with information; or (c) give assistance when someone is physically hurt.

Providing assistance with a task was mentioned by a Brownie Scout (Troop 1) who indicated, “They always help me with stuff.” When prompted to give examples, she said that friends could assist you, “If you are making something for Valentine’s Day, they
could color something” and “They could help you fix something.” A Junior Scout who was in charge of starting a campfire provided an example of helping others by giving assistance with a task. She stated, “They just help me out, like for camping if I can’t start the fire, they’ll start doing it with me, and it takes a lot of work to do it” (Junior Scout, Troop 2).

A Brownie Scout, when talking about a Girl Scout sponsored event, gave an example of helping others by providing information. She said, “If you have trouble on a game they’ll tell you if nobody’s there; they’ll tell you how the game is played maybe if they know it. And they will tell you the directions so you know” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2). Another Brownie Scout echoed the same theme by noting, “They are always around me helping me out if I need it. Like, if I can’t figure something out, if they know it, they’ll tell me what to do” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1). Again referring to a Girl Scout sponsored event, a Junior Scout participant stated that “If you don’t know where to go to or anything they’ll take you around to show you where to go.” The daughter of a troop leader gave an example of how her friends in Scouting provide her with information. She said, “Like if I missed a Girl Scout meeting they tell me like some things that I have missed” (Junior Scout, Troop 3). Both Brownie Scouts and Junior Scouts were able to provide clear examples of the value of having friends who are able to see a need and provide help to meet that need.

Occasions when an individual has been injured and a friend was able to provide assistance are another area in which both the Brownie and Junior Scouts indicated the
importance of having a friend who could respond to their needs. One Brownie Scout stated:

They like comfort me and they say are you feeling okay, because like if you didn’t have someone to stick up for you and ask you, and you were really injured and you couldn’t like get up, you would need that person to go find someone.

And those friends can be really important when you need them. (Brownie Scout, Troop 2)

Another Brownie shared how in some situations there were instances when children would make fun of someone who fell down; however she shared how her friends in Scouting would handle the situation differently. She stated, “Well, usually if my brother falls they would usually laugh, but they don’t laugh at my brother, they help my brother” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1). A similar experience was related by a Junior Scout who said, “And if somebody got hurt, that happened once, nobody made fun of the person. They helped them” (Junior Scout, Troop 1). It is not surprising that the Brownie and Junior Scouts both stated that helping others was an important behavior, as it is affirmed in the Girl Scout Promise. The Girl Scout Promise is taught in the first level of Scouting, Daisies, and is emphasized throughout all levels of Scouting. The Girl Scout Promise states that “On my honor I will try: To Serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girl Scout Law.” The Girl Scout Promise is the way that Girl Scouts agree to act every day toward one another and other people (Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 2012).
**Provides social/emotional support.** Some variation in responses between the younger Brownie Scouts and the older Junior Scouts in this category may be due to differing developmental levels; however, the basic premise of the responses remained the same. The Brownie Scouts were more likely to refer to times when they had no one to play with when a friend would step into play with them, whereas the older Junior Scouts were better able to describe a more complex social scenario in which a friend provided support to them.

As indicated above, Brownie Scouts related social support from their peers to play-related activities. Several Brownie Scouts were quite appreciative of having friends who would come to play with them at times when no one else wanted to play with them. For example, “They always are there for me when I don’t have a friend to play with. That’s very important” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2), and “So like when I am on the playground and stuff and I am all alone they’ll come and play with me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2).

Two Brownie Scouts described scenarios where their friends in Scouting provided them with emotional support. One Scout described how her friends in Scouting provide support when she is sad. She stated, “If you’re not really happy they will always try to cheer you up and stuff with jokes” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1). The other Scout noted: “They always like stick up for me because when I’m sad they always ask me what’s the matter” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2).
A Junior Scout related a social situation in her troop where a friend was able to provide social support to her in what could have been an embarrassing situation. She said,

When we were on a field trip, they say, like we went out to McDonalds for a field trip a couple years ago and I wanted something that nobody else was getting and then some people were like “Ewww.” And my best friend in the troop she’s like, “Oh no, that’s not disgusting, that’s just what people like.” (Junior Scout, Troop 3)

In a similar manner another Junior Scout (Troop 1) described a scenario where a friend came to her aid to provide support: “Like if someone is being mean or making fun of me or something like that, they will help you. They will tell them to stop doing that.” In addition to providing support in front of others, another Junior Scout described how a friend can provide social advice in a difficult situation: “Like with other friends, if we get into a fight or something, they help us about it. They tell us, ‘Just like say you’re sorry’” (Junior Scout, Troop 3).

**Encourages others.** Brownie and Junior Scouts stated that they like friends in Scouting who provide encouragement to them. The Scouts provided descriptions of times when encouragement was given to them by a friend in their troop when they were engaging in an activity where they were working hard, but were not confident of their skills. A Brownie Scout said, “And when I am really trying to do something, they really encourage me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2). A Junior Scout relayed the following scenario where she received encouragement from her friends in Scouting:
They just support me when I’m nervous. Well, I was thinking about trying out for a play and then I started out to sing for the Girl Scout troop and I stopped in the middle of the song and I was like, “Oh, I’m horrible” and everyone was like, “No, keep on going, it’s really good.” (Junior Scout, Troop 3)

Another Junior Scout provided a good summary of how her friends in Scouting provide encouragement: “They give me support when I need it because sometimes I don’t believe that I can do it but, then they say I can and they let me try again” (Junior Scout, Troop 1).

**Concern for friend’s feelings.** In this category there were a variety of responses that noted differing ways that a good friend in Scouting showed concern for their friend’s feelings. Unlike in the past categories, in this category it was the absence of a behavior that was viewed as being an important quality in friends. For example, Junior Scouts noted that they have friends in Scouting that don’t call names such as: “They just, don’t call me names” (Junior Scout, Troop 3) or “Well they don’t say anything that’s mean. They don’t call names and they, they don’t get mean if I have a bad idea or something”. (Junior Scout, Troop 2)

Besides not engaging in verbal behaviors that would harm a friend’s feelings, a Brownie Scout described a physical response which friends in Scouting refrain from doing. She stated, “They never yell at me. They never push or shove me or do anything mean” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2). A Brownie Scout shared her views on the importance of friends not only refraining from name calling, but also on how she ensures that potential friends are kind and nice. She provided the following quote in response to being asked if she had anything else she wanted to say at the end of her interview:
Not really, but that they are kind and a friend has to be kind and sweet and you have to test friends out before you actually get to know them. Because like if friends are mean and say mean things that you don’t like, they aren’t a true friend because friends would never do that. And I don’t be mean and say, “I’m testing you out,” but I just walk around with them and see if I would like to play with them. (Brownie Scout, Troop 1)

A third Brownie Scout indicated that there were other types of verbal slings that friends who cared about your feelings did not participate in, such as, “And they never go, like if I accidentally did something wrong or something, ‘I don’t want to be your friend anymore.’ They say, ‘It’s okay, just try not to do it again’” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1).

It appears from these responses that while both Junior and Brownie Scouts value friends who care for their feelings, the manner in which it is demonstrated varies by age level. The younger Brownie Scouts with less developed verbal skills may be more likely to engage in verbal sparring beyond name-calling and also engage in physical behaviors when upset. The older Junior Scouts with their superior verbal repertoire appear able to express their negative opinions to others with greater ease without resorting to the dissolution of friendships or physical engagement.

**Gives compliments.** Two Scouts provided input on how they enjoyed friends who provided compliments to them. For instance, a Brownie Scout explained, “They write nice letters to me. Sometimes if we write, they always say that I am their best friend and write why. And that is one thing that makes me happy inside” (Brownie Scout, Troop 3). A Junior Scout described another episode of providing compliments:
“They just act to me in a kind way; they compliment me like how they complimented me today” (Junior Scout, Troop, 3).

**Engages Others**

A willingness to invite others to take part in activities was noted by Brownie and Junior Scouts as a desirable social behavior in friends. This same willingness to engage with others is also present in the desire of Scouts to have friends who will share their belongings to someone who is in need. Social behaviors included in this theme include being *inclusive of others* and *shares*.

**Inclusive of others.** A Junior Scout best articulated the content of this category when she was discussing the behaviors she likes in her Scouting friends: “They really just include me and they make me feel like I’m a part of something instead of like a weirdo or something like that” (Junior Scout, Troop 3). As this Scout described, being included in activities with a group of peers is very important. A Brownie Scout provided further evidence of the importance of having a friend or friends who invite you to participate with them when she stated:

Well, every game they play they ask me to join them. Yes, and they never leave me out of anything. We get all the girls together and we all play together. That would be kind of mean to leave someone out. (Brownie Scout, Troop 3)

Further support of the importance of this attribute can be found in a study of third through sixth grade boys and girls. In this study being included in a group was the most frequently reported behavior in response to the question: “What do boys/girls do when they want to be nice to someone?” (Smith, 1995). Perhaps this is especially true in
Scouting, as the premise in being a member of a troop is by its very nature an inclusive activity.

**Shares.** Another social behavior noted by both Brownie and Junior Scouts that they appreciate is having a Scout who will share with others. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> When I play a game and I lose and then they win, then they might share their prize with me. And if I forgot something of mine they would let me have it. Like once on a camping trip I forgot my clothes. Because we were doing a fashion show, so everybody took apart something from their thing that they brought so that I could have an outfit. (Junior Scout, Troop 2)

And a Brownie Scout noted, “Well, let’s say my dishes are dirty at camping, and I haven’t had time to clean them. Maybe they would offer some dishes for me to borrow” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2). Offering to share your items with others in need is a behavior that may lead to reciprocity with the recipient of the gesture in the future, furthering good will among troop members.

**Loyal to Friends**

This theme contains two social behaviors, *proximity* and *talk and play together*. These categories reflect the importance that Scouts related about having friends who remain by your side and do activities with you aren’t alone and who seek you out talk and “hang out”.

**Proximity.** Having friends that want to be physically close to their friends in social settings is a behavior deemed important by Brownie and Junior Scouts. The
following three examples by Brownie Scouts highlight the value of having a friend who “wants to do everything” with them: (a) “Well, when I went camping my friends were there and we always stayed together because there is not a lot of people that I knew there. We sat together everywhere. We just did everything together” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1); (b) “We share a bunk. By the campfire we sit by each other, and sit by each other at the lunch and swim together in the pool at Camp Ledgewood” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1); and (c) “Usually they’re just like always by me and always do everything with me and that’s about it” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2). In the same vein, a Junior Scout stated that with her friends in Scouting: “We sleep in the same cabin right next to each other” (Troop 3). A less vivid description of the importance of having friends by your side was noted by both Brownie Scouts (Troop 2) and Junior Scouts (Troop 1, Troop 3), who stated having friends “to hang out” with socially is a behavior that they like in their friends. Whether it is the all absorbing nature of having a special person by your side continuously, or the relaxed nature of having friends that you just like to spend time with socially, staying in close proximity to a friend in Girl Scouts is an important social behavior.

**Talk and play together.** Another category agreed upon by both Brownie and Junior Scouts as being important was that their friends play with them and talk to them. In general the Scouts related that, “They play with you/me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1, Troop 2, Troop 3; Junior Scout, Troop 1, Troop 3). As well, in very simple terms it was noted that friends “Talk with me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1), or as stated by a Junior Scout, “Well, wherever we are we just always hang out together and chat” (Junior Scout, Troop 1).
Integrity

Friends who adhere to principles such as being *truthful* and *honest, trustworthy* and *respectful of others* comprise the social behaviors within this theme.

**Truthful/honest.** Both Brownie Scouts and Junior Scouts provided similar straightforward statements about the value of friends in Girl Scouts who are truthful and honest in their interactions with others. One Brownie Scout stated, “They’re truthful and nice” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1). Another Scout provided an example to highlight her point, “Well, I have this one friend, she lies to me and my other two friends aren’t like that, they never lie to me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1). An example of the value of truthfulness and honesty was provided by a Junior Scout who noted that she liked how her friends made her feel and how they treat her; however she stated, “And sometimes they start annoying me and I get really upset. I still really like them and they’re my friends because they’re honest and truthful to me and that is about it” (Junior Scout, Troop 2).

**Trustworthy.** Both Brownie and Junior Scouts mentioned “being trustworthy” as an important behavior in Girl Scout friends. A Brownie Scout stated, “They trust me, sometimes I tell something and it’s true, but it doesn’t sound true, but they trust me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1). A Junior Scout also referred to being trusted by a friend in a noteworthy manner. When asked by the interviewer to provide an example of what her friend does to show that “She trusts me,” she responded that she tells me, “Things that she’s not supposed to tell me because the others girls say not to tell me” (Junior Scout, Troop 1). In this example, loyalty was shown to one friend by being untrustworthy to the
friends who asked her not to share information. The other examples of trustworthiness given by Junior Scouts focused on friends being trustworthy by keeping confidences such as “When I tell them a secret, they just keep it to themselves” (Junior Scout, Troop 3), and “They talk a lot, they talk about different things and tell secrets that nobody else will tell anybody” (Junior Scout, Troop 1).

**Respects others.** Although this category is comprised of only two responses, the sentiments expressed by the girls providing the remarks are compelling. The Brownie Scout stated that her friends in Scouting “treat me the way that they want to be treated” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2). The quote by the Brownie Scout reflects the moral ethics of the Golden Rule; the basic concept of the Golden Rule as found in Confucianism is “Do not do to others what you would not like yourself” (Analects 12:2). The Junior Scout demonstrated a high degree of social awareness regarding friendships in her comment about her friends in Scouting. She said, “They like me for who I am, not for the stuff that I have or the things that I do for them” (Junior Scout, Troop 1). The Junior Scout noted that her friends liked and respected her for who she was as a person rather than for status or potential gains.

**Positive Affect**

Scouts noted that they enjoyed friends in Girl Scouts who were *kind* and *nice* to them. The girls also expressed an appreciation of friends who were *funny* or *fun* to be around.

**Kind/Nice.** Both Junior and Brownie Scouts often responded that their friends in Scouting were nice. For instance a Junior Scout said, “I just can’t stay away from them
because they’re such nice people and some of them are the most amazing and nice people I’ve ever met” (Junior Scout, Troop 2). Brownie Scouts shared the same sentiments in stating: “Well they are really nice to me and they are never really mean to me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2) and “They are kind to me” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1).

**Fun/Funny.** This category showed some variations in responses between Brownies and Junior Scouts as well as within Junior Scout troops. Two Brownie Scouts both relayed comments indicating that their friends are fun to be with in Girl Scouts, such as: “Well they just make it fun like” (Brownie Scout, Troop 1) and “Well, I have a lot of fun with them” (Brownie Scout, Troop 2). A Scout from Brownie Troop 3 stated, “They’re really funny to play with and they make me laugh. One likes to say jokes. One pretends to do funny things. Like she does different kinds of moves that would be funny.” The majority of the participants from Junior Scout Troop 1 indicated that they also enjoyed friends in Scouting who are fun or funny, however, participants from other Junior Scout troops did not indicate fun or funny as a social behavior that they value in friends.

In Junior Scout Troop 1, telling jokes was noted by three different participants as a way of being funny, such as: (a) “They make jokes and talk about things that happened at school that was funny. They talk about people in their family that did sort of strange stuff;” (b) “They tell jokes and they [are] always just trying to be funny in every way;” and (c) “They’re funny, they love to tell jokes.” One of the Junior Scouts who enjoyed telling jokes stated the following behavior that she liked in friends, “They laugh at my jokes” (Junior Scout Troop 1). As can be seen in this example, although some social
behaviors may be highly valued in one setting, perhaps due to the composition of the participants or the adults in charge, they may not be appreciated in the same manner in another setting.

**Presentation of Results: Research Question 2**

What are the social behaviors reported by only Brownie Scouts or by only Junior Scouts that are important for a good friend in their Girl Scout troop to demonstrate?

**Social Behaviors Reported by Brownie Scouts and Not by Junior Scouts**

*Copying each other’s choices* is the only social behavior that was noted by Brownie Scouts and not by Junior Scouts as a behavior that good friends possess. This item was provided by a Brownie Scout with regard to picking out the same items for crafts or projects. The Brownie Scout stated, “We also like when we are doing a craft and teacher tells us to pick out a piece of paper. We only get the same pieces of paper. Yeah and like the same color, but not all the time” (Brownie Scout, Troop 3).

**Social Behaviors Reported by Junior Scouts and Not by Brownie Scouts**

Responses, presented in Table 2, by Junior Scouts and not by Brownie Scouts, reflect several diverse topics (a) *able to settle down*; (b) *cooperative* (c) *excited about activities/share experiences*; (d) *fair*; (e) *listening skills*; (f) and *polite*. These social behaviors appear to reflect the developing social awareness of the Scouts regarding the increasing role that friends play in their lives.
Table 2

*Social Behaviors Reported by Junior Scouts but not by Brownie Scouts as Important for a Friend in Scouting to Demonstrate*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout</th>
<th>Junior Scout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to settle down</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited about activities/Share experiences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Able to settle down.** The ability to slow down and be calm when appropriate was noted by a Junior Scout as a desirable behavior in friends. She stated, “Well, I like friends that aren’t that rough and aren’t always joking around and are sometimes serious. Like not playing rough, and not jumping around everywhere” (Junior Scouts, Troop 2).

**Cooperative.** Having the capability to compromise and be accommodating to others instead of insisting on having your own way was noted as a positive behavior in Junior Scouts. This appeared to be particularly important in regard to making decisions about activities. For instance, one Junior Scout said:

Well what makes me really want to spend time with them in Girl Scout activities is that like if you want to do something and they want to do something a little differently, they won’t start begging and pleading for it. And they might just say,
“We can do your idea first or my idea second, and have some first solutions.”

(Junior Scout, Troop 2)

Another person stated, “Like whenever somebody says, ‘Well, why don’t we play this game?’ and we all agree on it” (Junior Scout, Troop 3).

**Excited about activities/share experiences.** Friends who are eager to participate in Scouting activities was noted by Junior Scouts (Troop 1, Troop 2) as a desirable social behaviors in their fellow Scouts. For example one Scout stated, “Well they are always like excited to do the activities” (Junior Scout, Troop 1). That Scout then went on to discuss a particular event where the troop member shared a memorable experience:

One time we thought that we were supposed to like choose a song and memorize it and my friends were all nervous and then it was a big relief that we were all being dramatic when we found out that we really didn’t need to memorize a song.

(Junior Scout, Troop 1)

In addition to the fun of being with friends who are excited about participating in activities, a sense of camaraderie may develop within the troop as members share experiences and develop memories of special times spent together.

**Fair.** Fairness among friends was an important social behavior noted by Junior Scouts. One Junior Scout related:

And on camping trips and stuff they let me sleep by them. And even if someone else wants to sleep by them, they sleep in the middle of us so that it is fair, and they try to make things so that I can have some of it and they can have some of it.

(Junior Scout, Troop 2)
Listening skills. Junior Scouts noted that being a good listener is an important behavior for their friends in Scouting to demonstrate. Having your opinions heard and valued by others was noted simply by two Scouts as, “They listen to me” (Junior Scout, Troop 1) and by another Scout as, “And they’re very nice and kind and they listen to what I have to say to them” (Junior Scout, Troop 2).

Polite. A Scout in Troop 3 noted that she and her friends “always say thank you and please and all that stuff.” She further noted that her friends in Scouts also spent time together with each other’s families and at school, which may have impacted their social behavior with each other in Scouting.

Analysis of Similarities and Differences in Responses of Brownie and Junior Scouts

Similarities. Many similarities exist between the responses of the younger Brownie Scouts and the older Junior Scouts as to the type of behaviors that they value in their friends. Although on occasion the manner of presentation of the behaviors differed, the basic construct was the same. Zembar and Blume (2008) defined voluntary behaviors that are intended to benefit another person as prosocial behaviors. A number of the responses provided by the Scouts are prosocial behaviors, including: (a) helps others; (b) respects others; (c) kind/caring/nice; (d) concern for friend’s feelings; (e) encourages others; (f) gives compliments; (g) provides social/emotional support; (h) inclusive of others; and (i) shares. During middle childhood, in addition to the continued importance of family relationships, friendships with same sex peers take on a larger role in the social world of young people. The presence of friends who engage in the prosocial behaviors listed by the Scouts may give rise to a number of benefits for the Scouts such as: (a)
providing emotional support; (b) teaching them how to communicate and interact with others; and (c) helping them to avoid becoming the target of aggression by others (Feldman, 2003).

**Differences.** There was only one social behavior, *copies each other*, indicated by Brownie Scouts that was not included in responses by Juniors Scouts, whereas the Junior Scouts indicated six social behaviors (i.e., *able to settle down, cooperative, excited about activities/share experiences, fair, listening skills, polite*) that the Brownie Scouts did not indicate in their interviews. Developmental differences between the younger Brownie Scouts and the older Junior Scouts may explain a significant amount of the difference in both the quality and quantity of differences in responses. One possible reason for the difference in responses may be due to the greater language development of the Junior Scouts versus that of the Brownie Scouts. The vocabulary of an average 6-year-old child, which is a young Brownie Scout’s age, is approximately 8,000 to 14,000 words. Between the ages of 6 and 11, a child will gain approximately another 5,000 words and also make gains in syntax (Feldman, 2003). Having a larger vocabulary may have allowed the Junior Scouts to describe their social world and respond to the researcher’s queries with greater ease.

Developmental differences in social cognition may also play a role in the differences in responses between the two levels of Girl Scouts. At the early stages of middle childhood, which would be characteristic of some young Brownie Scouts, social understanding of friends is likely to be based initially upon a one-way understanding of friendships (Selman, 1981). Their perceptions of friendships are focused upon what
friends do for them, and they are not fully able to understand the perspective of others. It is between the ages of 7 and 9 that they are able to understand that friendships are based on reciprocity and they begin to have an awareness of the feelings of others. Between the ages of 9 and 12, the age of the older Junior Scouts, there is an understanding that friendships require compromise, trust, and involve a level of intimacy. The personal qualities of friends are considered in the selection of friends, as compared to the earlier stage of friendship where it is based more on the behavior of other individuals (Damon, 1983). Evidence of this increase in social perspective taking and cognition can be seen in the Junior Scout’s responses of valuing friends who are cooperative and fair. Both of these social behaviors require an ability to understand the role of give and take in decisions with friends, and an understanding of the perspective of others.

Presentation of Results: Research Question 3

What are the social behaviors reported by both Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders as important for Girl Scouts to interact successfully with peers and troop leaders?

Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders indicated in their written surveys and interviews several social behaviors that are important for girls to interact successful with others in Girl Scouts (See Table 3).

These social behaviors encompass several themes, such as: (a) troop management (i.e., listening skills, respectful of adults, respectful of peers); (b) supportive/aware of needs of others (i.e., concern for other’s feelings, helps others); (c) cooperative (i.e., able to let others lead/listen to other’s idea, cooperative/able to work as part of a team); (d) self-confident (i.e., can be herself with other girls, willing to try new things); (e) positive
Table 3

*Social Behaviors Reported by Brownie and Junior Scout Troop Leaders as Important for Scouts to Interact Successfully With Others*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Troop Leaders</th>
<th>Brownie Scout</th>
<th>Junior Scout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Troop Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful of peers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful of adults</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive/Aware of needs of others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for other’s feelings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to be part of a team/Compromise</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to let others lead/Listen to other’s ideas</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Confident</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Willing to try new things</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be herself with other girls</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Affect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Happy/Positive disposition</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind/Caring/Nice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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affect (i.e., funny, happy/positive disposition, kind/caring/nice); and (f) engages others (i.e., inclusive of others/outgoing).

**Troop Management**

With their responsibilities being similar to teachers in a classroom setting, the adult leaders of a Girl Scout troop are responsible for planning the troop meeting, organizing activities, managing the behavior of the Scouts, and ensuring the safety of the Scouts in their care. As such, many of the social behaviors indicated by troop leaders as desirable for girls in Scouting focus upon skills that enhance the management of the troop including: *respect peers, respect adults, and listening skills*. This may be especially prominent in the troop leader’s responses because unlike a classroom environment, Girl Scout activities can involve hazards such as close proximity to fire, water, and other perils that could be encountered in a natural setting.

In written responses and in interviews troop leaders frequently indicated that being respectful to others is a desirable skill for Scouts to possess. It was indicated in a variety of manners such as having respect for others, respecting authority, respecting troop leaders, and respecting peers.

**Respect peers.** One Brownie and one Junior troop leader echoed the same sentiment of the Golden Rule as stated by a Brownie Scout in suggesting that “treating others the way you want to be treated” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 3) is one of the most important skills that Scouts should have to succeed in Scouting. The importance of respect in a Scout troop was further emphasized by another leader who noted:
Well, I think, I really think when it comes to it the most important thing is respect. I mean I think that’s what we try to instill on that. We want them to be respectful not only to us but to each other. And I kind of take this out of the Girl Scouts’ meeting and I would say if I see them on the playground doing something I said “Oh, is that how my Brownies act? Is this how my Brownies act outside the meeting?” (Brownie Scout Leader, Troop 1)

Additionally, the troop leader from Troop 2 noted that one of the keys for girls to be successful in Scouting is, “I would say, be respectful of everyone.” In general, the Brownie troop leaders all indicated the importance of being respectful to peers as an important skill for Scouts to demonstrate.

A Junior Scout troop leader also noted the importance of respect to peers in regard to following the Golden Rule. She further described how they use the Golden Rule and a section of the Girls Scout Law, which states that Girl Scouts should try “to be a sister to every Girl Scout as a teaching tool for situations where Scouts may be bickering with each other. She stated that:

I guess a lot of it is just treating them how you want to be treated, because they will get to times where they’ll say nasty things like “I don’t want to be your friend” or “You know your clothes are ugly” or any of those sorts of how they do verbal abuse versus the physical punching. And so to not do that and to understand that this girl could be like your sister and you know how to treat her how you want to be treated type of thing. We do draw on that one phrase quite a
bit when things start to get a little heated, and the girls are picking on each other or bickering. (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 2)

It is interesting to note that the Girl Scout Law indirectly contains a reference to being respectful to other Scouts by virtue of treating them as a sister.

**Respect adults.** The importance of respecting adults or other authority figures was mentioned by a number of Scout leaders in both their written surveys and interviews. Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders described how they defined respecting adults/authority figures in a number of ways, such as sitting quietly during meetings, not correcting adults, or being called by their last name. However, there was a general consensus that complying with adult requests was tantamount. One Junior leader described complying with adult requests as being respectful by noting:

I think when interacting with adults, I think an adult is more (inaudible) when a child is more obedient as opposed to an adult asking a child to “Please pick up that paper,” and a child says, “I don’t have to, if you tell me to.” I don’t think that is acceptable to most adults. (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 3)

This was confirmed by another Junior troop leader who stated that respect to adult leaders involved “actually listening the first time and responding respectfully” (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 2). She followed up to that response by describing what responding respectfully looks like to her: “Not talking back. Like saying ‘Yes, Mrs. X’ or ‘Sure, I’ll try and help’ or ‘I’ll try that,’ but not whining or sighing or ‘I don’t want to do that’ or simply ignoring you” (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 2). Similarly, a Brownie troop leader also stated that respecting authority involved complying with adult requests and listening.
She said, “When I talk, I expect them to listen. And when I tell them to do something, I expect it to be done, especially if it’s safety-related” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 2). It appears that listening to and responding to requests from troop leaders the first time they speak and complying with the request without question is seen as a sign of respecting leaders to both Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders. Clearly, as noted by one of the troop leaders, this is especially important for safety related items where the Scout leaders may need the Scouts to respond quickly in a given situation for their own well-being. It should be kept in mind that Girl Scout troop leaders are volunteers that pledge significant time commitments over several years in many cases. Having Scouts who do not follow directions or who disrespect their leaders by not complying with requests or talking back to them may cause leaders to reconsider their commitment to volunteering as a troop leader.

**Listening skills.** Strong listening skills were noted to be an asset in Scouting in a variety of circumstances. As was noted in the prior section, a Brownie troop leader stated that it was important for Scouts to listen to troop leaders, especially in the context of dealing with safety related issues (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 2). This was also mentioned by another troop leader in terms of respectful behavior in dealing with attending events in a public setting. She noted that when the girls are out in a public situation, such as a field trip to the pizzeria that “I mean you need to listen to adults” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 1). A Junior Scout troop leader acknowledged the importance of “listening to adult leadership” (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 2) on her written survey. Later, the same troop leader was asked to clarify what responding
respectfully to a request involved. She stated, “So I think it’s actually listening and responding with something pleasant. And also the respect is just listening when others are talking and not talking over them or interrupting” (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 2).

Having Scouts with strong listening skills enhances the ability of troop leaders to provide instruction on safety issues and directions for tasks, and allows for greater ease at events outside of the normal meeting place.

**Supportive/Aware of Needs of Others**

Troop leaders indicated the importance of girls supporting others by helping others in the troop and in the community. Additionally, having a concern for other feelings by being aware of how your actions impact others in the troop was noted as a valuable social behavior in Scouting.

**Helps others.** A Brownie Scout leader stated her desire to have Scouts help each other:

> Well, I like to see them helping each other. If somebody is struggling, and our girls are very generous in that matter, if somebody is struggling, we as leaders don’t necessarily go and help them per se if there is somebody else who can help with Susie Q. Our girls are just like, “Oh, I can do it, I’ve got it.” Because you know you have got the Girl Scouts that they just have it in their blood, so they just go and they help each other. (Brownie Scout Leader, Troop 1)

This was echoed by another troop leader who further noted that not only was it important to have girls who were “willing to help someone who needed it” and “willing to help those beyond their group,” but also that they needed to be “willing to ask for help when
needed” (Brownie Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2). It is interesting to note that the two troop leaders who indicated the importance of having girls help each other had many more girls in their troops than did the remaining troop. A Junior troop leader noted the long term social benefits for girls who are seen helping others:

One of our girls has special needs. And when one of our girls helps her or is considerate to her or bring her needs to the attention of others, the other girls tend to notice that and over time will gravitate towards the girl who is more considerate to the one with special needs, because they know they are going to be received in a positive manner. When they need help, they will not gravitate towards a child who is pushing to be first in line and will not gravitate towards or go seek out the girl who only wants to do her work, only interested in what she has to say. (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 3)

Being helpful to others can extend positive social benefits to the helper beyond just the person that they assisted, by virtue of enhancing their reputation in the group as someone who is approachable and considerate to others. Such behaviors may provide the helper with additional opportunities to engage in positive social interactions with other Scouts.

**Concern for other’s feelings.** Being aware of how your actions may impact the feelings of other girls in the troop and having empathy were both mentioned by troop leaders as social behaviors that they would like their Scouts to demonstrate. A Brownie troop leader noted on her survey both “concern for other’s feelings” and “taking responsibility for one’s actions such as if you hurt someone’s feelings accidentally genuinely being sorry for it” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 2). In her interview she
related that during circle time, a time when all of the girls gather together on the floor in a circle to hear directions or do an activity, some girls will only want to sit next to their best friend and they will “shut the other person right out.” She went on to say that when this happens that “I call them on it every time. ‘How would you feel? Look what you just did! How would you feel? Don’t do it.’” She stated that most of the time the girls don’t realize what they are doing by leaving another person out, and how being left out hurts the other girl’s feelings. A Junior Scout leader also noted that the girls are sometimes not aware of the feelings of other girls in the troop. She said, “Being aware of their feelings and even if you don’t intend it but their feelings get hurt, you have to at least be aware of that.” She continued by saying, “Or if you accidentally do something and they get hurt, to acknowledge that, ‘Okay, I didn’t mean to do that’” (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 2).

**Cooperative**

Scout leaders expressed a desire for their Scouts to be able to work well with others and to understand the importance of compromising. In a similar manner, troop leaders wanted their troop members to realize that it was important to let others have a voice in the troop. These skills are represented by the social behaviors of cooperating/able to be part of a team/compromise and able to let others lead/listen to other’s ideas.

**Able to be part of a team/Compromise.** Being able to cooperate, compromise, and work as part of a team are similar behaviors identified by leaders as desirable in their Scouts. The leader of a large troop of Brownie Scouts said, “I would say cooperation is
one of the greatest traits/skills needed for our troop” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 1). Another Brownie leader discussed how her Scouts need to learn to compromise and work together with each other just like siblings. For instance, she shared that if she has a coupon for a two-for-one ice cream with her children they would have to compromise on how they would use it, just like with her Scouts in the same scenario. She said, “So, the same thing with the girls, you have to compromise, you either both get a cone or you both get it in a dish. You can have your different kinds, but get it together” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 3).

Junior Scout troop leaders shared many of the same thoughts as the leaders of Brownie Scout troops with regard to the importance of compromising and cooperating. A Junior Scout troop leader related that in her group of Scouts there are a large number of girls who are leaders, which can make the process of compromising when making plans very challenging.

And they all want to do it their way, you know, their timeframe. They’ll talk over each other; they’ll say, “No, I’m doing it my way,” shout over each other. They have a very hard time compromising, taking turns. And it’s not all of them, but then what happens is that some of the ones that are more in the middle if you will, they’re not quite as loud; they get fed up and they’ll like say, “I’m not doing this anymore” and just get up and walk away. (Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2)

On the opposite end of the spectrum, another Junior leader describes how when attending a science museum together that her girls were able to come together and work as a group, even with people that they typically would not gravitate to in a meeting. She described
how the group had to work as a team on some of the activities and that “the girls just would work together really well as a group like going to different things. . . . Just even watching my daughter, who she was hanging out with was always different, it was just nice” (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 1). Unlike teachers in a classroom setting, the Scout leaders have the challenge of maintaining control of a group of children who are only in their presence for a limited period of time, and are attending the meeting to have fun and learn. In order to meet these demands it appears that having girls who are cooperative and able to compromise makes the management of the troop easier for the leaders.

**Able to let others lead/Listen to other’s ideas.** Closely related to the ability to compromise is the ability to let others have their turn at being at the center of attention and/or having other girls assume a leadership role. In comments from troop leaders it was evident that this could sometimes pose a challenge to the Scouts. A Brownie Scout troop leader shared the following about being the center of attention:

> And we had another girl, she’s moved too, and she would always, she always talked all the time and always was doing things to put the attention on herself. So, we would pull her out and say, “You know what? You are one of eighteen, well last year we had eighteen, you are one of eighteen girls in this troop; it’s not all about you.” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 1)

A Junior Scout leader provided another example of the complexities of dealing with Scouts who have difficulty with not being at the center of attention or letting other Scouts in the troop have a turn being the leader. She said:

> And some of the girls are never wrong and they have every answer to every
question. And so that’s hard because they’re telling you the way it is and they might not be right. It’s very, a lot about compromising of sharing, letting other people do their idea because it’s all about the girls having, you know Girl Scouts, of your sharing ideas and girl-led activities. But if you don’t have the same idea that everybody else does, it’s a huge clash of “Oh no, we’re doing it my way!” And so it’s working on ways to get along with other girls and taking turns and you might not like their way, but it’s their turn to do their way. (Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2)

**Self-Confident**

Girls who are self-confident may be more likely than others to demonstrate two of the social behaviors described as desirable for girls pursuing Scouting: *willing to try new things* and *able to be yourself with other girls*.

**Willing to try new things.** Being willing to learn and to try new activities, events, and foods were mentioned as behaviors that are important to success in Scouting. When asked what she felt was the most important skills for girls in her troop to have in Scouting, a Junior Scout troop leader described it best by saying:

I’m not sure if this is the right answer, but I would say just the willingness to try new things. I think overall, I mean they all have different levels of leadership and personality, but if they’re just willing to try new things, especially in Scouting, then I think they’ll be successful and even in life you know. If you’re not afraid to try something, and its okay, if it doesn’t work out or whatever, you just try it. (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 2)
She went on to describe how even if a Scout is fearful of a task at first, she may over time be willing to try it. Once they are able to get enough courage to try a new experience she said, they then feel the sense of accomplishment of having successfully mastered a “kind-of-scary” thing. In Girl Scouts, the requirements for earning badges or awards such as the Bronze Star require that the Scouts engage in a wide range of activities, so it is likely that the Scouts will encounter situations where they are presented with activities that they have never experienced. By displaying a willingness to try new things, Scouts have an opportunity to bond with their fellow troop members as they attempt to learn new skills. Girls in the troop who are unwilling to participate in trying new things and remain on the sidelines miss the social opportunities afforded by being part of a group experience.

**Can be herself with other girls.** A Junior Scout troop leader related that girls who are able to be themselves in the troop are able to attract other girls to them. She described a situation where a new girl had joined the troop and the girl’s willingness to open herself up during an improvisational skit was an important step in establishing herself as part of the group.

You know there was one girl, who was new to the troop and new to town, and it was an earlier meeting and I was curious because she really hadn’t displayed herself yet. And she was just funny and kind of goofy and crazy and you could just almost see like just see the rest of the girls say “Oh, okay.” She is not afraid to be herself, and I think that is very attractive as opposed to someone who is afraid to be themselves in the group. (Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 1)
A Brownie troop leader described how having the ability to open up to others is important in developing friendships with other Scouts. She referred to an incident where one Scout quit the troop because she had a difficult time making friends within the troop. When the troop leader’s daughter said that the girl quit because the girls were mean to her, her mother replied,

No one is, I’ll admit and I’m trying, one is (mean to her). The rest of them just don’t know her, that’s all. If she would just open up a little bit and they could see her because I know what a great kid she is. They just don’t know her. (Brownie Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2)

Having a social environment in the troop where the Scouts feel safe to show their own persona without fear of being ridiculed or derided may help the girls to have a greater willingness to do so in other social settings as well. Being open to share yourself with others in the troop opens the door to opportunities to connect with your peers by identifying shared interests and traits.

**Positive Affect**

The social behaviors under the theme of positive affect reflect troop leader’s appreciation for girls in their troops who are pleasant to others and enjoyable to be around such as: *fun/funny, happy/positive disposition*, and *kind/caring/nice*.

**Fun/Funny.** Having a sense of humor, even if you are being gently teased, and having a sense of fun was listed by a Brownie Troop leader as an important social skill for girls in Scouting. A Junior Troop leader indicated that girls who are able to be silly and laugh at themselves with a funny nickname or a silly skit are able to attract and
engage other girls. She described how her Scouts pick their own nicknames for outings and they have a chance to be a bit silly and crazy with them. She said:

One girl she was “soda pop” one time and she was “Woodstock” another time.

We used our camp nicknames when we went on a COSI trip and she put on her shirt that she wanted to be called “Chipmunk,” another girl “Bubbles” and “Froggy.” (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 1)

Having a sense of humor and a willingness to be silly was viewed as an asset to girls in Scouting by their troop leaders as it provides an inroad to further social interactions with peers.

**Happy/positive disposition.** A Brownie Scout troop leader indicated that she felt that one of the most important skills that girls need to be successful in Scouts is having a happy disposition. She stated that, “Because if you feel good then everyone else feels good” (Brownie Scout Leader, Troop 3). Similarly, a Junior Scout troop leader stated that having a positive outlook would be beneficial to her Scouts. She defined having a positive outlook as “Looking at the glass as half full as opposed to half empty. Looking for something that’s good in every situation, the thing that can be turned into a positive, rather than focusing on a negative” (Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 3). As the Brownie leader indicated, being happy and optimistic is more likely to attract the positive attention of peers socially than someone who responds in a negative manner to peers.

**Kind/Caring/Nice.** In written comments both a Brownie Scout troop leader (Troop 1) and a Junior Scout troop leader (Troop 2) indicated that being kind to others is
an important behavior for Scouts. The Junior Scout leader additionally stated that being caring toward others is another important quality.

**Inclusive of Others/Outgoing**

Troop leaders stated that Scout behaviors such as initiating conversations or asking others to join in activities were meaningful social behaviors that they felt were helpful to fellow Scouts in their troop. An example of the value of being outgoing and participating in conversations was provided by a Junior Scout troop leader, who described a scenario involving a sharing circle. During a sharing circle Scouts take turns describing something interesting that they did or that happened to them with the other Scouts as a way to make social connections with each other. The troop leader stated:

So having the ability to connect, for them to be able to interject what they’re, anything, just anything, can relate to one another. And then so when we have someone that is like, “Nothing much,” I just, my co-leader and I just start asking questions finding them something to say. (Junior Troop Leader, Troop 1)

The leader went on to describe how one girl who was new to her troop skillfully showed the ability to engage others and make connections during a sharing circle:

“Well, first of all, I have those shoes” (pointing to another Scout’s shoes) and she’s like “And I love them.” It was just so funny that she didn’t know any of them, she was new to town even. I’m like you don’t know anyone and immediately it was the fact that she was, she’s like, “I’m going to say I have those shoes and I love them and I like you because I have those shoes.” And it was just, I was like, okay, well we’re connected. (Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 1)
The importance of being willing to initiate and join into conversations was also discussed by a Brownie Troop leader. She described a Scout who quit Scouting because the scout was quite shy and never joined in or engaged with the other girls. The leader said:

Kids, if you start talking, they’ll talk right back to you. If they’re around and they’re in their own little comfort zone with their own little friends, they’ll talk to them. And if you don’t just join in, people don’t think about stuff like that.

(Brownie Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2)

The ability to engage others in conversations provides a time for the Scouts to further develop social ties to one another and bond as a troop as they share their likes, dislikes, opinions, or comments on someone else’s statements. Identifying other girls in the troop who have the same interests could also lead to developing friendships outside of the troop meeting.

**Presentation of Results: Research Question 4**

What are the social behaviors reported by only Brownie Scout or by only Junior Scout troop leaders as important for Girl Scouts to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders?

Between the Brownie Scout troop leaders and the Junior Scout troop leaders there were several social behavior that were indicated exclusively by Brownie or Junior Scout leaders, but not both, either in their interviews and/or in their written survey responses. For behaviors that were listed only in the written survey, where the troop leaders provided no additional commentary, the items are only listed in the appropriate table. For
items included in the interview portion, examples are provided to elucidate the responses. A discussion of the potential reasons for the divergence of responses follows the narrative about the social behaviors.

**Social Behaviors Reported by Brownie Scout Troop Leaders and Not Junior Scout Troop Leaders**

The behaviors indicated only by the Brownie Scout leaders are presented in Table 4. These behaviors are likely to have been mastered by the older Scouts as they matured and had exposure to classroom environments where these skills would be honed. All of the behaviors indicated by the Brownie leaders reflect Scouts’ skills that would be beneficial to the Scout leaders in troop management. These types of behaviors would enhance the leader’s ability to direct the Scout meetings by reducing conflict and decreasing the amount of direct supervision time needed during a meeting.

**Table 4**

*Social Behaviors Reported by Brownie Scout Leaders and Not by Junior Scout Leaders as Important for Scouts to Interact Successfully With Others*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout Leader</th>
<th>Junior Scout Leader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management of Scout Troop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes turns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to make decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks for help when needed</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows persistence in hard tasks</td>
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</table>
Management of Scout Troop

Brownie Scout leaders indicated several social behaviors that they like to see in their troop members that relate to making the tasks of running a troop meeting easier for the adults in charge. The social behaviors include: *takes turns*, *able to make decisions*, and *shares*.

**Takes turns.** A troop leader of a large group of Scouts stressed the importance of the girls in her troop taking turns. Because of the size of her troop, she said that the girls “need to take turns when speaking because if we have seventeen girls speaking at once” (Brownie Scout Leader, Troop 1). She also indicated that she liked to see girls wait patiently for their turn at an activity.

**Able to make decisions.** The ability to make decisions independently or as a member of the troop is another behavior Brownie troop leaders like to see in their Scouts. For instance, a Scout leader described how deciding how to spend the troop’s profit from selling Girl Scout cookies requires the Scouts to make decisions both individually and as a group. The Scouts must decide as a group “what they would like to learn and where they would like to go to spend their profits from cookie sales” (Brownie Troop Leader, Troop 3). The troop leader stated that the Scouts may have to make decisions on their own on fieldtrips. She gave an example about a time when her troop had taken a fieldtrip to make scrapbooks, “They had to make their own decisions and own choices, even independently, not together and using their own creativity” (Brownie Scout Leader, Troop 3). A leader from another Brownie troop also indicated that giving the Scouts a chance to make decisions when they are young helps the girls to avoid making poor
decisions with more negative consequences when they are older (Brownie Scout Leader, Troop 2). Having Brownie Scouts who are able to make decisions helps the Scouts develop the skills that they will need as they continue in Scouting where the activities and projects are girl-led. It is also beneficial to the management of the troop as the Scouts are able to assist the leaders in determining what activities that the troop would enjoy.

**Shares.** A willingness to share items is a social behavior that Brownie Scout troop leaders indicated is beneficial for girls to have in Scouting. For example, a troop leader described a scenario where one Scout took the majority of the gems for a craft project, leaving others without enough for their work. She said, “It’s whoever is aggressive gets there first (to the items) type thing” (Brownie Scout Leader, Troop 3). Another girl in the troop however was willing to share and stated, “Okay, you can have mine” so that the other girls would have materials to work with on their projects.

**Social Behaviors Reported by Junior Scout Troop Leaders and Not by Brownie Scout Troop Leaders**

The social behaviors listed by Junior Scout troop leaders and not Brownie Scout leaders are provided in Table 5. The general themes of the behaviors described include: (a) self control (i.e., *advocate for self* and *able to control emotions when upset*); (b) management of Scout troop (i.e., *respects surroundings, polite, follows directions, attends troop events, uses positive body language, communication skills, completes tasks on time*); (c) supportive/aware of needs of others (i.e., *provides encouragement to others, provides social/emotional support, accepts differences*); and (d) integrity (i.e., *truthful/honest, fair*).
Table 5

*Social Behaviors Reported by Junior Scout Leaders and Not by Brownie Scout Leaders as Important for Scouts to Interact Successfully With Others*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout Leader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to control emotions when upset</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocate for self</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management of Scout troop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes tasks on time</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Follows directions</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses positive body language</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects surroundings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends troop events</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive/Aware of needs of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides social/emotional support</td>
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<td>Provides encouragement to others</td>
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<td>Accepts differences</td>
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<td>Truthful/Honest</td>
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Self-Control

Junior Scout troop leaders noted two social behaviors, *able to control emotions when upset* and *advocate for self* that are associated with the ability of the Scouts to control their emotions, feelings, and behaviors when in difficult situations.

**Able to control emotions when upset.** When strong emotions arise in a troop setting, a troop leader indicated the importance of having Scouts who are able to stay in control of their emotions. She indicated that it was important for Scouts to be kind towards others even if they were frustrated by them and that “You don’t start yelling at them or hitting or something like that” (Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2).

**Advocate for self.** When presented with a scenario where one Scout is attempting to order others around, having girls who are able to handle the situation by expressing their viewpoint without causing discord is valuable. A troop leader stated that in this type of circumstance she finds that those who can “ignore it by not doing what the girl is telling them to do or by saying ‘Don’t tell me what to do, I don’t have to do that’ can stop the domineering behavior” (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 3).

Management of Scout Troop

Junior Scout leaders noted social behaviors that may make the management of a Scout troop easier for the adults in charge. The social behaviors in this theme include: *communication skills, completes tasks on time, follows directions, respect surroundings, attend troop events, polite, and uses positive body language.*

**Communication skills.** Junior Scout leaders listed a range of ways that communication skills were important to success in Scouting. The ideas ranged from the
basic skills of being able to communicate with both adults and children to more complex behaviors such as being able to share ideas and participate in planning discussions.

During an interview, a leader indicated that it was also important for the girls in her troop to know when a Scout is overwhelming others in the troop with their commentary. She stated that during sharing circles:

We have one girl that it is hard to keep her from commenting on every single child’s contribution, which can be a bit of a problem. She has gotten a lot better but I’m like it is not your turn because she likes to launch in to her own, to overtake you. She does try to overtake it but they actually listen to one another and they are interested and then they want to relate, I think it’s just making, wanting to make a connection. (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 1)

The same leader wrote on her survey that the girls who do choose to share something during their sharing circles are able to connect with their peers more easily than girls who do not choose to circle share (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 1).

**Completes tasks on time.** Troop leaders stated that they appreciate Scouts who complete their tasks in a timely manner. A Junior Scout troop leader indicated that the other Scouts looked up to the Scouts that complete their work on time. The troop leader also noted that Scouts that lagged behind in completing their work miss out on other social opportunities. First, she stated that by not being in sync with what the rest of the Scouts were doing, they miss directions for upcoming steps and become confused. Second, the Scouts are not able to interact informally with their peers by comparing ideas or asking opinions about their work when they are not on the same steps. Third, she
stated that on projects, “You gotta stay with the group ‘cause then you do miss out on the less organized interaction time” that takes place as girls finish their work (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 1). By not having work completed in a timely fashion, the Scouts can miss opportunities for informal social interactions that can help secure social relationships in the troop.

**Follows directions.** Junior Scout leaders noted in their written responses that the ability to follow directions was an important social behavior. As was noted above troop leaders indicated that Scouts who are not able to follow directions and remain on task may miss out on opportunities to have shared experiences and social interactions with other troop members.

**Polite.** In written surveys troop leaders indicated that being polite to others, such as allowing someone else to go first, was a social behavior that was appreciated by peers and troop leaders.

**Uses positive body language.** Maintaining eye contact and smiling at others were mentioned by troop leaders as social behaviors that were valued in the Scout troop.

**Respect surroundings.** In addition to respecting peers and adults, a leader stated in both her written survey and in her interview the importance of the Scouts respecting the surroundings. When asked what she would like to see Scouts do in this regard she referred to the Girl Scout philosophy of leaving an area better than you found it. She stated she would like to see Scouts do the following:

Cleaning up your area, not being afraid to pick up that piece of paper that wasn’t yours but, it’s okay to still pick it up and throw it away. Just not yelling and
screaming when you’re in a common area, kind of being aware of what’s going on around you so that you’re not disturbing others with your noise, not scribbling on tables. Knowing that the place is not yours and you need to take care of it.

(Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2)

The idea of taking responsibility for the maintenance of the property that you are using and treating it with respect exemplifies the importance of environmental caretaking in Girl Scouts along with respecting the rights of others in public spaces. It also is important for the Scouts to know how to behave socially in environments (i.e., when to use a quiet voice versus when it is appropriate to speak louder with your peers), beyond the troop meeting site.

**Attend troop events.** Attending the troop meetings and events is important to the girls’ success in Scouting, according to a Junior Scout leader. She said, “I think a lot of people forget that I should go to this, well, maybe but, I’ve got this, and you have to make a commitment to be able to be successful and be part of the group” (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 1). By attending meetings and events Scouts have the opportunity to have shared experiences that help them to bond as a troop and as friends.

**Supportive/Aware of Needs of Others**

Junior troop leaders indicated three social behaviors (*provides social/emotional support, provides encouragement to others, and accepts differences*) that revolve around the theme of being supportive and aware of the needs of others that are important for social competence in Scouting.
Provide social/emotional support. Providing social/emotional support to others was indicated in a variety of manners on both surveys and interviews such as: (a) having empathy for others; (b) supporting Scouts in the troop by sympathetic listening; and (c) being aware of those around them and understanding their social cues.

Provide encouragement to others. A troop leader, when discussing her experiences with Scouts attempting new activities, gave an example of providing both social support and encouragement. She stated, “They generally are supportive and encouraging; ‘Come on try it’” (Junior Scout Troop Leader, Troop 2). The troop leader also indicated that it was important for the Scouts to be able to read her cues and pull back from their encouragement if she feels that the Scout is frightened of the activity. Being able to support others in their attempts at new experiences, and also understanding the social signals of when it is time to back down due to someone’s fear level requires the Scout to be both supportive and have an awareness of social cues.

Accepts differences. A leader described a scenario in which the girls in her troop were able to come to a point of acceptance of a girl in the troop who had a “big personality.” Initially some of the girls in the troop were unsure of her, the leader said. She stated, “So they kind of looked at her like, ‘What’s your deal?’ And it was disruptive, but it has become, you know, it’s no longer, it isn’t disruptive because it almost became like well ‘Who can be crazier?’” (Junior Scout Leader, Troop 1). She went on to state that over time the girl had matured and the other girls opened up to her and are now accepting of both her and her large personality.
Integrity

Truthful/Honest. A troop leader indicated that being honest, as stated in the Girl Scout Law, was an important social behavior for success with others in Scouting.

Fair. As stated above, a troop leader again referred to the Girl Scout Law to denote the importance of having Scouts who treat others fairly. By treating peers equally, there are fewer opportunities for disagreements among the Scouts.

Analysis of Similarities and Differences in Brownie Scout and Junior Scout Troop Leader Responses

Similarities. Several common social behaviors indicated by both Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders’ reflect their roles in managing the behavior and activities of the Scouts in troop meetings and events (e.g., listening skills, respectful of adults, respectful of peers). Troop management skills in this study are similar to tasks described by Luckner and Pianta (2011) in their study of the role of teachers’ interactions and classroom settings of fifth grade students with regard to children’s prosocial behaviors in the classroom. Classroom teachers’ organization/management skills in the study were defined as the ability to manage students’ time, behavior, and attention. The study found that the classroom teachers who positively managed children’s time, attention, and behavior in the classroom were associated with higher levels of prosocial peer behavior in the classroom. This fits in with the desires of Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders to have Girl Scouts who are cooperative, that respect peers and adults, have strong listening skills, and help others in that such behaviors may help to create a social environment that is conducive to pleasurable peer interactions.
Positive social interactions between Scouts can also make the demands of being a troop leader in charge of a group of Scouts less demanding. As stated by Farmer, Lines, and Hamm (2011), teachers are both an “authority” of society’s rules and a “facilitator” of the development of students’ social competencies and social interactions in the classroom. In the case of Girl Scouts, the troop leaders fulfill many of the same roles on a limited scale in Girl Scout meetings as do school teachers in their classrooms. The “rules” for the role of the social authority figure in Scouting are found in the Girl Scout Law. The Girl Scout Law states that:

I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, and responsible for what I say and do, and to respect myself and others, respect authority, use resources wisely, make the world a better place and be a sister to every Girl Scout. (Girl Scouts of the United States, 2011)

As the authority figure of the societal rules in their troop, leaders work with their Scouts to adhere to the tenets of the Girl Scout Law, and to facilitate opportunities for those without the skills to attain them. Many of the behaviors listed in the Girl Scout Law can be found in the Brownie and Junior Scout troop leader responses such as: helping others, respectful of peers and adults, kind/caring, being willing to try new things, and cooperative. Scouts who have these social skills would be well equipped to work effectively with peers and adults in a variety of activities.

Overall, the commonalities between the Brownie and Junior Scout leaders reveal that there are many behaviors desired by troop leaders that cross the age ranges from
Brownie to Junior Scouts. The majority of these behaviors appear to be skills that make the management of the Scout troop easier and enhance the social relationships among the troop members.

**Differences.** As with the Girl Scout’s feedback, the major differences in responses from Brownie Scout troop leaders as compared to the Junior Scout troop leaders are likely due to the differing developmental levels of the girls. For instance, responses provided by Brownie Scout troop leaders indicated the importance of several behaviors that the older Scouts who have greater experience in an academic setting may have already mastered such as *sharing, persevering in hard tasks,* and *asking for help when needed.*

Bierman, Torres, and Schofield (2010) noted that there are a great many changes in children’s levels of social reasoning, emotional understanding, and the organization of the peer group as they make the transition from early to late elementary and middle school. These types of changes appear to be reflected in the responses of the Junior Scout leaders versus the responses of the Brownie Scout leaders. Whereas the Brownie Scout leaders related behaviors of a pragmatic nature (i.e., *sharing, ask for help, make decisions*) the Junior Scout leader’s responses reflected the older Girl Scouts’ greater understanding of their social environment and an awareness of their own emotional needs as well as the needs of their peers (i.e., *accepts differences, controls emotions when upset, fair, provides social/emotional support, provide encouragement to others*). The shorter attention spans and less developed social understanding of the Brownie Scouts may require the troop leaders to spend more time helping their Scouts to complete projects,
guide Scouts in disagreements over who is “going first,” or mediate an unwillingness to share resources in the troop as compared to the older Junior Scouts.

**Presentation of Results: Research Question 5**

What are the social behaviors reported by Brownie Scout and by Junior Scout parents as important for Girl Scouts to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders?

Five parents who took part in at least two Girl Scout activities or events participated in this portion of the study by completing a written survey. The survey asked the parents to indicate the social behaviors that they felt were needed for the Scouts in the troop to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders. Although some parents agreed to a phone follow-up interview to clarify or to expound upon their responses, not all parent participants agreed to do so. Therefore, the comments made by parents who participated in the phone interview are only used as exemplars within the Discussion section. Meaningful social behaviors that were indicated by both Brownie and Junior Scout parents are located in Table 6. Because many of the respondents only provided a list of behaviors, some behaviors are not indicated in the written commentary that follows.

The Brownie and Junior Scout parents’ responses indicated a number of social behaviors that they indicated were important for success in Girl Scouts. Two themes were noted among the social behaviors (a) cooperative (i.e., able to interact as part of a group and able to let others lead/speak) and skills that aid in troop management (i.e.,
helps others, listening skills, and respectful of others). The parents also indicated that self-confidence was of benefit to girls participating in Scouting.

Table 6

Social Behaviors Reported by Both Brownie and Junior Scout Parents as Needed for Success in Scouting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout Parents</th>
<th>Junior Scout Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to interact as part of a group</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to let others lead/listen to others ideas</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troop Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful of others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two social behaviors were noted among the theme of cooperative: able to interact as part of a group and able to let others lead/listen to other’s ideas. Both of these behaviors relate to Scouts who can set aside their own ideas and compromise for the good of the larger group. A parent who attended a camping trip provided an example of Scouts successfully interacting as part of a group. The parent stated, “The prep team had to prep the food for cooking. They would discuss what needed to be prepped for dinner and work as a team to get that task done” (Junior Scout Parent, Troop 1). The Scouts in this
example were able to work together in order to accomplish their portion of the work required to feed the troop members.

Brownie and Junior Scout parents noted being able to let others in the troop lead and have an opportunity for all Scouts to express their opinions were important assets. A Brownie Scout parent stated that the Scouts in a troop need to be able to “not always be the center of attention” or as she said, “having the ability to allow others to sometimes take charge or be the center of attention” (Brownie Scout Parent, Troop 1). A comparable response was given by a Junior Scout parent who stated that it was important for the Scouts to “allow others to express themselves” in the troop (Junior Scout Parent, Troop 2). Having the ability to take turns with sharing the spotlight and being able to allow others to share opinions and ideas is another essential skill needed to succeed in a group setting such as Girl Scouts.

**Presentation of Results: Research Question 6**

What are the social behaviors reported by only Brownie Scout or by only Junior Scout parents as important for Girl Scouts to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders?

**Social Behaviors Reported by Brownie Scout Parents and Not Junior Scout Parents**

Behaviors reported only by Brownie Scout parents and not by the parents of Junior Scouts are listed in Table 7. Overall, the behaviors listed encompass having: (a) integrity (i.e., sincere, trustworthy, honest); (b) positive affect (i.e., happy/positive disposition, kind/caring, and outgoing); (c) troop management (i.e., communication skills, follows directions, polite, and respects surroundings); and (d) communication skills.
Table 7

*Social Behaviors Reported by Brownie Scout Parents and Not by Junior Scout Parents as Needed for Success in Scouting*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout Parents</th>
<th>Junior Scout Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troop Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional maturity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows directions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects surroundings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy/Positive disposition</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind/Caring</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincere</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These parental responses were indicated in the written surveys without additional commentary.

The social behaviors listed by the parents of Brownie Scouts and not the parents of Junior Scouts contain several social behaviors that would be desirable in a friend (i.e., *happy/positive disposition, kind/caring, polite, sincere*). Girls who display these
behaviors would be unlikely to engage in actions that would lead to conflict or hurt the feeling of their friends.

The parents of Brownie Scouts also indicated that it would be important for girls involved in Scouting to have communication skills, follow directions, respect their surroundings, and display emotional maturity. These behaviors are similar to those reported by the troop leaders and appear to reflect skills that enable efficient organization and management of the troop.

**Social Behaviors Reported by Junior Scout Parents and not Brownie Scout Parents**

The social behaviors indicated by Junior Scout parents and not by Brownie Scout parents as important social behavior for girls in Scouting are listed in Table 8. Two central themes emerged among the parent responses those of: supportive/aware of needs of others (i.e., encourages others, provides social/emotional support, accepts differences, speaks positively of others, and thoughtful); and troop management skills (i.e., completes tasks, doesn’t touch others in an unwelcome manner, patient and inclusive of others).

A parent who participated in a camping experience with her daughter’s troop described the importance of having peers who are good role models in completing tasks in Scouting. She stated that while watching a group of Scouts wash the dinner dishes, “Sometimes some of the girls would get silly, but it was so inspiring to see how the other girls would just continue to get their tasks done, and eventually the girls acting silly would stop and join the group” (Junior Scout Parent, Troop 1). She stated that it was good to see that the Scouts were able to complete their work even though the Scouts who were silly initially distracted them.
Table 8

*Social Behaviors Reported by Junior Scout Parents and Not by Brownie Scout Parents as Needed for Success in Scouting*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout Parent</th>
<th>Junior Scout Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive/Aware of needs of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts differences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides social/emotional support</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks positively of others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troop management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes tasks</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t touch others in unwelcome manner</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive of others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In considering the remaining responses provided by the parents of Junior Scouts and not the parents of Brownie Scouts, it appears that they are looking for Scouts to have behaviors that are supportive and affirming to others (i.e., accepts differences, doesn’t touch others in unwelcome way, encourages others, inclusive of others, provide social/emotional support, speaks positively of others, thoughtful). The selection of these social behaviors may reflect some of the changes that the parents of the Junior Scouts have noted in the complexity of their child’s social relationships as they have matured.
Analysis of Similarities and Differences in Brownie Scout and Junior Scout Parent Responses

**Similarities.** In general, it appears that the parents of Brownie and Junior Scouts may be seeking opportunities for their daughters to develop many of the social behaviors advertised as reasons to join Girl Scouts. On the Girl Scouts of the United States website, the following was listed under the header of “Information for Parents” as to why they might want their daughters to join a local Scout troop:

> Whether she is 5 or 17, you want her to become self-confident, strong and compassionate. You want her to respect herself and others, make good decisions, to be open to new challenges and use her skills and talents to make the world a better place. You want her to build strong friendships, be a leader, and put her values into practice in her everyday life. (Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 2011)

A review of the responses provided by both the Brownie and Junior Scouts parents in this study (i.e., *self-confident, helps others, respects others*) does align with the rationale provided by the Girls Scouts regarding behaviors that Scouting tries to develop in girls of all ages.

**Differences.** Disparities indicated by the parents of Brownie Scouts versus Junior Scouts may be due to developmental differences between the two age groups of Scouts. The Brownie Scouts may still be learning the rules governing social behaviors in school and in organized activities, while the Junior Scouts have ideally mastered these skills and
are now engaged in more complex peer interactions requiring a wider array of social responses.

**Template of Meaningful Social Behaviors by Participant Categories**

A summary of all of the social behaviors reported by participant categories is provided in Table 9. All of the social behaviors reported as being important for Girl Scouts at both the Brownie and Junior Scout level by all study participant categories (i.e., Brownie Scout, Brownie troop leader, Brownie parent, Junior Scout, Junior troop leader, Junior parent) are represented in this table. The social behaviors are organized hierarchically by the number of participant categories that indicated the social behavior as important for girls in Scouting.

**Identifying Social Behaviors Indicated by the Majority of Participant Categories and Groups**

As the goal of the contextual assessment process is to determine what behaviors are relevant and meaningful (i.e., have high social validity) to the major stakeholders in a setting to target for interventions (Warnes et al., 2005), a further delineation of the social behaviors was warranted in order to identify which social behaviors were indicated by the majority of participant categories and participant groups (i.e., Brownie Scout/troop leader/parent and Junior Scout/troop leader/parent).

Two sets of criteria were used to determine agreement among the majority of participants. First, at least four out of six participant categories (i.e., Brownie Scout, Brownie troop leader, Brownie parent, Junior Scout, Junior troop leader, Junior parent), over 50%, had to identify the social behavior as being important. Second, within each of
Table 9

*Social Behaviors Reported as Important for Girls in Scouting by One or More Respondents Sorted by Participant Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout</th>
<th>Junior Scout</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Scout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative/Able to interact as part of a group</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive of others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind/Caring/Nice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to let others lead/listen to other’s ideas</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for other’s feelings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthful/Honest</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy/Positive disposition</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides social/emotional support</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts differences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be herself with other girls</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 9 (continued)

**Social Behaviors Reported as Important for Girls in Scouting by One or More Respondents Sorted by Participant Category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout</th>
<th>Junior Scout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes tasks on time</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows directions</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives compliments</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects surroundings</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk and play together</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to try new things</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to make decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to remain calm when upset</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to settle down</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for self</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks for help when needed</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends troop events</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy each other</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t touch others in unwelcome way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional maturity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 9 (continued)

*Social Behaviors Reported as Important for Girls in Scouting by One or More Respondents Sorted by Participant Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie Scout Scout</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Junior Scout Scout</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excited about activities/Share experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient/Thoughtful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes turns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows persistence in hard tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks positively of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses positive body language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the two groups at least two out of three participant categories had to indicate that the social behavior was important. Following these steps ensured that a social behavior had the support of the majority of participants within both Brownie and Junior Scouts.

Without this step, a social behavior could be indicated by four out of six participant categories, but it could be composed primarily of three participant categories in one group (i.e., Brownie Scout, troop leader and parent), and only one participant category in Juniors (i.e., Junior parent). Although the social behavior in this example might have high social validity for Brownies, it would not be valued by the majority of Junior Scout participant categories and consequently was not included as a majority social behavior for both groups.
Identifying Social Behaviors Indicated by the Primary Members of Scout Troops

Another way to affirm the social behaviors in Table 9 that have the highest social validity is to take into consideration the differing levels of participation in Scout meetings and activities by the adult participants (i.e., troop leaders and parents) in the current study. Although parents play a role in Scouting activities, it is the troop leaders and Scouts who are the primary members of a Girl Scout troop. Determining the social behaviors that are valued by troop leaders and Scouts at both Brownie and Junior levels provides another way to identify behaviors that have high social validity since those behaviors were indicated as important by the primary members of a Scout troop. Table 9 was reviewed to identify the social behaviors indicated by Brownie Scouts and Brownie troop leaders and Junior Scouts and Junior troop leaders. Social behaviors specific to one group of Scouts and leaders, either Brownies or Juniors were also selected. The results of the data analyses are provided in Table 10. This table is comprised of meaningful social behaviors identified by the majority of participant categories, participant groups and primary members (i.e., troop leaders and Scouts) of Scout troops who participated in the current study. A commentary on the results follows.

Social behaviors agreed upon by all participant categories. Two social behaviors, helps others and respects others, were reported by all participant categories (i.e., Brownie Scouts, Brownie troop leaders, Brownie parents, Junior Scouts, Junior troop leaders, Junior parents) in the current study. These two social behaviors have high social validity as targets for potential social skills interventions, as they were deemed important by all participant categories of adults and children across both age groups.
Table 10

*Meaningful Social Behaviors as Identified by Majority of Participant Categories and Groups, and by Primary Participants in Scouting in Rank Order*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>All Participant Categories</th>
<th>Majority of Both Categories and Groups</th>
<th>Brownie Scout and Brownie Troop Leader</th>
<th>Junior Scout and Junior Troop Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive of others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind/Caring/Nice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for other’s feelings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthful/Honest</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to let others lead/Listen to other’s ideas</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative/Able to interact as part of a group</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides social/emotional support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social behaviors indicated by the majority of participant categories and groups. Eight additional social behaviors were reported by both a majority of participant categories (i.e., over 50%) and the majority of participant categories within a group (i.e., two out of three participant categories in a group). They are: (a) cooperative/able to interact as part of a group; (b) inclusive of others; (c) kind/caring/nice; (d) listening skills; (e) able to let others lead/listen to other’s ideas; (f) concern for other’s feelings, (g) fun/funny; and (h) truthful/honest. These social behaviors would also have high social validity, as they were identified by both the majority of participant categories and the majority of participant groups as important social behaviors in Scouting.

Social behaviors indicated by Scouts and troop leaders. In addition to helps others and respects others, which were agreed upon by all participant categories as being important social behaviors in Scouting, four additional behaviors were indicated as important by the participant categories of Brownie Scout/Brownie troop leader and Junior Scout/Junior troop leader: (a) inclusive of others; (b) kind/caring/nice; (c) concern for other’s feelings; and (d) fun/funny. These social behaviors would also have high social validity as potential targets for intervention, as they were valued by primary members in Scouting (i.e., Scouts and troop leaders), and they were all also included in the social behaviors valued by the majority of participant categories and groups.

A further partitioning of the responses by Scouts and troop leaders revealed that Brownie Scouts and their troop leaders identified sharing as an important social behavior, while the Junior Scouts and their troop leaders indicated that: (a) cooperative/able to work as part of a group; (b) provides social/emotional support; (c) truthful/honest; (d)
encourages others; (e) listening skills; (f) polite; and (g) fair were important in Junior Scout troops. The social behaviors that are important to the Scouts and leaders of one group (i.e., Brownie Scouts or Junior Scouts) would have social validity in the group in which they were indicated, but not necessarily within the other group setting.

**Observation Results**

The results of the observations conducted in Brownie and Junior Scout troop meetings reflect many of the social behaviors indicated in surveys and interviews as desirable by troop leaders, parents, and the Scouts (Table 11).

The majority of social behaviors noted in the observation of a “typical” peer in a Scout meeting were indicated previously in one or more of the participant categories as being important social behaviors in Scouting. The observation of these behaviors taking place in a troop meeting helps to enhance the potential social validity of the behaviors. Only three social behaviors were not indicated previously in any participant category. The three behaviors are: (a) accepts criticism appropriately; (b) participates in discussions; and (c) shows leadership skills. The participants in the study may not have deemed these behaviors important or they may have been considered a part of other categories that were indicated by the participants in this study.

**Member Check Results**

Due to her rich background in Scouting, the participant selected for the member check was able to review the results of this study from several perspectives: (a) as a Brownie Scout troop leader; (b) as a Junior Scout troop leader; and (c) as the parent of a Brownie and a Junior Scout. Comments were made by the participant regarding responses
Table 11

*Social Behaviors Identified in Observations of “Typical” Scouts in a Troop Meeting*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behavior</th>
<th>Brownie Scouts</th>
<th>Junior Scouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism appropriately</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks for assistance when needed</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks permission of adult when needed</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliments peers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates task persistence</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows directions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows rules</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has patience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiates conversations with peer</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in discussions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares materials</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows leadership skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses positive body language</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
provided by the Scouts that were similar to those expressed and observed in the troop leader’s own children as well as those of Scouts in her troops. In general, the results of the member check corroborated the viewpoints expressed by the troop leaders, parents, and Scouts. A review of pertinent remarks is provided for each participant category.

Scouts. The evaluation of the responses provided by the Scouts was consistent with behaviors the participant has witnessed in her Brownie and Junior Scout troops. She stated that in her experience, the number one desire of girls in Scouting is to have a friend or peer that is supportive and is aware of the needs of others. She also noted that as the Scouts mature from Brownies to Junior Scouts, having a friend who has a good sense of humor is very helpful in reducing the stress of early adolescence. In a similar manner, the participant noted that the Junior Scout’s desire to have a friend who is able to settle down is consistent with what she observes as a parent of a Junior Scout.

Troop leaders. The member check participant agreed with the answers provided by both the Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders. She felt that the most important skills indicated by the troop leaders were listening skills, and a willingness to try new things. She believed these two behaviors were essential because without listening skills and a willingness to try new things, planning done by the troop leaders for the meeting or activity would have to be disregarded.

Although the participant who reviewed the results agreed that the social behaviors indicated by Brownie Scout leaders and not Junior Scout leaders were important, she did have one caveat. She felt that guidance would have to be provided by the troop leaders
for the girls to be able to succeed in the categories of able to make decisions and shows persistence in hard tasks.

In a similar vein, although the participant indicated that the behaviors indicated by Junior Scout leaders and not Brownie Scout leaders were valid, she was surprised that *leads by example* and *flexibility* were not listed. In her experience, as the Scouts advance from Brownie to Junior Scouts, leadership skills become more important. The leadership skills of the older Scouts, she stated, allow for a greater diversity of experiences for the Scouts because there is less need for direct supervision from the troop leader. Flexibility was defined by the participant reviewer as: “able to go with the flow” and “goes with majority ideas.” These two skills are reflected in the category of cooperative in this study, which was indicated as being an important social behavior by both Brownie and Junior Scout troop leaders.

**Parents.** In the review of social behaviors indicated by parents as being important in Scouting, the participant conducting the member check agreed with all of the categories listed. In her opinion, however, the categories of *hard worker/motivated* and *dedicated/committed* should have been included in the responses from the parents of the Junior Scouts. The rationale for including *hard worker/motivated*, she indicated, was due to the increasing complexity of the tasks involved in Scouting at the Junior Scout level. She also noted that it was important for Junior Scouts to demonstrate their dedication and commitment to Scouting by upholding the values taught in Scouting in their daily lives.

**Summary of member check.** In qualitative research conducting a member check provides a means of triangulating the data to verify the credibility of the results that were
obtained in the study. By having the reviewer conducting the member check corroborate the information provided by the study participants on social behaviors important for girls in Scouting, the trustworthiness of the study is enhanced.

**Summary of Results**

The results of using a contextual assessment process to identify social behaviors necessary for social competence in Girl Scouts produced several notable findings. Two social behaviors, *helps others* and *respects others*, were agreed upon by participants across both age levels and participant categories and would have high social validity as behaviors to be targeted for interventions in the groups studied. Although *helps others* and *respects others* were indicated by all participant categories as being important social behaviors, the definition of these social behaviors varied between the participant groups. For instance, in defining *helps others* child participants described the importance of having friends help them when they were injured, needed directions or information, or needed direct assistance on a difficult task such as starting a fire. On the other hand, troop leaders described the role of *helps others* as helping someone in the troop who was “struggling,” bringing a child’s needs to the attention of others, and helping individuals beyond the troop level.

It is important to be aware of the various ways in which individuals in a specific environment define a social behavior in order to correctly identify which social behaviors would need to be taught to a child having social difficulties in that realm. It may not be sufficient to simply refer to a social behavior as being important without identifying how that behavior is operationalized in a particular context. Utilizing a template matching
procedure allows the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders in a particular contextual setting to not only identify the desirable social behaviors, but also to identify how the major stakeholders define the behavior.

In addition to helps others and respects others, eight additional social behaviors were agreed upon by the majority of participant categories and participant groups. These additional behaviors are: inclusive of others, kind/caring/nice, concern for other’s feelings, fun/funny, listening skills, truthful/honest, able to let other’s lead/listen to other’s ideas, and cooperative/able to interact as part of a group. This set of social behaviors would also be expected to have high social validity as they were indicated by the majority of stakeholders. These social behaviors would be important to consider as potential intervention targets for children struggling socially in one of the troops in the study. Additionally, several of these social behaviors (i.e., inclusive of others, kind/caring/nice, concern for other’s feelings, fun/funny) were also indicated by primary members of Scouting (i.e., troop leaders and Scouts) across developmental levels, enhancing the social behaviors probability of being strong targets for social skills interventions.

The results of this study utilizing a contextual assessment procedure resulted in the identification of a wide variety of social behaviors that were agreed upon by the majority of participants as being important for social success in Girl Scouts. Several of these behaviors crossed developmental lines as being important to both Brownie and Junior Scouts, whereas others were developmentally specific. The importance of being aware of the differing ways that adults and children define a social behavior was also
noted. Finally, the identification of a social behavior (i.e., fun/funny) that was concerned important to one specific troop of Junior Scouts and not to the other Junior Scout troops in the study illustrates the point that some social behaviors may be contextually bound. It is important to utilize an assessment process that takes into account the nuances of a particular social environment in order to identify social behaviors with high social validity for interventions.

In sum, the contextual assessment process to identify social behaviors determined by the study participants to be important to social competence in Girl Scouts resulted in the identification of several meaningful behaviors that were agreed upon by the majority of participant categories and groups. In the following section, results from the current study are compared to other pertinent studies that have identified meaningful social behaviors for youths. Following this review a discussion of the limitations of the current study and implications of the findings for future research and practice are provided.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify those skills that are necessary to demonstrate social competency in a structured leisure time activity, Girl Scouts, from the perspective of multiple informants (i.e., Scouts, troop leaders, parents) utilizing multiple methods (i.e., surveys, interviews, observations). By identifying social behaviors that are valued by multiple stakeholders in Girl Scout troops, it may be possible to develop social skills interventions for children involved in Scouting who are experiencing difficulty in that particular setting. Furthermore, those skills deemed important by multiple stakeholders using a template approach could be used to develop a preventive social skills curriculum for all Scouts within a particular troop. Because the social behaviors were identified in the context of Scouting, the potential for developing social skills interventions with the ability to yield high social validity may be great. In this chapter a brief overview of the findings is presented followed by a comparison of the current study to pertinent articles that seek to identify meaningful social skills for youth. This is followed by a brief overview of the limitations of the current study, implications for research and practice, and conclusions.

Summary of Results

Grounded theory was used in this study to develop a template of meaningful social behaviors for girls participating in the structured leisure time activity of Girl Scouts. To ensure the fidelity of the conclusions drawn from the data, several procedures were followed: (a) triangulation; (b) peer reviews; and (c) a member check (Bogdan &
Triangulation, using multiple data sources to ensure that the data collected is robust, was achieved by using multiple methods (i.e., surveys, interviews, observations) as derived from multiple sources of individuals involved in Brownie and Junior Scout troops (i.e., Scouts, troop leaders, parents). Peer reviews were employed to confirm the accuracy of coding completed by the primary investigator and to assist in the process of identifying conceptual themes. In order to help substantiate the credibility of the participant’s perspective, a member check was completed. For the member check, a summary of the final results was provided to an individual familiar with many aspects of Scouting. The results of this member check indicated that the reviewer found the conclusions of this study to be in line with her experiences as both a troop leader and parent of Girl Scouts.

The result of the contextual assessment process to identify meaningful social behaviors from the viewpoint of multiple informants in the structured leisure time activity of Girl Scouts resulted in two behaviors that stand out as primary targets for assessment driven interventions: helps others and respects others. Both behaviors were indicated by all participant categories (i.e., Brownie Scouts, Brownie troop leaders, Brownie parents, Junior Scouts, Junior troop leaders, Junior parents) as being important behaviors for girls in Scouting and would have high social validity as potential targets for interventions for both groups of Scouts.

Several other social behaviors were indicated by both the majority of participant categories and groups (i.e., Brownie and Junior Scouts) as being important social behaviors for girls in Scouting. The behaviors are: cooperative/able to interact as part of
a group, inclusive of others, kind/caring/nice, listening skills, able to let others lead/listen to other’s ideas, concern for others feelings, fun/funny, and truthful/honest. As these behaviors were identified by the majority of participant categories and the majority of groups, they would also have high social validity and could also be important targets for social skills interventions for both groups of Scouts.

Despite the fact that parents take part in some Scouting activities and meetings, the primary participants in all activities for a Scout troop are the Scouts and their troop leaders. When identifying targets for social skills interventions that are relevant and meaningful in a contextual setting, it would be reasonable to assume that the viewpoints of the main participants (i.e., Scouts and troop leaders) should be given greater weight than those of occasional participants (i.e., parents). Therefore, behaviors defined as important by the participant categories of Scouts and troop leaders in both Brownie and Junior levels were also identified for consideration as intervention targets. These social behaviors identified include: inclusive of others, kind/caring/nice, concern for other’s feelings, and fun/funny. Again, due to the significance of the behaviors being identified by the main participants in Scouting, these social behaviors would also have high social validity as related to targets for social skills interventions for both groups of Scouts.

Several additional social behaviors identified by the Scout/troop leader categories beyond those listed in the above paragraph may be contextually bound. For example, the participant categories of Brownie Scout and Brownie troop leader noted that shares was an important social behavior, but this was not agreed upon by the participant categories of Junior Scout and Junior troop leader. Similarly, among the participant categories of
Junior Scout and Junior troop leader several social behaviors were agreed upon as being important for Scouts, but were not universally agreed upon by the participant categories of Brownie Scout and Brownie troop leader. These behaviors include: *listening skills, truthful/honest, cooperative/able to work as part of a team, encourages others, polite, provides social/emotional support, and fair.* When viewed within the context of social validity, these social behaviors would make appropriate intervention targets when utilized in the contextual setting where they are deemed relevant and meaningful to the participant categories. In other words, targeting sharing would be an appropriate target for social skills interventions related to the Brown Scouts in this particular sample population and those seven additional behaviors listed above as related to Junior Scouts/Junior Troop Leaders would be appropriate targets for social skills interventions related to Junior Scouts in this particular sample population.

**Analysis of Results**

Following is a discussion of the results of this study as compared to other pertinent studies in the social skills literature that seek to identify meaningful social skills for youth. Specifically, the results of this study are compared and contrasted to: (a) the results from a template matching procedure study conducted by Warnes et al. (2005) upon which the current study was based; (b) Caldarella and Merrell’s (1997) taxonomy of positive social skills; (c) Elliott and Gresham’s (2007) identification of the top 10 social skills necessary for school success; and (d) Lane et al.’s (2006) work on critical social skills for youth. Social behaviors that were identified by participants in the current study
are italicized in order to aid in differentiating between social behaviors indicated in comparison studies.

When considering this content, it should be noted that the studies being reviewed categorized similar constructs with different labels, although the content and operationalization of the categories was often similar across studies. For example, the category empathetic was defined as sympathetic, nurturing, caring, compassionate, and help when sad/emotional in the Warne’s et al. (2005) study, which corresponded to the category *provides social/emotional support* in the current study. The findings of the comparisons between studies are discussed primarily in terms of the categories used in the current study. In addition, when reviewing the comparisons made between the current study and the comparison studies, it is important to consider that the participants in the current study, with the exception of one parent participant, were all female, but both male and female participants were represented in the comparison studies.

**Comparison of Current Study to Pertinent Studies That Contain Adult and Child Respondents**

Two studies that identified meaningful social behaviors in children from the perspective of both adults and children were selected for comparison to results of the current study. The first study by Warnes et al. (2005) considered data from second and fifth grade children, teachers, and parents through surveys and interviews to determine which social behaviors characterized social competence in children in an academic setting across two age groups. The second study chosen for comparison to the current study is Caldarella and Merrell’s (1997) taxonomy of positive social skills. The
development of the taxonomy of positive child and adolescent social skills was developed through a meta-analysis of journal articles on social skills over a 20-year period. The articles used to develop the taxonomy contained studies with only adult participants and also studies with both adult and child participants.

A Contextual Approach to the Assessment of Social Skills

Warnes et al. (2005) conducted an exploratory study to determine the feasibility and utility of using a contextual approach to assess social skills to develop a template of meaningful social behaviors for children in the second and fifth grades. The perspectives of multiple stakeholders (i.e., children, teachers, and parents) were obtained across two age groups (i.e., second and fifth grade students) to determine the meaningful social behaviors needed for social competence in an academic environment. The data were analyzed using grounded theory, a qualitative research method. The data analysis used in the current study and the Warnes et al. (2005) study were comparable, and consequently the results are interpreted by using the same criteria as in the current study to determine agreement among the majority of participant categories (i.e., Brownie Scouts, Brownie troop leaders, Brownie parents, second grade children, second grade teachers, second grade parents, Junior Scouts, Junior troop leader, Junior parents, fifth grade children, fifth grade teachers, fifth grade parents) and groups (i.e., Brownie, Junior, second grade, and fifth grade, of which three participant categories are located within each). Two sets of criteria were used to determine agreement among the majority of participant categories. First, at least seven out of 12 participant categories, over 50%, had to agree upon the importance of the social behavior. Important was defined by having one or more
respondents in the participant category indicate that the behavior was important for social competence in Scouting. Second, within each group at least two out of three participant categories had to indicate that the social behavior was important. These two steps were completed to ensure that the majority of participant categories were comprised of social behaviors that had majority agreement within all groups.

Agreement among the majority of participant categories. As noted in Table 13, several noteworthy social behaviors were indicated by the majority of participant categories in the current study as well as in the Warnes et al. study (2005). One social behavior, *helps others*, was identified as being important to children’s social competence in their respective setting by all participant categories and participant groups in both the current study and Warnes et al.’s (2005) study. It appears that *helping others* is a social skill that is deemed important across grade levels, participant categories, and in both a structured leisure time activity and an academic setting. In addition to *helps others*, five other social behaviors were identified as being important to the majority of participant categories (i.e., Brownie Scout, Brownie troop leader, Brownie parent, second grade child, second grade teacher, second grade parent, Junior Scout, Junior troop leader, Junior parent, fifth grade child, fifth grade teacher, fifth grade parent) and by the majority of groups in both studies (i.e., Brownie, second grade, Junior, fifth grade): (a) 

*cooperative/able to interact as part of a group*; (b) *inclusive of others*; (c) *concern for other’s feelings*; (d) *fun/funny*; and (e) *truthful/honest*. The social behaviors that were agreed upon by the majority of participant categories and groups appear to reflect skills that would make a child pleasing to be around either individually or in a group setting as
Table 12

*Social Behaviors Agreed Upon by the Majority of Participants Categories in Girl Scouts and in Warnes et al. (2005)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownie</th>
<th>2nd grade</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>5th grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative/Able to interact as part of a group</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive of others&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for other’s feelings&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthful/Honest</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>This social behavior is comprised of two categories in Warnes et al. (2005), inclusive of others and outgoing and friendly.

<sup>b</sup>This social behavior is comprised of two categories in Warnes et al. (2005), does not verbally hurt others and empathetic.
perceived by both children and adults alike. These behaviors suggest agreement among adult and child respondents about the nature of social skills that are appreciated by adults and by children across two age ranges and across two different contextual settings. Nonetheless, because the expectations of authority figures in different settings may vary, it is important to determine how a complex social behavior such as *cooperative/able to interact with others* is exhibited in different contextual environments.

**Agreement among child participants.** Table 13 illustrates the results of comparisons made between the current study and the Warnes et al. (2005) study regarding the similarities between meaningful social behaviors reported by Brownie and Junior Scouts as compared to the responses of second and fifth grade children. Seven social behaviors were agreed upon by all categories of child participants in both studies as desirable social skills for a friend to possess: (a) *helps others*; (b) *inclusive of others*; (c) *concern for other’s feelings*; (d) *fun/funny*; (e) *provides social/emotional support*; (f) *talk and play together*; and (g) *trustworthy*. These social behaviors appear to reflect the desire of the child participants in both the Warnes et al. (2005) and the current study to have friends who are aware of the social needs of other children in their environment. Moreover, it appears the children want friends who can provide social support or assistance to them once a need has been identified.

**Responses exclusive to one age group.** As noted in Table 13, Junior Scouts and their fifth grade counterparts agreed upon a number of social behaviors as being important in their friends that were not indicated by both the Brownie Scouts and their second grade counterparts: (a) *cooperative/able to interact as part of a group*, (b)
listening skills; (c) encourages others; (d) shares; (e) fair; and (f) gives compliments. These social behaviors reflect the ability of the older children to understand the perspective of others and engage in friendships that have a greater level of social complexity than the younger child participants in both the current and Warnes et al. (2005) studies. One social behavior, respects others, was unique to Brownie Scouts and their second grade counterparts.

**Child-only-responses.** Some social behaviors were only indicated by child participants in both the current and Warnes et al. (2005) studies; however, none of the responses overlapped. Nonetheless, several behaviors indicated only by child respondents in the Warnes et al. (2005) study were noted by Scouts and one or more adults in the current study. For example, in responses indicated only by children in the Warnes et al. (2005) study, shares was only noted by second grade children, but in the current study shares was indicated by one or more Brownie Scouts, Juniors Scouts, and Brownie troop leaders. This difference may reflect the notion that the contextual setting of Girl Scouts requires sharing more frequently than in an academic environment. For example, in Girl Scouts, supplies for projects are typically communal and sharing is required, while in academic settings children typically have their own individual supplies and may not be frequently required to share them with others.

**Summary of comparisons.** The social behaviors identified as being important by the majority of adult and child participants in the current study and the Warnes et al. (2005) study denote behaviors that have high social validity in a structured leisure time activity and in an academic environment. These behaviors appear to revolve around
Table 13

*Social Behaviors Reported by Brownie and Junior Scouts and Second and Fifth Grade Students in Warnes et al. (2005)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Brownies</th>
<th>2nd grade</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>5th grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive of others&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for other’s feelings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides social/emotional support</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk and play together</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative/Able to interact as part of a group</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages others&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives compliments&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> This social behavior is comprised of two categories in Warnes et al. (2005), inclusive of others and outgoing and friendly

<sup>b</sup>One social behavior in Warnes et al. (2005) gives praise/compliments, represents these two social behaviors.
skills that make a child pleasing to be with irrespective of the contextual setting. On the other hand, some social behaviors reported by child participants in both the current and Warnes et al. (2005) study appear to be differentiated by the child’s level of social emotional development (i.e., encourages others, fair), with older children having higher expectations for the behavior of their friends. It is important to note that although there is agreement among participants in both studies regarding many social behaviors, the manner in which these behaviors are displayed may vary in different contextual settings. For example, within the category of shares, participants in the current study described situations in which a friend provided them with clothing when they forgot to pack items during a camping trip, or shared items that they needed to complete a project. Yet, sharing was described in the Warnes et al. (2005) study as “gives you toys, money.” Although both are examples of sharing, the characteristics of the setting may impact how the social behavior is performed. It is essential to consider the role that context plays when developing social skills interventions in order to identify behaviors that are valued in a particular setting, and to identify how those behaviors are manifested in that setting.

As social behaviors are in their very nature contextual, the assessment process utilized to identify behaviors for social skills interventions need to identify specific behaviors that are meaningful to the major stakeholders in a child’s environment to target for intervention. In doing so, the likelihood of generalization increases due to the multiple opportunities available in a natural setting for teachable moments and natural reinforcement of the behavior to take place (Gresham, 1997; Gresham et al., 2001).
**Taxonomy of Positive Behaviors**

Caldarella and Merrell (1997) developed an empirically based taxonomy of positive social skills for children and adolescents to serve as a tool for researchers and clinicians to utilize to (a) identify social skills deficits; (b) develop and monitor the effectiveness of interventions; and (c) aid in developing more comprehensive programming. The taxonomy is composed of the five most common behavioral dimensions (i.e., Peer Relations, Self Management, Academic Skills, Compliance Skills, and Assertion Skills) identified through a meta-analysis of numerous studies that utilized social skills rating scales. Each of the five dimensions is comprised of individual social behaviors that were grouped together due to their similarities.

The results of the current study were compared to the social behaviors from the taxonomy of positive social skills to determine similarities and differences. As some child participants were included in the meta-analysis used to develop the taxonomy, results from both Scout and adult participants in the current study were used to determine if a social behavior was present in both studies. On occasion, two or more specific behaviors in a dimension in the taxonomy were represented by one social behavior category in the current study. For example, in the current study the social behavior of *inclusive with others* is comprised of two behaviors in the Peer Relations dimension: invites peers to play/interact and skillfully initiates or joins conversations with peers.

**Peer relations.** The Peer Relations dimension in the taxonomy of positive social skills is comprised of 12 social behaviors that characterize positive social relationships with peers (e.g., compliments others, has many friends, sense of humor). The social
behaviors common to both studies within the peer relations dimension include: *compliments others, encourages others, helps others, provides social/emotional support, inclusive of others, and fun/funny*. Behaviors that were not indicated in the current study but were noted in the Peer Relations dimension include social behaviors such as: being admired by peers, having leadership skills, and making friends easily.

**Self management skills.** The Self Management Skills dimension in Caldarella and Merrell’s (1997) taxonomy is comprised of six social behaviors that revolve around a child’s ability to control his or her temper, follow rules, and work well with others. Out of the six social behaviors included in the Self Management Skills dimension, four social behaviors were also indicated in the current study. The common social behaviors include: *respects others, cooperative/able to interact as part of a group* [comprised of two social behaviors in the taxonomy: compromises with others and cooperates with others], and *able to remain calm when upset*. The ability to respond adaptively to criticism and responds to teasing by ignoring peers were noted in the Self Management dimension were not included in responses by participants in the current study.

**Academic skills.** The Academic Skills dimension of the taxonomy contains eight social behaviors associated with successfully completing tasks in a classroom environment. As might be expected due to the difference in contextual settings between academic tasks and leisure activities, only three out of the eight positive behaviors were indicated in the present study that were present in the taxonomy of positive social skills. The three skills noted in both studies were: *asks for help when needed, follows directions,* and *completes tasks on time*. The social behaviors found in the Academic Skills
dimension that were not in the current study focused on organizational skills, producing quality work, working independently and being able to work with distractions. As compared to their relative validity with regard to academic tasks, the majority of these behaviors may not be of particular value to children engaged in a leisure time activity.

**Compliance skills.** The Compliance Skills dimension is comprised of seven social behaviors that are associated with children who are cooperative, follow social rules, and meet expectations (e.g., follows rules, puts toy/work/property away, follows directions). Many of the social behaviors reported by Scout troop leaders and parents in the current study were also found in this dimension in the taxonomy. Commonalities between the studies include: follows directions, respects others, shares, and completes tasks in a timely fashion. Responds to criticism appropriately, puts toys/work/property away, and uses free time appropriately were included in the Compliance Skills dimension of the taxonomy although these social behaviors were not noted by participants in the current study. It appears that behaviors that help children adhere to the social conventions of a setting are important to adults.

**Assertion skills.** Social behaviors associated with the Assertion Skills dimension of the taxonomy, describe skills a child who is outgoing might possess (e.g., initiates conversations with others, questions unfair rules). This dimension had the fewest common responses, three out of a possible ten, between the current study and the Caldarella and Merrell (1997) taxonomy. Several of the social behaviors indicated in the Assertion Skills dimension (i.e., appears confident with the opposite sex, introduces self to people, appropriately joins ongoing activities) may not represent skills applicable to
the contextual setting of a Girl Scout meeting or event. For example, in Scouting, most activities are structured so all of the Scouts participate together, therefore fewer opportunities would arise that would involve joining ongoing activities as listed in the taxonomy of positive social skills. In the current study inclusive with others [comprised of invites peers to play, initiates conversations with others in the Assertion Skills dimension], and self-confident were agreed upon as being important social behaviors by participants in both the current and comparison study.

**Summary.** Social behaviors that were found to have the greatest similarities between the current study and the Caldarella and Merrell (1997) study were those in the Peer Relations, Self-Management and Compliance dimensions. These domains represent behaviors that involve positive social relations with peers, self-control, and being cooperative. These social behaviors appear to represent skills that assist adults in having an atmosphere conducive to instruction.

Several of the social behaviors indicated by the majority of categories and groups in the current study were also present in the taxonomy of positive social skills. These include: (a) helps others; (b) respects others; (c) fun/funny; and (d) cooperative/able to interact as part of a group; and inclusive of others.

**Comparison of Pertinent Studies With Only Adult Participants**

As troop leaders and parent volunteers are the central authority in Girl Scout troops, a comparison of social behaviors deemed important for children in Scouting by adult participants (i.e., troop leaders, parents) to social behaviors deemed important by teachers who are the authority figure in a classroom setting is warranted. A study about
teachers’ perception of the social skills that are necessary for success in the classroom was conducted by Lane et al. (2006). In the Lane et al. study, over 700 teachers across three grade spans (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) were asked to rate 30 social behaviors from the *Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) on a 3-point Likert-type scale as to their importance for success in an academic setting. The authors of this study reported results in terms of social skills rated as important by participants across the three grade spans (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school), and also as social skills valued by the majority of teachers in each separate grade span. The results from the Lane et al. study are compared to adult participant responses in the current study to identify similarities and differences.

Although many studies focus on social skills for children in an academic setting, Elliott and Gresham’s (2007) work on the top 10 social skills was chosen for comparison to the current study because of the authors’ focus on developing a list of social behaviors that would help a child to have positive interactions with others both in school and across various social situations that a child would encounter. To develop the core list of social behaviors, the authors had hundreds of teachers from across the United States rank a list of 100 social behaviors according to their importance in the classroom. The top behaviors indicated by the teachers, along with social behaviors added by Elliott and Gresham that they deemed important across various settings, resulted in the list of top 10 social skills.
Critical Social Skills Across Grade Levels

Lane et al.’s (2006) survey of teachers from kindergarten through 12th grade identified five social skills deemed critical for success in a classroom environment across three grade levels (i.e., elementary, middle school, high school). The social behaviors deemed critical are: (a) follows/complies with directions; (b) attends to your instructions; (c) controls temper in conflict situations with peer; (d) controls temper in conflict situations with adults; (e) easily makes transitions from one classroom activity to another.

Five additional behaviors were reported by the majority of teachers in the elementary grades, the grade level of the majority of Girl Scouts in the current study, as critical for school success. The five additional social behaviors identified by Lane et al. are: (a) uses free time in an acceptable way; (b) gets along with people who are different; (c) ignores peer distractions when doing class work; (d) responds appropriately to peer pressure; and (e) responds when pushed or hit/responds to physical aggression. Several similarities in responses were noted between social behaviors reported by teachers as important across the grade levels as compared to the responses of adult participants in the current study including: (a) respects others/follows directions; (b) listening skills; and (c) able to remain calm when upset. Of these social behaviors, both respects others and listening skills were indicated by the majority, three out of four, adult participant categories (i.e., Brownie troop leaders, Brownie parents, Junior troop leaders, Junior parents). One additional social behavior indicated by elementary teachers, gets along with people who are different, was also indicated in the current study (i.e., accepts differences) but not by the majority of adult participant categories.
Social behaviors that were reported by the majority of elementary school teachers in the Lane et al. (2006) study and were not listed by the adult participants in the current study (i.e., responds appropriately to peer pressure, uses free time in an acceptable way, responds when pushed or hit) may be due to differences in contextual settings. For example, in a Girl Scout troop that meets bi-weekly for one to two hours, there is very little free time available to the Scouts, whereas students who are in school for five days per week for seven or more hours per day are likely to have some free time available.

**Top 10 Social Skills**

Elliott and Gresham’s (2007) list of top 10 social skills focuses on behaviors that are important for children in an academic setting as well as in various other social settings that a child might encounter. The list of the top 10 social skills, derived from over 700 teacher surveys rating the importance of social skills as part of the development of the Social Skills Improvement System Classwide Intervention Program (SSIS-CIP), encompasses a wide range of social behaviors such as: (a) cooperation (i.e., listen to others, follow the steps, follow the rules, get along with others, take turns in conversations), (b) self-control (i.e., pay attention to your work, stay calm with others), (c) assertion (i.e., ask for help), (d) responsibility (i.e., do the right thing), and (e) empathy (i.e., do nice things for others). When comparing Elliott and Gresham’s (2007) top 10 social skills to the responses from adult participants in the current study, it was determined that all of the top 10 social skills were represented.

One potential reason for the similarity between the results of the current study and the list of top 10 social skills may lie in the generic nature of the social behaviors
indicated in the top 10 list. A wide range of social behaviors could be included in the category of “do the right thing” depending on the environment in which a child was participating at the time. For example, in Scouting “do the right thing” could involve sharing supplies for a craft, comforting a friend who fell on a hike, or remembering to call your troop leader by their last name. Despite this limitation, the top 10 social skills list provides a good starting point for identifying the broad range of behaviors that are valued across settings. However, it is important to keep in mind that the context plays a key role in how these social behaviors are displayed. When designing interventions for individuals with social competence concerns, it is important to be able to identify not only the category of social behaviors that have high social validity, but to delve deeper to identify how the major stakeholders define the social behavior.

**Analysis of Study Comparisons**

Many similar social behaviors were identified by participants in the current study and the additional studies reviewed. Child participants in both age ranges in the current study and the Warnes et al. (2005) study agreed upon social behaviors that reflected their desire to have friends who were supportive, aware of and responsive to the needs of others, and principled (i.e., *trustworthy, truthful/honest*). Adult participants in the studies reviewed indicated a preference for social behaviors in children that aid the adult leaders, teachers, troop leaders, or parents value the ability to maintain order in their environment, to enable children to listen to information and complete assigned tasks. Social behaviors that were conducive to achieving these goals in the current study include: *listening skills,*
follow directions, completes tasks on time, asks for help when needed, control temper when upset, and accepts differences.

Several social behaviors that were identified as having high social validity in the current study were also indicated by participants in the comparison studies (Table 14). The five social behaviors indicated by the majority of the comparison studies, three out of four, are: (a) helps others; (b) respects others; (c) inclusive of others; (d) listening skills;

Table 14

Current Study’s Social Behaviors, as Indicated by Majority of Participant Categories and Groups, as Compared to Four Relevant Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive of others</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind/Caring/Nice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for other’s feelings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthful/Honest</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to let others lead/listen to other’s ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative/able to interact as part of a group</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and (e) \textit{cooperative/able to interact as part of a group}. These social behaviors may represent a set of behaviors that are important in creating a supportive social environment for children in both a leisure time activity and an academic setting.

When the current study is considered within the context of related studies, it seems that there exists: (a) a set of rule-governed social behaviors that adults, who are responsible for teaching children, value to help them maintain order in the classroom (i.e., \textit{listening skills, follows directions}); (b) child-pleaser social behaviors that cut across developmental stages and define basic characteristics of friends (i.e., \textit{inclusive of others, helps others}); (c) higher level social behaviors of friendship desired by older child participants (i.e., \textit{fair, cooperative/able to interact as part of a group}); (d) behaviors that are specific to a particular contextual setting (i.e., \textit{excited about activities}) and (e) social behaviors to create a supportive environment for children (i.e., \textit{helps others, inclusive of others, cooperative/able to interact as part of a group}).

It may be possible with rule-governed behaviors (i.e., \textit{listening skills, follows directions}) indicated by adults to be included in a positive behavior support program format as these are behaviors that may be of a more universal nature and not as likely to be specific to one contextual setting. With the remaining social behaviors that were indicated across multiple studies, many of these behaviors are likely to be demonstrated differently in varied contextual settings. As such, merely identifying the name of a behavior is in itself insufficient, as the contextual demands and expectations of a setting can vary the manner in which a behavior is valued by the participants. In order to identify social behaviors with high social validity for intervention, it is important to
address the social behaviors in the setting in which they have meaning (Sheridan et al., 2003).

Limitations

Methodology

Despite the fact that the methodology and design utilized in this study were selected in order to best answer the research questions posed, there are some limitations inherent to this study’s methodology. First, using convenience sampling to recruit participants for the current study means that the results obtained may not be representative of other Girl Scout troops beyond those that participated in the present study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Second, although having a member check completed by a person who did not participate in the study agree that the majority of findings were similar to her experiences as a Girl Scout troop leader and a parent of Scouts adds credibility to the results of this study, it does not alter the limited representativeness of the current study. The very nature of this study (i.e., understanding meaningful social skills within a particular context in an effort to identify specific behaviors that may be targeted for interventions) significantly limits the external validity of this particular study. However, when considered within the context of an expanding literature in this area, this study makes a unique contribution in helping shape an evidence-based approach to identifying skills for intervention.
**Design**

Other noteworthy limitations in the current study are related to design issues such as participant recruitment, data saturation, limited participation, data collection, and ranking of responses.

**Participant recruitment.** Despite attempts to recruit participants from rural, urban, and suburban areas, the only individuals who volunteered to participate in the study came from suburban areas. This limited the diversity of respondents who were available to participate in the study. It also brings into question whether the individuals who responded affirmatively to allow their Scout troops to take part in the study were somehow fundamentally different from those who did not respond to the request for study volunteers.

**Data saturation.** In research using grounded theory, it is assumed that data saturation (i.e., the point at which no new information is gained from interviewing respondents) is obtained prior to discontinuing data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In the current study, saturation of the data for parent participants may not have been obtained prior to completing data collection. A limited number of parents from each Scout troop met the criteria (i.e., having participated in two Scouting activities or meetings) for inclusion in the study, thereby limiting the number of parent participants available to ensure data saturation was obtained for this particular group of participants. In addition, not all parents who completed the written survey were able to participate in the follow-up interview. This may have further limited satiation for this particular
category of participants as well as failed to allow for clarification of responses provided in the written survey.

It should also be noted that data saturation was not obtained during the observation portion of the study. Field observations typically take place by the principal researcher over an extended period of time; however, limits to the amount of time and the availability of research participants can impact data collection. Accordingly, the observation portion of the study may not have the level of depth of responses that would have been possible with extended periods of observation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Data collection.** Two issues related to data collection in the study may have affected the content and outcomes. First, a deviation in the protocol of data collection may have impacted the data collected during two observations of Scouts. The protocol for the observation was to observe a Scout who was engaged in an activity allowing for some kind of working and/or social interaction with peers (e.g., working on a craft, participating during snack time, or other similar activity). Two troop leaders had the Scouts in their troop engaged in an activity that was typical for their Scout meetings, but the activity was not specifically focused on working and/or interacting with peers.

A second potential data collection issue involved the difference in data collection methods between those used for troop leaders and parents (i.e., written survey plus follow-up interview for clarification) to that of the Scout participants (i.e., interview only). Due to the potential limits on reading and writing skills of the younger Scouts, it was determined that an interview only approach would likely provide the greatest amount of useable data for the study. If the Scouts provided a response in their interview that
was unclear, it was possible for the primary researcher to ask them at that time to clarify their response. Additionally, as not all Scouts in a troop participated in the interview process, it would be difficult to ensure that the Scouts did not share answers when completing the forms at the troop meeting or receive adult assistance that would impact their responses. Nonetheless, the difference in data collection methods could have created a difference in the quality of responses provided between the participant types.

**Ranking of responses.** Another limitation of the current study is that while participants were asked to report social behaviors that they deemed important in Scouting, no method of measuring the level of importance was utilized to rank order the participant’s responses. For the purposes of substantiating which social behaviors had the highest levels of social validity, a procedure such as the one utilized by Gresham and Elliott (2008) in the design of the *Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scale (SSIS-RS)* may have been beneficial. In the development of the *SSIS-RS*, teachers were asked to rank the importance of social behaviors according on a Likert scale as to their importance for success in an academic setting. A similar method may have been beneficial to use in the current study to further delineate which social behaviors indicated by the participants had the highest level of social validity.

**Implications for Future Research**

In order to further evaluate the efficacy of using a contextual approach to social skills assessments, additional research is needed that expands upon current studies that have utilized a contextual method (i.e., Warnes et al. 2005 and the current study). At present, it appears that research has not been conducted to determine if the social
behaviors identified in a contextual social skills assessment have high social validity in practice. Therefore, future research is needed that not only identifies social behaviors with high social validity using a contextual approach to the assessment of social skills, but also expand on the research by conducting and monitoring the results of social skills interventions using the behaviors identified through the contextual assessment.

In lieu of attempting to conduct contextual assessments across a variety of social environments and aggregating the results, it may be most beneficial to focus upon one setting, such as an individual Scout troop where a child is experiencing social difficulties, in order to refine the results. This focus would enable a researcher to identify social behaviors that are meaningful and relevant to a specific contextual setting, thereby enhancing the likelihood that social behaviors identified for intervention would have high social validity.

Continued research on identifying social behaviors that are valued by adult leaders and child participants in Girl Scouts and in other similar structured leisure time activities could have several benefits. First, it would be informative to determine if there are gender differences between the social skills valued by participants in male dominated structured leisure time activities (e.g., Boy Scouts, Adventure Guides, Camp Fire Boys) versus those in female dominated structured leisure time activities (e.g., Girl Scouts, Frontier Girls, Camp Fire Girls), as the organization and principles of the programs are quite similar. If gender differences were noted between male dominated versus female dominated groups in the types of social behavior deemed important by children and their adult leaders, this information could add to the rationale for utilizing a contextually based
approach to identify social behaviors for interventions as other social skills assessment methods may not be able to identify such nuances. Second, continued research on the social skills necessary for success in structured leisure time activities such as Scouting may lead to the identification of a common set of social behaviors that have high social validity for participants in structured leisure time activities. This identification may result in a taxonomy of behaviors identified through research similar to that developed by Caldarella and Merrell (1997). Moreover, if a common set of social behaviors were to be identified for participants in a specific structured leisure time activity, it might be possible for a national organization (e.g., Girl Scouts of the United States of America) to develop a primary prevention program to ensure that all Girl Scout participants have the opportunity to receive instruction (i.e., coaching, modeling, role playing, reinforcement) by their troop leaders in those behaviors identified as having high social validity in Scouting. This approach may also allow adults leaders to use a rating scale that incorporates both an endorsement of a particular skill as well as a context-specific social validity rating using a Likert-type scale (e.g., How important is this skill? 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = extremely important), as endorsed by Gresham and Elliott in the development of both SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) and the SSIS-RS (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

In future work on the identification of meaningful social behaviors in Scouting an emphasis should be placed on increasing both the number and duration of observations of a typical peer in the troop. Increasing the number and duration of peer observations would enable the observer to gain a greater understanding of the social behaviors needed
for successful social interactions in Scouting. Additionally, multiple observations of a
typical peer engaging in a variety of activities common to Scouting (i.e., making crafts,
receiving instructions, engaging in physical activities) would provide a fuller picture of
the social behaviors used by Scouts in the troop. Identifying a wider variety of social
behaviors used by Scouts may help to validate social behaviors indicated by multiple
stakeholders as having high social validity in Scouting. Furthermore, it may be possible
to identify social behaviors that were not indicated by stakeholders as being important to
social competence in Scouting, yet are frequently noted in observations, for further
analysis. It would be beneficial as well to conduct additional observations of a typical
peer during activities where the Scouts and their leaders left the confines of their meeting
rooms and engaged in activities such as camping, field trips, or service activities. This
inclusion of typical peers would enable future research to determine if the social
behaviors reported for social success in Scouting are valid for the variety of contextual
settings in which Girl Scout troops operate.

Implications for Practice

Scouts who receive special education and related services for social competence
calls have their needs for support met while in academic settings, yet these services
are not directed towards a child’s leisure time activities. In order for Scouts who have
social skills deficits to fully enjoy the benefits available from a structured leisure time
activity such as Girl Scouts, it would be helpful for them to have access to social skills
training that could be beneficial to meet their needs in the social milieu of Scouting. By
instituting a plan for collaboration between the child’s school, parents, and the adult
leaders of structured leisure time activities that the child participates in, it may be possible to enhance the child’s social competence in both academic and leisure time settings. Collaboration among the stakeholders in both settings could have many advantages. One benefit of the collaboration would be that if the troop leader was informed of the social behaviors being reinforced in the academic setting, the adult leader could also reinforce those behaviors in the leisure time activity to enhance generalization. Adult leaders of leisure activities would also be able to provide insight for school interventionists as to how the child is interacting socially with adults and peers in the more relaxed setting of a leisure time activity. This information may help the school to identify social behaviors as targets for intervention that have been identified across the two settings as limiting the child socially. Perhaps the most important benefit of having open lines of communication between the school personnel, parents, and the leisure time activity leaders would be the potential benefit to the child of having enhanced social competence in multiple contextual settings.

Contextual assessment practices adhere to the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological-developmental theory that posits that all individuals develop within multiple different systems (i.e., schools, neighborhoods, home, religious organizations) and experience different types of interpersonal relationships (i.e., teachers, peers, school-based friendships, families) all of which interact and have an impact upon a child. To study a child, according to Bronfenbrenner, there must be an awareness of the many contexts in which the child is involved and how these contexts all impact the child. It is not surprising that the behaviors that are considered necessary for a child to be socially
competent are not universal (Sheridan et al., 2003). Therefore, when considering the selection of target behaviors for social skills interventions, even when using a contextual approach to social skills assessment, it is still essential for practitioners to be sure that the social behaviors being selected for intervention are socially relevant to culturally and linguistically diverse students (Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway, 2011). Without sensitivity to issues of cultural differences, the best planned and executed social skills interventions will not help the child develop social competence in the multiple settings in which the child participates.

**Conclusion**

Social competence has been defined in many ways, but the simplest of these definitions suggest that socially competent individuals are those who have the ability to know which social skills to use at the right time and the right place (Elliott & Gresham, 2007; Sheridan & Walker, 1999). For many children with disabilities (e.g., intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, autism, ADHD), knowing when to use the right social skill at the right time is not an easy goal to achieve. Various negative implications of having poor social skills have been documented over the years (Parker & Asher, 1987; Vogel & Forness, 1992; Wentzel, 1993), yet much work remains to be done in identifying socially valid behaviors to target for interventions to assist children in improving their level of social competence.

Although research has been conducted to ascertain what social behaviors are considered critical for success in academic settings (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997; Elliott & Gresham, 2007; Lane et al., 2003; Lane et al., 2006; Warnes et al., 2005), very little
research has been conducted to identify what skills are valued by participants in structured leisure time activities such as Girl Scouts. Results of the current study suggest that although there appear to be some rule-governed social behaviors that are similar across settings such as helps others and respects others, to be successful in identifying social behaviors with high social validity for developing interventions, a contextual assessment approach that identifies what social behaviors are valued by participants and how the behaviors are displayed in that setting is critical. A ‘one size fits all’ approach to identifying socially valid targets for interventions is not likely to provide results that will lead to improved social competence in children. Rather social skills assessments and interventions need to take into account the unique social environments in which a child participates and the expectations and preferences of the major stakeholders in those environments (Sheridan et al., 2003). The use of contextual assessment techniques to identify behaviors that have high social validity may be one way to enhance the identification of social behaviors with high validity in a particular contextual environment such as structured leisure time activities.

Almost three million girls currently participate in Girl Scouts in the United States of America. The girls join Scouting in order to find fun, friendship, build character, build self-esteem, and serve their communities (Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 2012). In order for the Scouts to experience success in Scouting, it is necessary for them to know what social skills to use at the right time and the right place in their Girl Scout troop. Continued research to determine what social behaviors are valued by Scouts, troop leaders, and parent participants in Girl Scouts may open the door further to providing
socially valid interventions to help Scouts with social skills concerns fully enjoy the many benefits of Scouting.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTION REVIEW BOARD
Appendix A

Kent State University Institution Review Board

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO USE HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Send completed forms to one of the reviewers designated for your Department or Katherine Lunt, Research and Graduate
Studies, 113 University Auditorium

LOG NUMBER C77-317

Form can be downloaded from http://www.kent.edu/ogar-alpha/forms/

Please type all information. HANDWRITTEN FORMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. Move through the document
using TAB or Mouse. Do not use the enter Key. To mark a box, click with the mouse.

Name: Tammy Matecun
Telephone: 330-342-0079
Address: 7476 Whitemarsh Way, Hudson OH 44236
Email: tmatecun@aol.com

Department: Educational Foundations and Special Services
Faculty Rank/Student Status: Doctoral Student

Project Title: Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Type of Project: ☐ FACULTY RESEARCH ☐ External Funded (Agency: ) Include copy of proposal
☐ STUDENT DIRECTED RESEARCH (Advisor: Dr. Richard Cowan, )
☐ Thesis ☐ Dissertation ☐ Course Requirement (Course #: )
☐ Other (Specify: )

Duration of Project: Starting Date: February 12, 2007 (But not before approval is obtained)
Ending Date: February 12, 2008

I certify that the research procedures for this project and the method of obtaining consent (if any), as approved by the Kent State
University Institutional Review Board, will be followed during the period covered by this research project. Any future changes
will be submitted for Board review and approval prior to implementation.

If this project involves approval/permission from other institutions, the principal investigator (and the faculty advisor if the PI is
a student) must sign below to certify the following statement: "We will not begin research at other institutions before having
obtained their permission to do so."

Principal Investigator: [Signature] Date: 1-24-07

Faculty Advisor (If PI is a student): [Signature] Date: 11-24-07

Action Taken: [By REVIEWER:]
[☑ Level I, Category ] ☐ Level II, Category
[☐ Level III, To Full Board]
Project Involves: [☑ Identiﬁable medical information]
[☑ Deception] [☑ Waiver of Consent]

By KSU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD:
[☑ Approved, Level I]
[☑ Approved, Level II]
IRB Comments: [Signature] Date: 3-20-07

Administrator, IRB: [Signature] Date: 2-6-07

Date: [Signature] Date: [Signature]

IRB Level III Action: [☑ Approved] [☐ Disapproved] [☐ Contingent Approval (Comments or Contingencies): ]

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APPENDIX B

CHILD INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM
Appendix B

Child Interview Consent Form

Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Child Interview

We are contacting you because we are interested in conducting research to help parents and teachers better understand how children interact socially, paying particular attention to positive social skills in children. We are particularly interested in finding out which behaviors and traits children believe are important when they are participating in leisure time activities such as Girl Scouts. We want to do this because there is a lack of information on this topic from the child’s perspective. We hope this information will help provide better assessment strategies and interventions for children who may lack certain social skills. It is our hope that this research will help us learn to more accurately target social skills to teach to children who are experiencing social difficulties in leisure time activities. We would like your child to take part in this project.

If you decide to allow your child to participate in this project, your child will be asked to answer some verbal questions about what she thinks makes a good friend and rank her responses in order of importance. Prior to interviewing your child, your child will be asked if he or she wishes to participate. The interviews will take place in a private setting during a Scout meeting. It is anticipated that the interview will take ten to fifteen minutes. Your child will be allowed to stop at any time, with no harmful consequences to your child. All data collected will remain confidential by identifying students only by identification codes. We will be audiotaping these interviews for the sole purpose of making certain that we reliably report the information obtained. This is necessary because sometimes it is difficult to write down and/or remember details from the interview. These tapes will not be used for purposes that would make them available to the public. Following standards set forth by our research review committee; all tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed and checked.

If your child takes part in this project, your child will help the researchers gain information to improve the effectiveness of interventions for children experiencing social delays. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against your child if you decide not to do it. If your child does take part, your child may stop at any time. We as a research team do not anticipate any negative consequences from participating. We view all of the procedures as positive in nature.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call, Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology at (330) 672-2294. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies at (330) 672-2704.

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Tammy Matecun
Doctoral Student
Kent State University

Richard Cowan, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of School Psychology
Kent State University
Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Child Interview

I agree to let my child take part in this project. I know what she will have to do and that she can stop at any time.

_________________________________________  __________________
Signature                                      Date

_________________________________________
Relationship to child

_________________________________________
Child’s name

If you have any questions about this research project please contact:
Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology
Kent State University
405 White Hall
Kent, Ohio 44242
(330) 672-2294
rcowan1@kent.edu.
APPENDIX C

CHILD INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION CONSENT FORM
Appendix C

Child Interview and Observation Consent Form

Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

We are contacting you because we are interested in conducting research to help parents and teachers better understand how children interact socially in a structured leisure time activity. In this study we are interested in studying positive social skills in children. We are particularly interested in finding out which behaviors and traits children believe are important when they are participating in leisure time activities such as scouting. We want to do this because there is a lack of information on this topic from the child’s perspective. We hope this information will help provide better assessment strategies and interventions for children who may lack certain social skills. It is our hope that this research will help us learn to more accurately target social skills to teach to children who are experiencing social difficulties in leisure time activities. We would like your child to take part in this project. Your child was selected because the troop leader(s) observed that she appears to get along well with her peers.

If you decide to allow your child to participate in this project, your child will be asked to answer some verbal questions about what she thinks makes a good friend in Scouting. Prior to interviewing your child, your child will be asked if she wishes to participate. In addition, your child will be allowed to stop at any time, with no harmful consequences to your child. We will be audiotaping these interviews for the sole purpose of making certain that we reliably report the information obtained. This is necessary because sometimes it is difficult to write down and/or remember details from the interview. These tapes will not be used for purposes that would make them available to the public. Following standards set forth by our research review committee; all tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed and checked. As part of this project, the principal investigator will conduct an unobtrusive observation of your child’s positive social interactions while they are participating in a Scouting activity during one 30-minute observation. All data collected will remain confidential by identifying students only by identification codes.

If your child takes part in this project, your child will help the researchers gain information to improve the effectiveness of interventions for children experiencing difficulties in social interactions in leisure time activities. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you or your child if you decide not to agree to have your child participate. If your child does take part, your child may stop at any time. We as a research team do not anticipate any negative consequences from participating. We view all of the procedures as positive in nature.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call, Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology at (330) 672-2294. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies at (330) 672-2704.

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Tammy Matecun
Doctoral Student
Kent State University

Richard J. Cowan, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of School Psychology
Kent State University
Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Child Observation and Interview Consent Form

I agree to let my child take part in this project I know what she will have to do, and that she can stop at any time.

______________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                      Date

_____________________________________________
Relationship to child

_____________________________________________
Child’s name

If you have any questions about this research project please contact:
Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology
Kent State University
405 White Hall
Kent, Ohio 44242
(330) 672-2294
rcowan1@kent.edu
APPENDIX D

TROOP LEADER INTERVIEW AND SURVEY COMPLETION CONSENT FORM
Appendix D

Troop Leader Interview and Survey Completion Consent Form

Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

We are contacting you because we are interested in conducting research to help parents and teachers better understand how children interact socially, paying particular attention to positive social skills in children. We are especially interested in finding out which behaviors and traits children believe are important when they are participating in leisure time activities such as Scouting. We hope this information will help provide better assessment strategies and interventions for children who may lack certain social skills. It is our hope that this research will help us learn to more accurately target social skills to teach to children who are experiencing social difficulties in leisure time activities. We would like you to take part in this project.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief survey form on your opinions of what social skills are important for girls who participate in Girl Scouts. You will also be asked to participate in an interview to provide additional information about your survey responses. This survey and interview will take approximately one hour of your time. All data collected will remain confidential by identifying participants only by identification codes. We will be audiotaping the interviews for the sole purpose of making certain that we reliably report the information obtained. This is necessary because sometimes it is difficult to write down and/or remember details from the interview. These tapes will not be used for purposes that would make them available to the public. Following standards set forth by our research review committee; all tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed and checked.

If you take part in this project, you will help the researchers gain valuable information to improve the effectiveness of both assessment strategies and interventions for children experiencing social delays. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call, Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology at (330) 672-2294. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies at (330) 672-2704.

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Tammy Matecun, Doctoral Student
State University

Richard Cowan, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Kent School Psychology, Kent State University
Troop Leader Consent Form
Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

I agree to take part in this project, I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

_____________________________________________  _________________
Signature                                           Date

If you have any questions about this research project please contact:
Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology
Kent State University
405 White Hall
Kent, Ohio 44242
(330) 672-2294
rcowan1@kent.edu
APPENDIX E

PARENT SURVEY AND INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM
Appendix E

Parent Survey and Interview Consent Form

Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

We are contacting you because we are interested in conducting research to help parents and teachers better understand how children interact socially, paying particular attention to positive social skills in children. We are especially interested in finding out which behaviors and traits children believe are important when they are participating in leisure time activities such as scouting. We hope this information will help provide better assessment strategies and interventions for children who may lack certain social skills. It is our hope that this research will help us learn to more accurately target social skills to teach to children who are experiencing social difficulties in leisure time activities. We would like you to take part in this project.

If you decide to participate, we would like you to complete the attached brief survey form on your opinions of what social skills are important for girls who participate in Girl Scouts. This survey will take approximately fifteen minutes of your time. All data collected will remain confidential.

In addition to the survey form, we would like to ask you to participate in a follow-up phone interview. The phone interview will provide an opportunity for us to further expand upon your answers to the written questions. It is anticipated that the phone survey will take between ten to fifteen minutes of your time. All data collected will remain confidential by identifying participants only by identification codes.

If you take part in this project, you will help the researchers gain valuable information to improve the effectiveness of both assessment strategies and interventions for children experiencing social delays. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology at (330) 672-2294. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies at (330) 672-2704.

Sincerely,

Tammy Matecum
Doctoral Student
Kent State University

Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology
Kent State University
405 White Hall
Kent, Ohio 44242(330) 672-2294
rcowan1@kent.edu
Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Parent Survey and Interview Consent Form

_______ I would like to participate in the survey form only.

_______ I would like to participate in the survey and phone interview.

I can be reached by phone at: ________________________________

I agree to take part in this project; I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

_____________________________________________  ____________
Signature                                           Date

If you have any questions about this research project please contact:
Dr. Richard Cowan, Assistant Professor of School Psychology
Kent State University
405 White Hall
Kent, Ohio 44242
(330) 672-2294
rcowan1@kent.edu
APPENDIX F

AUDIO CONSENT FORM FOR CHILD INTERVIEW
Appendix F

Audio Consent Form for Child Interview

AUDIO CONSENT FORM
(CHILD INTERVIEW)

Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

I agree to audio taping of ___________________________ for an interview regarding positive characteristics of friends in leisure time activities at my child’s Girl Scout troop meeting on: ___________________________.

_____________________________  ________________________________
Signature  Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audiotapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

___ want to hear the tapes  ___ do not want to hear the tapes

Sign now below if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them.

Tammy Matecun, Richard Cowan, Cathy Telzrow, and other researchers approved by Kent State University may / may not use the audiotapes made of my child. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

___ X ___ this research project  ___ teacher education  ___ presentation at professional meetings

All tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed and checked.

________________________________________  ________________________________
Signature  Date

________________________________________
Child’s name

Address: ________________________________________________________________
________________________________________

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APPENDIX G

AUDIO CONSENT FORM FOR ADULT INTERVIEW
Appendix G

Audio Consent Form for Adult Interview

I agree to audiotaping at ______________________________ on ______________________.

________________________________
Signature

_____________________
Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audiotapes before they are used. I understand that the audiotapes will be destroyed after transcription to preserve confidentiality. I have decided that I:

_____ want to hear the tapes

_____ do not want to hear the tapes

____________________________
Signature

___________
Date

Sign now below if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them.

__________________________________
Signature

________________________
Date

Address
APPENDIX H

RECRUITMENT FLYER
Appendix H

Troop Recruitment Flyer

Research Project on Social Skills in Girls Needs Your Input

The PROJECT
We are asking for your help in conducting a research project to find out which positive behaviors and traits children, Scout leaders and parents believe are important for girls to have when they are participating in leisure time activities such as Scouting. We hope that this research will help to provide better assessment strategies and interventions for children who may lack certain social skills. We believe that this research will help us learn to more accurately target social skills to teach to children who are experiencing social difficulties in leisure time activities.

The DETAILS
We are seeking several troop leaders with at least one year of leader experience from second year Brownies or first and second year Junior Girl Scouts who would be willing to assist us in obtaining data for this project. Data will be collected from troop leaders, parents, and the Scouts in order to provide the most information possible from differing perspectives on this topic.

In order to gather this data we would like your assistance in completing one survey form and a follow-up interview regarding your opinions on important social skills for girls in scouting. We would also seek your assistance in identifying one girl in your troop that is “well-liked” by peers for inclusion in an observation portion of the study. Finally, your assistance in forwarding information regarding the project and consent forms to the parents of the girls in your troop would be needed.

The primary investigator or a trained graduate student will collect the data for the study. All data collected will remain confidential. The Human Subjects Review Board at Kent State University has approved this project. We hope to begin data collection in January or February, but we will be happy to work to accommodate your schedule. For the study the following data will need to be collected for each participating troop:

- Troop leader survey and follow-up interview (Approximately 1 hour)
- One parent survey and follow-up interview (Approximately 1 hour)
- 4-5 Child interviews (Approximately 10-15 minutes each)
- Observation(s) of one child (Approximately 1 hour)

If you are interested in assisting us in this project or would like more information, please contact:

Tammy Matecun
Doctoral Student in School Psychology
Kent State University
330-342-0079 (Home)

Richard Cowan, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor in School Psychology
Kent State University
330-672-2294
APPENDIX I

TROOP LEADER SURVEY FORM
Think about the girls in your Scout troop and the specific behaviors they exhibit in order to be successful in interacting with their peers and troop leaders in scouting. Please list as many of these observable behaviors as you can that demonstrate the social skills needed to be a participant in the troop. When considering these observable behaviors, consider the variety of settings in which the girls participate as Scouts such as troop meetings, service projects, and field trips.

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

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APPENDIX J

SCRIPT USED FOR OBTAINING ASSENT FROM CHILD INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
Appendix J

Script Used for Obtaining Assent From Child Interview Participants

Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Script for Assent for Children

Hi, (child’s name)
My name is ________________ and I am trying to learn more about what you look for when choosing friends to spend time with in Girl Scouts.
I would like you to answer some questions about what you like in a friend.
Do you want to do this?
Do you have any questions before we start?
If you want to stop at any time, just tell me.
I am going to use this recorder. Is that okay?
APPENDIX K

SAMPLE SOCIAL BEHAVIORS FROM CALDARELLA AND MERREL’S (1997)
TAXONOMY OF SOCIAL BEHAVIORS TO FACILITATE OBSERVATION
DATA COLLECTION
Appendix K

Sample Social Behaviors from Caldarella and Merrel’s (1997) Taxonomy of Social Behaviors to Facilitate Observation Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Relations</th>
<th>Compliance Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compliments others</td>
<td>Follows directions/instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers help to peer</td>
<td>Follows rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invites others to play</td>
<td>Shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiates conversations</td>
<td>Responds appropriately to criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defends peers</td>
<td>Completes tasks/assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good leadership skills</td>
<td>Starts conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in discussions</td>
<td>Acknowledges compliments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows rules</td>
<td>Self-Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromises with others</td>
<td>Questions unfair rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives criticism well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperates with others</td>
<td>Completes work/tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remains calm/controls temper</td>
<td>Listens and carries out directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asks for assistance when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignores peer distractions when working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses free time appropriately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX L

PARENT SURVEY FORM
Appendix L

Parent Survey Form

Assessing Positive Social Skills in a Structured Leisure Time Activity

Parent Survey Form

Think about your daughter and the girls in her Scout troop. In your opinion, what are the important social behaviors that the Scouts need to have in order to interact successfully with their peers and troop leaders in Scouting. Please list as many of these observable behaviors as you can that demonstrate the social skills needed to be a participant in the troop. When considering these observable behaviors, consider the variety of settings in which the girls participate as Scouts such as troop meetings, service projects, and field trips.
REFERENCES


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*Psychology in the Schools, 39*, 293-304.


Gresham, F. M. (1997). Social competence and students with behavior disorders: Where we’ve been, where we are, and where we should go. *Education & Treatment of Children, 20*(3), 233-250.


