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Cross-informant ratings of social competence in children and adolescents

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Abstract

The cross-informant ratings of social competence displayed by children and adolescents were investigated in a meta-analytic study. Effect sizes from 74 studies containing the ratings of the social competence of children and adolescents from at least two different informants were included in this meta-analysis. Results indicated that studies investigating the correspondence of the child or adolescent's own report with the report of parent, teacher, or peer informants had average effect sizes that were small in magnitude. The average effect sizes of other types of cross-informant pairs (e.g., parent–teacher) were moderate in magnitude, with teachers and peers demonstrating the greatest correspondence. Potential moderators (e.g., the type of measure completed by the informants, the age and gender of the target child or adolescent, and the location of the assessment) were also examined. These results demonstrate the importance of selecting carefully informants when evaluating the social competence of children and adolescents.

Keywords: Cross-informant ratings; Social competence; Children; Adolescents

1. Introduction

The development of social competence in children and adolescents has been related closely to positive outcomes in later life (e.g., Galejs & Stockdale, 1982). As a result, evaluating the consistency of cross-informant ratings when assessing social competence exhibited by children and adolescents may be important for the promotion and evaluation of effective interventions focused on improving social

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competence across settings. Few attempts, however, have been made to examine the cross-informant ratings of social competence. Cross-informant ratings of emotional and behavioral functioning in children and adolescents have been examined thoroughly (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987; Duhig, Renk, Epstein, & Phares, 2000). In contrast, cross-informant ratings of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents often have been treated as an aside. Such ratings have not been investigated directly in many cases. As a result, a meta-analytic study was conducted to describe the correspondence of cross informants in their ratings of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents.

2. Cross-informant ratings of social competence

The benefits and difficulties of dealing with multiple informants, as discussed by Achenbach et al. (1987), have become apparent in clinical work and research with children, adolescents, and families. When information from multiple sources is integrated, a more complete picture of an individual can be constructed. Achenbach et al. suggested that it is essential to preserve the contributions of different informants, even if their reports are not correlated highly. Cross-informant ratings have provided valuable information in the examination of other areas of childhood functioning, such as in the emotional and behavioral functioning of children and adolescents. As a result, the contributions of multiple cross-informants likely will provide valuable information regarding the social competence of children and adolescents.

Although cross-informant reports may correlate modestly, each informant may have differing experiences with the various types of characteristics and behaviors displayed by children and adolescents. In fact, Achenbach et al. (1987) found that informants who played similar roles (e.g., mothers and fathers) tended to show higher levels of agreement in their ratings of the emotional and behavioral problems of children and adolescents than did informants who played different roles (e.g., teachers and peers). This finding may apply to cross-informant ratings of social competence as well. For example, mothers' ratings of children's task-oriented behaviors have been correlated positively with fathers' ratings of capable, leadership, and active behaviors with peers (Galejs & Stockdale, 1982).

Individual studies examining the agreement of cross informants, other than that of mothers and fathers, have found conflicting patterns of results, however. For example, parents' ratings of the social competence exhibited by their children tended to not correspond with that of other sources of information (Schneider & Byrne, 1989). Furthermore, Steele, Forehand, and Devine (1996) reported that teachers and adolescents did not differ in their ratings of adolescent social competence, whereas mothers had higher ratings than did adolescents. In contrast, Galejs and Stockdale (1982) reported that teachers' reports of social competence corresponded more with those of parents rather than with those of peers. To provide an overall picture of these different findings, the current meta-analysis attempted to clarify the degree of correspondence in the ratings of social competence exhibited by children and adolescents when provided by different informants.

In general, it has been suggested that researchers combine data from multiple informants. This approach has proven to be more reliable than using information from a single data source (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Furthermore, this approach may be particularly useful for the construct of social competence, as it has been defined in many different ways. One primary component of social

competence appears throughout the literature: Social competence involves an individual's ability to deal with situations by exchanging information with others (Lieberman, 1977). From this primary component, definitions have diverged widely. Social competence has been used as a molar concept. In these cases, the concept has been defined broadly as "an ability to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment" (Waters & Sroufe, 1983, p. 80). Because such broad definitions may lack specific implications for assessment and do not provide measurable operationalizations of the concept, more narrow definitions also have been incorporated. With these definitions, social competence has been viewed as the specific skills that compose the construct, allowing for ease of measurement.

3. Potential moderators of cross-informant ratings of social competence

3.1. Measurement of social competence

Social competence is a multifaceted construct (Hogan, Scott, & Bauer, 1992) with many definitions available. In particular, Sroufe, Cooper, and DeHart (1996, p. 378) defined social competence as "a child's ability to engage and respond to peers with positive feelings, to be of interest to peers and be highly regarded by them, to take the lead as well as follow, and to sustain the give-and-take of peer interaction." To coincide with this definition, assessment measures that provide positive measures of social competence were selected for inclusion in the current study. These assessment measures included sociometric measures, self-report measures (e.g., the Self-Perception Profile for Children; Harter, 1985), rating scales for parents and teachers (e.g., the Child Behavior Checklist and Teacher Report Form, competency subscales; Achenbach, 1991a, 1991b), and social problem-solving measures. Each of these measures can provide an assessment of social competence through the presence of social skills and social knowledge as well as peer acceptance.

Assessment measures used to assess social competence in children and adolescents may be related to the cross-informant ratings provided by different informants, however. Cross-informant ratings may be different if different conceptualizations of social competence are utilized across measures. Different measures may be utilized to assess social competence. As included in this meta analysis, cross informants may complete sociometric measures, in which they are asked to rate a child or adolescent on some specific interpersonal criteria (e.g., McCandless & Marshall, 1957), or rating scales, in which they are asked to rate the actual behavior of a child or adolescent (e.g., Harter, 1985). Cross informants also may complete social problem-solving measures, in which they indicate what they think the child or adolescent may do in a specific social situation. Although some of these assessment measures, such as the sociometric measures, have addressed the question of "Is the child liked?," other measures, such as the rating scales, have addressed the question of "What is the child like?" (Parker & Asher, 1987). Differences in cross-informant ratings using these different types of measures may be simultaneously valid with respect to the different aspects of social competence at different levels of analysis (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Although the use of these different assessment measures would be consistent with the multiaxial assessment of children and adolescents emphasized by Achenbach (1985), these different strategies may promote differences in cross-informant ratings. As a result, the types of measures used by different informants were examined in this study.

3.2. The gender and age of the children and adolescents being rated

The relationships among the ratings of cross informants may also vary depending on various characteristics, such as the gender and age, of the children or adolescents being rated. For example, Epkins (1996) found that parent–child and parent–teacher correspondence on ratings of depression and anxiety symptoms in children was significantly better when the ratings were of elementary school children than of inpatient children. This discrepancy appeared to be the result of parents endorsing significantly more symptoms than did teachers for inpatient children (Epkins, 1996). Furthermore, mother–child and mother–father agreement was greater in ratings of preadolescents than in ratings of adolescents (Tarullo, Richardson, Radke-Yarrow, & Martinez, 1995). These findings may also apply to the ratings of social competence exhibited by children and adolescents.

Differences in correspondence between cross informants may be a function of socially competent behaviors being situation and age specific (e.g., Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Social competence may progress developmentally from infancy throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. As a result, it would be necessary to assess age-appropriate competence, with select central issues for each developmental period. These central issues may be varied in salience at different developmental periods and may require researchers to assess different behaviors (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). In addition, the gender of children and adolescents may be important in the development and evaluation of social competence. For example, positive social characteristics for boys and girls have been related to differential parental behaviors (MacDonald & Parke, 1984). Furthermore, some researchers have suggested that girls may be better at skills necessary in demonstrating social competence, such as the comprehension of prose as well as the use of phonological and semantic information (e.g., Halpern, 1997). Furthermore, different cross informants may be utilizing different views of developmentally appropriate behaviors. Given these factors, the gender and age of the children and adolescents will be examined within the context of cross-informant ratings in this meta-analysis.

3.3. The location where measures of social competence were administered

Finally, the correspondence of cross informants may differ based on the location where the measures of social competence were administered. Because the self-reports of young children often have been viewed as problematic, other measures of social competence have been utilized, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, in natural settings, the assessment of socially competent behaviors may be less circumscribed and less controlled as well as more difficult to arrange and design than that conducted in laboratory settings (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Furthermore, the range of behaviors scored in naturalistic settings may be broad and difficult to define, resulting potentially in a lack of comparable assessments across occasions or informants (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). In contrast, observations made in naturalistic settings may not be far removed from the world to which researchers intend to generalize their findings (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). With regard to laboratory settings, however, samples of socially competent behavior may be unrepresentative of that in naturalistic settings and lacking in construct validity (Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Given these findings, the location where measures of social competence were administered was also examined in the current meta-analysis.

3.4. The meta-analysis

In summary, researchers have reported substantial findings in the area of social competence. However, researchers have lagged behind in their efforts to compile the findings pertaining to cross-informant ratings in this area, as has been done in the area of internalizing and externalizing behaviors (e.g., Achenbach et al., 1987). As a result, the purpose of this meta-analysis was to assess the correspondence of cross informants in their ratings of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents and to examine the potential moderators of this correspondence. Based on the findings of Achenbach et al. (1987), it was expected that mothers and fathers would show high correspondence in their ratings of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents. It also was hypothesized that other informant pairs would demonstrate somewhat lower correspondence due to their varying roles in relation to the children and adolescents being rated. Finally, it was expected that differences among cross informants would be related to the type of measure completed, the age and gender of the children and adolescents rated, and the location where the assessment measures were completed.

4. Method

4.1. Sample of studies

A computer-based literature search of PsychLit and PsychINFO, which both provide abstracts of psychologically oriented articles in all areas of psychology, was conducted. Keywords used in the searches were multiple combinations of *mother*, *father*, *parent*, *teacher*, *peer*, *social*, *competence*, *informant*, and *agreement*. Relevant articles also were collected from the reference lists of related journal articles and book chapters in the area of social competence and cross informants. In addition, the following top level journals from the late 1980s to the late 1990s were scanned for relevant articles: *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *Psychological Assessment*, *Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *Development and Psychopathology*, and *Journal of Family Psychology.*

The studies were included in the meta-analysis if they met the following criteria:

1. Informants included parents, teachers, peers, and the children or adolescents themselves. Studies were included when there were two or more informants regarding the social competence of children or adolescents.
2. Informants were familiar with the children or adolescents studied and saw them regularly in at least one condition.
3. Informants provided scores for *social* competence. Other forms of competence were excluded from this meta-analysis.
4. Informants had completed different measures of social competence (e.g., sociometric measures, rating scales, social problem-solving measures) that are used widely and have demonstrated adequate reliability and validity in the research literature.
5. The studies were published or in press in the English language in peer-reviewed journals.

6. The children and adolescents examined were of school age, ranging from preschool to high school.
7. The results were reported in sufficient detail to permit calculation of effect sizes.

Based on these criteria, 74 studies containing effect sizes were obtained. If studies contained information from multiple cross-informant pairs, the effect size for each cross-informant pair was treated as an independent effect size. As a result, these studies yielded 199 effect sizes across all cross-informant pairs examined. These studies are denoted with an asterisk in the Reference list. Sixty-nine of these studies listed the Pearson correlation coefficient, *r*, for the cross informants in the study itself, whereas one study required that a *t* statistic be converted to an effect size (e.g., D'Ilio & Karnes, 1992), and four studies required that an *F* be converted to an effect size (e.g., Dodge, McClaskey, & Feldman, 1985; Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990; Volling, MacKinnon-Lewis, Rabiner, & Barandaran, 1993). Conversions for effect sizes followed the equations provided by Rosenthal (1991) and Wolf (1986). The studies were grouped by the cross-informant correlations that were provided, including self–parent, self-teacher, self–peer, parent–teacher, parent–peer, mother–father, and teacher–peer, with "self" indicating that the children or adolescents had provided ratings of social competence for themselves. Unfortunately, sufficient numbers of effect sizes for other types of cross informants, such as mental health professionals, were not located through the search described above and could not be used meaningfully in this meta-analysis.

In most cases, the studies reported only one effect size for each cross-informant pair. In seven cases (e.g., Beck, Collins, Overholser, & Terry, 1985; Bierman & McCauley, 1987; Dekovic & Jannssens, 1992; Hughes et al., 1989; Olson & Lifgren, 1988; Profilet & Ladd, 1994; Williamson, Moody, Granberry, Lethermon, & Blouin, 1983), however, more than one effect size for specific cross-informant pairs was provided. Because including more than one effect size from a study is a violation of the independence assumption (Erel & Burman, 1995) and may inflate the sample size of the statistical tests and effects beyond the number of independent studies (as summarized in Wolf, 1986), one effect size was chosen for inclusion in each of these cases. Effect sizes derived from the measure that was a more widely used and substantiated measure were selected (e.g., a rating scale was selected over a measure consisting of a one-item description). In cases where multiple effect sizes were provided as a result of longitudinal studies (e.g., Steele et al., 1996; Van Lieshout, van Aken, & van Seyen, 1990), only the effect size derived from the first round of testing was included so that these effect sizes would resemble most closely the effect sizes from one-time testing. In studies where multiple samples were analyzed separately (such as, boys vs. girls, abused vs. nonabused, etc.), effect sizes from each sample were treated as independent.

4.2. Planned analyses

The meta-analysis completed by Achenbach et al. (1987) and the meta-analytic strategies described by Rosenthal (1991) and Wolf (1986) were used as examples in conducting this meta-analysis. Findings from relevant studies were combined to determine the degree of correspondence for respective cross-informant pairs. To combine the results of multiple independent studies, the effect size (*r*) was collected from each study and converted to a Fisher z_r. Then, a mean effect size and a weighted mean effect size, where the z_r was weighted by the *df* (or $n - 3$) of each study, were calculated as suggested by Rosenthal. To compare the mean effect sizes (while converted to Fisher z_r), significant differences between cross-informant raters were then determined using *z* tests, as suggested by Rosenthal.

In addition, focused meta-analytic techniques were used to identify potential moderator variables that may explain inconsistencies in cross-informant ratings (as summarized by Hedges & Olkin, 1985). Moderator categories were constructed based on the characteristics of the studies sampled for this meta-analysis. The types of measures used across cross informants were examined. This examination was limited to comparisons of studies where both informants completed the same type of measure (e.g., sociometric measures, rating scales), as the completion of different measures across informants would not represent a meaningful comparison group. The age of the children studied was also included as a moderator to examine potential developmental differences reflected in effect sizes and was based on the ages and/or grades of the children studied. In this case, the ages of the children and adolescents rated in each study were categorized as falling within early childhood (e.g., preschool age), middle childhood (e.g., school age), and adolescence. Furthermore, gender was included to determine potential differences in the ratings of boys versus girls. Finally, the location of the test administration was examined.

From Monte Carlo studies concerning analysis of variance, it has been concluded that the F test is not affected greatly when the distribution of scores are symmetrical, but not normal, and when the sample sizes are equal and greater than $n = 12$ (Clinch & Kesselman, 1982). Similarly, the results of simulation studies demonstrate that the large sample distribution of the test statistic Q is reasonably accurate in moderate-sized samples of $n = 10$ or larger (as summarized by Hedges & Olkin, 1985). Another definition of largeness for the Q statistic relies on a larger number of studies with relatively small sample sizes (rather than a small number of studies with large sample sizes). In these cases, the large sample normal approximation also is applicable whenever the number of studies is large, rather than when the sample size is large (Hedges & Olkin, 1985). Thus, the assumptions of Q rely on the sample size of studies producing the effect size, rather than on the number of effect sizes used in the analyses, unless the sample sizes of studies producing the effect sizes are small. Given this information, all comparisons of potential moderators were conducted using the Q statistic.

5. Results

5.1. Mean composite effect sizes

The results of the computation of mean effect sizes and mean weighted effect sizes for self–parent, self–teacher, self–peer, parent–teacher, parent–peer, mother–father, and teacher–peer cross informants can be found in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, the mean weighted effect sizes reflecting cross-informant ratings between the self-report of the children and adolescents and other informants were small in magnitude, ranging from .21 to .30. The mean weighted effect sizes reflecting cross-informant

Table 1
Cross-informant correlations

	Self–Parent	Self–Teacher	Self–Peer	Parent–Teacher	Parent–Peer	Mother–Father	Teacher–Peer
Number of effect sizes	19	42	39	16	7	6	70
Mean r	.20	.27	.29	.43	.33	.45	.47
Mean weighted r	.21	.25	.30	.38	.39	.36	.48

ratings of other types of informants (parents, teachers, and peers) were moderate in magnitude, ranging from .38 to .48.

The results of comparisons between cross-informant rater pairs are listed in Table 2. As can be seen in Table 2, the correspondence between teachers and peers was significantly greater than the correspondence between any other cross-informant pair. In addition, cross-informant correspondence between parents and other informants (other than the children or adolescents themselves) was significantly greater than that between the children and adolescents themselves and any other informant. Finally, although the correspondence between the children and adolescents themselves and other informants was significantly lower than all other cross-informant pairs, correspondence between children and adolescents with their peers was significantly greater than that between children and adolescents with other informants.

5.2. Potential moderators of cross-informant ratings

The focused analyses were limited by the information (or lack thereof) reported in each of the studies examined and may not demonstrate reliable differences. Given the number of comparisons, however, the alpha level was constrained to .001. A summary of the average effect sizes for each moderator, including number of effect sizes and participants summarized in each effect size, is provided in Table 3.

5.2.1. Type of measure

Effect sizes were separated within cross-informant pairs by the type of measure completed by the cross informants. In this comparison, both informants completed the same type of measure. Unfortunately, there was not enough information included in studies to examine sufficiently the different types of measures within the same cross-informant pairs (e.g., sociometrics vs. rating scales within a specific

Table 2
Significant differences in cross-informant correlations

Cross informant	Self–Parent	Self–Teacher	Self–Peer	Parent–Teacher	Parent–Peer	Mother–Father	Teacher–Peer
Self–Parent (S–P)	–						
Self–Teacher (S–T)	NS	–					
Self–Peer (S–Pr)	S–Pr > S–P**	S–Pr>S–T**	–				
Parent–Teacher (P–T)	P–T>S–P**	P–T>S–T**	P–T>S–Pr**	–			
Parent–Peer (P–Pr)	P–Pr>S–P**	P–Pr>S–T**	P–Pr>S–Pr*	NS	–		
Mother–Father (M–F)	M–F>S–P**	M–F>S–T*	NS	NS	NS	–	
Teacher–Peer (T–Pr)	T–Pr>S–P**	T–Pr>S–T**	T–Pr>S–Pr**	T–Pr>P–T**	T–Pr>P–Pr**	T–Pr>M–F**	–

NS = not significantly different.
* $P < .01$.
** $P < .001$.

Table 3
Effect sizes for moderator categories

	Self–Parent	Self–Teacher	Self–Peer	Parent–Teacher	Parent–Peer	Mother–Father	Teacher–Peer
Type of measure							
Rating scale	.22 (15; 2943)	.26 (29; 7149)	.42 (3; 801)	.36 (14; 2476)	–	.37 (5; 455)	.66 (3; 801)
Sociometric	.40 (1; 181)	.31 (6; 1052)	.35 (5; 895)	.73 (1; 181)	.46 (1; 181)	–	.51 (29; 2338)
Social problem solving	–	–	–	–	–	.31 (1; 114)	–
Q sort	–	–	–	.31 (1; 93)	–	–	–
Age of children or adolescents							
Early childhood	.12 (1; 46)	.33 (5; 233)	.30 (3; 197)	.42 (3; 195)	.38 (4; 803)	.42 (1; 57)	.31 (15; 664)
Middle childhood	.23 (14, 2943)	.24 (32; 7450)	.29 (31; 6264)	.35 (12; 2457)	–	.28 (3; 328)	.43 (46; 7601)
Adolescence	.09 (5, 403)	.21 (8, 1757)	.38 (5; 779)	.41 (1; 98)	.31 (3; 185)	.41 (2; 184)	.53 (9; 1175)
Gender of child or adolescent							
Boys only	.30 (2; 446)	.30 (3; 482)	.25 (3; 670)	–	–	–	.36 (9; 678)
Girls only	.19 (2, 451)	.29 (3; 485)	.25 (3; 667)	–	–	–	.33 (7; 492)
Boys and girls	.18 (15; 2314)	.23 (38; 8292)	.31 (31; 5637)	.34 (13; 2448)	.35 (6; 807)	.34 (6; 569)	.45 (50; 7883)
Location of testing							
School	.20 (14, 2821)	.24 (39; 8901)	.30 (33; 6612)	.33 (10; 2308)	.37 (5; 750)	.26 (2; 281)	.44 (62; 8835)
Laboratory	–	–	–	.43 (3; 161)	.07 (1; 57)	.42 (1; 57)	.10 (1; 57)
Other	.08 (4; 255)	.02 (2; 71)	–	.27 (1; 38)	–	.40 (3; 231)	–

–: Indicates that an effect size could not be calculated for a category. Following each average effect size, the number of effect sizes and the number of participants included in each average are listed (number of effect sizes; number of participants).

cross-informant pair). There were several cross-informant pairs exhibiting significant differences. In self–parent pairs, there was significantly greater agreement when sociometric measures were used (r=.40) than when rating scales were used (r=.22). Consistently, there was significantly greater agreement in self–teacher pairs when sociometric measures were used (r=.31) than when rating scales were used (r=.26). For parent–teacher pairs, there was significantly greater agreement when sociometric measures were used (r=.73) than when rating scales (r=.36) or *Q* sorts (r=.31) were used. For teacher–peer pairs, there was significantly greater agreement when rating scales were used (r=.66) than when sociometric measures were used (r=.51). The comparisons for other cross-informant pairs were not significant.

5.2.2. Age

Studies were grouped within cross-informant pairs according to the presence of children in early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence in the samples examined. Significant differences across age groups were identified within three cross-informant pairs. Self–parent pairs demonstrated greater agreement in the rating of children in middle childhood (r=.23) than in the rating of adolescents (r=.09). Self–peer pairs demonstrated greater correspondence in the ratings of adolescents (r=.38) than in the ratings of children in middle childhood (r=.29). Teacher–peer pairs demonstrated greater correspondence in ratings of adolescents (r=.53) than in the ratings of children in middle (r=.43) and in early childhood (r=.31); furthermore, they demonstrated greater correspondence in the ratings of children in

middle childhood (r=.43) than in the ratings of children in early childhood (r=.31). Comparisons for other cross-informant pairs were not significant.

5.2.3. Gender

Significant differences were only identified in the agreement of teacher–peer informants. Teacher–peer pairs demonstrated significantly greater agreement in studies that did not separate boys and girls (r=.45) in their samples than in studies that examined only boys (r=.36) or only girls (r=.33). It should be noted, however, that none of the studies reporting parent–teacher, parent–peer, and mother–father correspondence included separate samples for boys and girls. The comparisons for other cross-informant pairs were not significant.

5.2.4. Location of test administration

There was only a significant difference for teacher–peer pairs. Teacher–peer agreement was significantly greater when teachers and peers completed measures in the school setting (r=.44) than in a laboratory setting (r=.10). The comparisons for other cross-informant pairs were not significant.

6. Discussion

The results of this meta-analysis demonstrated that different pairs of cross informants were likely to demonstrate different levels of correspondence in their ratings of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents. As a result, these findings emphasize the importance of using multiple cross-informants in the assessment of the social competence displayed by children and adolescents. By including multiple cross-informants, who provided reliable and knowledgeable reports of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents, a more complete picture can be constructed. Overall, the cross-informant correspondence in the ratings of the social competence displayed by children and adolescents was low to moderate, rather than perfect. These levels of correspondence were demonstrated although the informants investigated in this meta-analysis were relatively familiar with the children and adolescents being rated. It would be expected that such informants should demonstrate some level of consensus about the social competence of children and adolescents based on their acquaintance with them (i.e., the amount of information to which the informant is exposed; Kenny, 1991).

Similar to the meta-analysis by Achenbach et al. (1987) examining emotional and behavioral problems, cross-informant ratings between the self-report provided by the children and adolescents themselves and the report of other informants, such as parents, teachers, and peers, showed relatively small degrees of correspondence, ranging from .21 to .30. Furthermore, cross-informant pairs involving the self-report of the children and adolescents themselves demonstrated significantly lower correspondence than did other cross-informant pairs. In contrast, other cross informants showed moderate degrees of correspondence, ranging from .36 to .48. These effect sizes, however, are not as large as those obtained by Achenbach et al. (1987). Furthermore, these effect sizes did not exhibit higher correspondence between informants who play similar roles (e.g., mothers and fathers) in relation to the target child or adolescent. The largest effect size (.48) was obtained for the correspondence of teacher and peer ratings. In addition, this correspondence between teachers and peers was significantly greater than that of any other set of cross-informant pairs. It may be the case

that the social behaviors of students in the classroom became a particularly salient cue to teachers when researchers were gathering information actively about these behaviors. Teachers and peers also see students in a very specific setting, the classroom. Both of these factors may have contributed to the higher level of correspondence between teachers and peers.

Cross-informant correspondence for social competence may have been lower than those for emotional and behavioral difficulties for a variety of reasons. It may be the case that emotional and behavioral problems of children and adolescents are a much more salient cue for adult observers than socially competent behaviors are. In addition, researchers have documented that cross-informant ratings are more consistent for more bothersome behaviors, such as externalizing behavior, than for less bothersome behaviors (e.g., Achenbach et al., 1987). For example, both parents and teachers tended to rate externalizing behaviors as more bothersome than adolescents rated these behaviors (Phares & Danforth, 1994). Thus, certain characteristics of the behavior (e.g., being highly bothersome) may result in greater correspondence in reports of multiple cross-informants. These relationships should be explored further in an effort to explain the potential reasons for the differential reporting of social competence versus problematic internalizing and externalizing behaviors, especially in the case of informants who play a similar role in relation to the child or adolescent being rated.

Although the cross-informant correspondence for the social competence of children and adolescents was low to moderate in magnitude, depending on which cross-informant pair is considered, the behavior of children and adolescents who are socially competent should vary, to some extent, across social situations and depending on who is present. To a certain extent, behavior is characterized by situational specificity (Mischel, 1968). In addition to the expected differences in behavior across different settings, socially competent children and adolescents should be able to evaluate a given social situation and interact appropriately with other individuals in an effective manner (i. e., Lieberman, 1977). Thus, these children and adolescents would recognize the differing social expectations of parents, teachers, and peers, and respond accordingly.

Although several differences in effect sizes were described based on the types of measures administered, the age and gender of the children or adolescents who were being rated, and the location where measures were administered, these differences should be viewed cautiously. With regard to the measures completed by informants, many cross-informant pairs demonstrated greater agreement when they completed sociometric measures. This finding may have been the result of the demonstrated validity of these measures as well as the fact that they indicate whether or not the child is liked. Making a judgment about whether a child or adolescent may be liked by their peers may be an easier distinction to make than determining which behaviors a child or adolescent exhibits on a regular basis. With regard to the age of the child or adolescent rated, self–parent agreement was greater during middle childhood, whereas self–peer and teacher–peer agreements were greater during adolescence. These findings may reflect the growing social network of adolescents and the greater amount of time that adolescents spend in school-related activities (e.g., Harter, 1990). The interpretation of gender differences was difficult due to the number of studies that examined boys and girls together rather than separately. Finally, teacher–peer agreement was greater when measures were completed at school than in the laboratory, reflecting the salience of the setting in the ratings of cross informants.

Given the importance of social competence in predicting individual social development, academic success (Galejs & Stockdale, 1982), and positive occupational attainments (Clausen, 1991), the cross-informant ratings of socially competent behaviors in children and adolescents deserve further research. In particular, the findings of this meta-analysis demonstrate that certain cross-informant

pairs have been neglected in the current literature. Whereas a number of studies reported cross-informant information pertaining to the correspondence of the self-reports of children or adolescents and the ratings of parents, teachers, and peers, as well as the correspondence between the ratings of teachers and the ratings of peers and parents, fewer studies reported cross-informant correspondence between parent–peer and mother–father pairs. As a result, researchers and mental health professionals who work with children and families should begin to include more widely cross-informant measures of social competence in therapy and assessment practices, rather than maintaining a sole focus on the difficulties that family members may be experiencing. In particular, the characteristics of children and families should be examined in relation to the ratings of social competence.

To achieve a strong agreement across informants, each informant may have to observe the target child or adolescent in every possible setting to acquire a representative sample of the social competence displayed by children and adolescents over time. Because most cross informants in clinical and research-based assessment will be unable to observe children and adolescents in multiple settings, it is important to utilize the reports of as many reliable and knowledgeable cross informants as possible to increase the reliability of the composite of behaviors. Ultimately, however, the decision of which cross informants to survey should be based on the setting in which one is interested and the types of information one wishes to collect. Based on the results of this meta-analysis, it is evident that different cross informants will contribute different information to the description of the social competence exhibited by children and adolescents. To gain a comprehensive understanding of social competence in a child or adolescent, however, this meta-analysis suggests that it may be beneficial to utilize the reports of a teacher or a peer, who tend to show the highest level of agreement. The report of a parent, as well as a self-report from the child or adolescent, could then provide additional information about social competence because these types of reports tend to show lower levels of correspondence with other informants. Thus, for the best possible estimate of the social competence displayed by a child or adolescent, the reports of multiple cross-informants should be considered.

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