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The relationship between the functions of school refusal behavior and family environment

Rachel Marie Schafer
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIOR AND FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

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Rachel Marie Schafer

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Christopher Kearney, Committee Chair

Michelle Carro, Committee Member

Jennifer Rennels, Committee Member

Lori Olafson, Graduate College Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies
and Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

The Relationship Between the Functions of School Refusal Behavior and Family Environment

by

Rachel Schafer
Dr. Christopher Kearney, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The current study examined the relationship between the functions of school refusal behavior and family environment characteristics in a community sample of youth. The primary aim was to determine the family environments most strongly associated with each function of school refusal behavior in an ethnically diverse, community-based sample of youths referred to the legal process for absenteeism. Hypotheses for the current study were based on the premise that family environment characteristics of the community sample of youths with problematic absenteeism would generally resemble those identified in previous clinical samples. The first hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity would exhibit a healthy family dynamic. The second hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to escape social or evaluative situations would exhibit an isolated family dynamic. The third hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to pursue attention from significant others would exhibit an enmeshed family dynamic. The fourth hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school would exhibit a conflictive and detached family dynamic.

The sample was recruited from two truancy settings and was composed of 215 middle and high school youth aged 11-17 years and their parent or guardian. Overall families scored significantly lower than the norm on the Cohesion, Independence, Active-

Recreational Orientation, and Intellectual-Cultural Orientation Family Environment Scale subscales. Families also scored lower than the norm on the Expressiveness subscale and higher than the norm on the Conflict subscale, but these findings were not robust. Families of function one and function four youth were associated with low levels of cohesion and high levels of conflict. There were no significant associations between function two and function three youth and specific family characteristics. Varying results were also found for English-speaking and Spanish-speaking families. These results provide important clinical implications regarding assessment and treatment of school refusing youth in community settings.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School Absenteeism

Researchers, clinicians, and educators have investigated the etiology, contributing factors, and treatment of problematic school absenteeism for over a century. School absenteeism refers to any excused or unexcused absence from school (Kearney, 2001). Absences may be excused for reasons such as illness, religious holidays, hazardous weather conditions, or funerals (Kearney, 2001). Unexcused absences can occur for various reasons such as child-motivated refusal to attend school (school refusal behavior) or parent-motivated absenteeism due to economic hardship, desire to conceal abuse, or parent psychopathology (Kearney, 2008a). Although 80% of absences are occasional and brief, absenteeism can become problematic (Hersov, 1985a). On a typical school day, 5.5% of students are absent from school, with some urban areas reporting up to a 30% daily absenteeism rate (Cimmarusti, James, Simpson, & Wright, 1984; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

Historical Perspective

Truancy

School absenteeism was initially investigated in the 19th century when compulsory education laws were enacted and education officials thus focused on maintaining attendance (Fagan, 1992). The term "truant" referred to students who were excessively absent from school. In early literature, "truancy" referred to an illegal and deliberate absence from school without parental knowledge (Williams, 1927). Since that time, several terms have been used to describe children with problematic absenteeism. A

historical overview of attempts to properly define and classify problematic absenteeism is thus provided next.

Historically the concepts of truancy and delinquency have overlapped. These concepts have been intertwined since the work of Kline (1897) who suggested that children who do not attend school possess little ambition, morals, and self-respect and do so to rebel against structured school life. Williams (1927) similarly characterized youth who do not attend school as truants who lack motivation, have undesirable friends, and have a difficult home environment.

These ideas led to the conceptualization of truancy as a form of delinquency. Historically the key defining features of truancy were problematic conditions such as neglectful parents, negative influence from peers, poor academic environment, and lower intelligence of the child (Kearney, 2001). Today, truancy has a much broader meaning involving "unexcused, illegal, surreptitious absences" that are non-anxiety based. The modern conceptualization of truancy is also linked to lack of parental knowledge about the absenteeism, delinquency or academic problems, and certain social conditions such as poverty or homelessness (Fremont, 2003; Kearney, 2008b). However, truancy is often reduced to a form of delinquency in research (Fremont, 2003).

Psychoneurotic Truancy

Several researchers began to redefine school absenteeism in the 1930s and 1940s. Partridge (1939) expanded on existing conceptualizations of truancy by introducing psychoneurotic truancy. He delineated five types of truancy, four of which were associated with antisocial behavior and detached family relationships. These four groups included a desiderative group for whom truancy was an expression of inner wants and

needs, a rebellious group for whom truancy and other behaviors were overt and obtrusive, an undisciplined group for whom truancy was a product of environment, and a hysterical group for whom truancy represented a means of escaping a difficult situation. The fifth type of truancy was psychoneurotic truancy where absenteeism arose from an emotional bond between the parent and the child that was characterized by excessive attachment and overprotection or maternal rejection (Partridge, 1939).

Around the time of Partridge's work, Broadwin (1932) was one of the first researchers to acknowledge the anxiety component of school absenteeism. Broadwin noted that some children who were considered truant exhibited "a deep-seated neurosis of the obsessional type," frequently fearing that some harm would befall their mother while they were away at school (1932, p. 254). He also acknowledged that truants often exhibit behavioral symptoms at home that serve to obtain love, to escape from difficult situations, or to act out of defiance (Broadwin, 1932). These ideas were integrated into an evolving conceptualization of school absenteeism, and two groups were delineated. The first encompassed the traditional concept of truancy, while the second acknowledged a more complex, neurotic component (Kearney, 2001). Researchers then turned to the anxiety-based aspect of school absenteeism, and school phobia became a major focus.

School Phobia

Johnson and colleagues (1941) emphasized the concept of school phobia as a type of psychoneurotic disorder characterized by obsessive and phobic tendencies (Johnson, Falstein, Szurek, & Svendsen, 1941). Johnson later clarified her position, stating that school phobia was actually a type of separation anxiety that occurred before a child began to attend school (Johnson, 1957). Despite this clarification, researchers continued to use

the term school phobia within other contexts. As such, school phobia was seen as a subset of psychoneurotic truancy with three main components. First, a child experiences acute anxiety typically caused by emotional conflict or organic disease often accompanied by hypochondriacal and compulsive symptoms. This results in a desire for dependence. The child's mother simultaneously experiences increased anxiety due to a life stressor that involves a threat to her security. Together this leads to an overdependent mother-child relationship (Kearney, 2001) and eventually to a situation in which both mother and child desire school nonattendance.

School phobia was initially viewed as an anxiety-based part of school absenteeism or psychoneurotic truancy characterized by negative affectivity and general distress (Kearney, 2001). The relationship between separation anxiety and school absenteeism is still present today in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR*. Diagnostic criteria for Separation Anxiety Disorder include "persistent reluctance or refusal to go to school or elsewhere because of fear of separation" (p. 125, APA, 2000). The concept of school phobia later included comorbid problems such as depression, family conflict, and somatic complaints (Agras, 1959; Suttenfield, 1954; Talbot, 1957). In addition, school phobia was expanded to the school situation rather than simply the home or maternal situation (Waldfogel, Coolidge, & Hahn, 1957).

Given the increasing complexity of school phobia, other researchers tried to further classify the concept into distinct subtypes. Coolidge, Hahn, and Peck (1957) hypothesized two subtypes of children with school phobia. The neurotic subtype encompassed the traditional concept of school phobia characterized by sudden onset of absenteeism, acute panic-like anxiety symptoms, and younger age. The characterological

subtype was associated with school refusal, or the original concept of psychoneurotic truancy, and gradual onset of absenteeism, depression and paranoia, and older age. This distinction was soon adapted by others and, in the early 1960s, the complexity of problematic absenteeism was increasingly recognized (Kearney, 2001). Waldron and colleagues (1975) identified four subtypes of school phobia. The first subtype was identified as the "family-interaction type" where a youth's refusal to attend school was seen as a form of separation anxiety within the context of a hostile-dependent mother-child relationship. The second subtype was a "classical phobia type" where a youth's defense mechanisms along with a dysfunctional relationship with the mother led to a fear of school. The next subtype, or "acute anxiety type," was an anxiety reaction involving an intense, overwhelming fear that some harm will befall the parent. The fourth subtype was the "situational characterological type," or fear of a real school situation involving threat to bodily harm, failure, or loss of self-esteem (Waldron et al., 1975).

Psychodynamically-based theories eventually became intertwined with those of behaviorism, which led to several new subtypes of school absenteeism. The terms school phobia and school refusal also began to be used interchangeably in the literature. Kennedy (1965) delineated two subgroups of school phobia based on overt symptoms and problem duration. Type I or "neurotic crisis" was marked by younger age and lower grades, acute onset, concern about death, physical illness of the maternal figure (perceived or actual), good parental communication, well-adjusted parents, equal household management by both parents, and parental understanding of a child's problem. The second, characterological subtype was exemplified by gradual onset including multiple episodes of school absenteeism, upper grade levels, no concern about death, and

difficult parents (Kennedy, 1965). Common symptoms across the subtypes included somatic complaints, fears, separation anxiety, and parent-school official conflict.

Berg and colleagues (1969) provided more concrete definitions of school phobia. Acute school phobia involved at least three years of normal attendance before absenteeism onset. All other cases were labeled as chronic. These researchers also defined school phobia using four criteria. First, a child must experience severe difficulty attending school, which often leads to prolonged absences. Second, a child must exhibit emotional upset including misery, somatic complaints, and fear. Third, parents are aware that a child is staying home from school. Fourth, no antisocial behaviors such as lying, destructiveness, or stealing are present (Berg, Nichols, & Pritchard, 1969).

School Phobia and Truancy

The aforementioned literature generally reveals a distinction between concepts of school phobia and truancy, though some have questioned this dichotomy. Those with school refusal/phobia are thought to exhibit primarily internalizing symptoms and acute onset accompanied by parental knowledge, whereas those with truancy are thought to exhibit externalizing symptoms, gradual onset, and parental deception (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). However, several features are common to both types. Cooper (1966a, b) found that children classified as truants and school refusers both exhibit somatic complaints and overdependence in addition to parental knowledge of the absenteeism. Tyerman (1968) found that both groups exhibited peer withdrawal, shyness, and anxiety. A high rate of comorbidity of anxiety and conduct-related disorders has been acknowledged as well. Due to these problematic contradictions among others, Kearney

and Silverman (1996) recognized the need to develop an atheoretical approach to school absenteeism.

Kearney and Silverman's Approach

Kearney and Silverman (1996) provided an atheoretical approach to school absenteeism accompanied by a broad definition of school refusal behavior. School refusal behavior is exhibited by youth aged 5-17 years who have difficulty remaining in class for the entire day or who refuse to attend school. Types of absenteeism include not attending school at all, attending school but then leaving during the day, attending school but only following morning misbehaviors such as temper tantrums, or attending school under distress followed by pleas for future nonattendance (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). Self-corrective school refusal behavior refers to absence from school that resolves within a two-week period. Acute school refusal behavior refers to problematic attendance for more than two weeks but less than one year. Chronic school refusal behavior refers to problematic attendance for longer than one year (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). Other researchers have provided similar distinctions of severity. Last and Strauss (1990) defined mild absenteeism as missing one day in two weeks, moderate absenteeism as missing one day per week, severe absenteeism as missing several days per week, and extreme absenteeism as missing several weeks of school.

Functional model. Kearney and Silverman further developed a functional model of school refusal behavior (Kearney, 2001, 2004, 2007; Kearney & Silverman, 1996). This model focuses on the maintaining factors and motivating conditions of school refusal behavior and proposes that children refuse school for one or more of four main functions. These functions are broadly separated into negative and positive

reinforcement dimensions. Negative reinforcement refers to termination of an aversive school situation and positive reinforcement refers to a desire to pursue rewarding situations outside of school (Kearney, 2001).

Two subtypes comprise the negative reinforcement dimension of school refusal behavior. The first consists of children who avoid school-based stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). A youth may avoid these stimuli, which reinforces school refusal behavior via anxiety reduction. Some children can identify the object of their distress, such as a fire alarm, a teacher, or a class pet (Kearney, 2001). Others simply report general feelings of "malaise" or misery at school (Kearney, 2004). These children also tend to be younger (Kearney & Albano, 2004). The second negative reinforcement function is escape from aversive social and/or evaluative situations at school (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). Youth in this category may avoid social situations such as speaking with classmates or participating in classroom activities. Youth may also attempt to escape from evaluative situations such as speaking before the class, taking tests, or eating before others (Kearney, 2001). Children in this subtype tend to be older (Kearney & Albano, 2004). Some youths may exhibit both forms of negatively reinforced school refusal behavior.

The positive reinforcement dimension of school refusal behavior is also expressed in two ways. The first consists of youth who refuse school to pursue attention from significant others (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). A child may wish to gain attention or sympathy from a caregiver or others (Kearney, 2001). These children tend to be younger and often exhibit a wide range of morning misbehaviors to garner attention and to miss school. These misbehaviors can include screaming, tantrums, reassurance-seeking,

exaggerated somatic complaints, locking oneself in a room or vehicle, or temporarily running away (Kearney, 2001). The other function in this category involves pursuing tangible reinforcement outside of school (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). These youth tend to be older and refuse school to pursue desirable activities such as spending time with friends, engaging in substance use, watching television, or sleeping late (Kearney, 2001). This type of school refusal behavior is most congruent with the traditional concept of truancy. Youths may exhibit both functions of positively reinforced school refusal behavior or may do so in conjunction with an aspect of negative reinforcement.

Diagnostic Conceptualization

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR,* school refusal behavior may be a characteristic of several disorders. One criterion for Conduct Disorder is "often being truant from school, beginning before age 13 years" (APA, 2000, p. 99). This criterion reflects the common conception that youth who refuse to go to school display delinquent behaviors. In addition, one criterion of Separation Anxiety Disorder involves "persistent reluctance or refusal to go to school or elsewhere because of fear of separation" (APA, 2000, p. 125). A youth with school refusal behavior may also refuse school due to a feared object in the school environment such as the bell or a fire drill and thus meet criteria for Specific Phobia. Youths afraid of social and/or evaluative situations may be diagnosed with Social Phobia.

Epidemiology

Prevalence

The prevalence of school refusal behavior is difficult to estimate and so rates vary considerably. Discrepancies in prevalence rates are mainly due to different criteria used

to define absenteeism (Last & Francis, 1988). A recent review of truancy outcome studies revealed that researchers often define problematic absenteeism as 10-40% of school days missed (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). A commonly used method for determining problematic absenteeism is the criteria proposed by Kearney (2008a). Problematic absenteeism is defined as missing 25% of school days in a 2-week period or difficulty attending class such that the family routine is interrupted. Problematic absenteeism can also be defined when a youth is absent for 10 days of school in a 15-week period, with an absence defined as 25% or more of a school day missed (Kearney, 2008a).

Kearney (2001) estimated that 5-28% of youth display some aspect of school refusal behavior at some point. Others have found the prevalence rate to be as high as 35% (Pina, Zerr, Gonzales, & Ortiz, 2009). The large variance results from various definitions and schools' inconsistency in recording and reporting absences and tardiness (Kearney, 2001). Moreover, schools do not typically record the cause of absences, such as those due to anxiety-based difficulties.

Partial absences, including tardiness or skipped classes, are an important component of absenteeism. The National Center for Education Statistics found that 4.5% of teachers believed that skipping class was a problem (NCES, 1996). Rates of these behaviors are difficult to determine, but partial absenteeism does vary by location and type of school. Public schools (5.1%) have a higher rate of partial absenteeism than private schools (0.7%). Inner city schools (7.6%) tend to have a higher rate of partial absenteeism than rural schools (2.4%) (NCES, 1996). As many as 9.5% of teachers indicated that tardiness was problematic at their school (NCES, 1996). Tardiness is more common in the inner city (14.8%) than in large towns (9.4%) and small towns (5.5%),

and is more common in public (10.6%) than private (2.5%) schools (NCES, 1996). Some cases of tardiness may stem from morning misbehaviors (Kearney, 2001).

The National Center for Education Statistics also reported that 19% of fourth grade youth and 20% of eighth grade youth missed 3 days of school in the past month, and that 7% of fourth and eighth grade youth missed 5 days of school in the past month (NCES, 2007). Many of these absences may have been due to illness. In 2004, 10.9% of children aged 5-17 years missed 6-10 days of school due to illness (Center for Disease Control, 2004).

School absenteeism is a strong predictor of dropping out of school (Bryk & Thum, 1989). School absenteeism and dropout rates vary considerably across geographic locations. The national graduation rate is 76.4% (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009). Nebraska has the highest graduation rate at 88.4% and Nevada has the lowest graduation rate at 58% (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009). Other sources indicate a slightly higher graduation rate for Nevada. The State Accountability Summary Report indicated that Nevada's graduation rate in 2008 was 68.7% (Nevada Department of Education, 2009).

Rates of problematic absenteeism in Nevada also vary across school districts. The proposed study will focus on youth from the Clark County School District in Nevada which has the lowest graduation rate at 65.1% and the highest dropout rate at 5.8% for the class of 2008 (Nevada Department of Education, 2009). Clark County School District also reported 1,961 habitual truancy incidents in 2008-2009. Most of Nevada's students (71.2%) are in the Clark County School District and so the habitual truancy rate in Clark County accounts for more than half of the state's habitual truancy rate (54.3%) (Nevada Department of Education, 2009). Problematic absenteeism is a serious problem

in Nevada and in Clark County in particular. Given the severity of absenteeism in Clark County, an acute need exists to gather more information on the families of these youth and eventually produce more effective treatments.

Age

The average age of onset for school refusal is generally 11-14 years (Chazan, 1962; Hersov, 1960a; Kearney, 2001; Smith, 1970; Torma & Halsti, 1975). School refusal behavior has also been found to peak at key transition times, such as when children first enter school (5-7 years) (Hersov, 1985), when youth enter middle school (10-11 years) (Ollendick & Mayer, 1984), and when youth enter high school (14 years) (Makihara, Nagaya, & Nakajima, 1985).

Gender

Problematic absenteeism occurs equally in males and females (Kearney, 1995). However, the reason for absenteeism may vary by gender. Females may be more likely to refuse school due to anxiety and fear, whereas males may be more likely to be absent due to conduct problems (Kearney, 2001). Although males and females have similar rates of absenteeism, dropout rates do vary. Males have a higher dropout rate (11.6%) than females (9.0%) (NCES, 2004).

Ethnicity

Problematic absenteeism occurs worldwide. Prevalence of school refusal in Venezuela ranges from 0.4-7.3% in children aged 3-14 years (Granell de Aldaz, Vivas, Gelfand, & Feldman, 1984). School refusal has also been widely studied in Japan. The Japanese Ministry of Education found that 8.1% of students have difficulty attending school and that these students are comprised of passive youth (27%), neurotic youth

(26.3%), youth with mixed symptomatology (18.4%), and truants (13%) (Iwamoto & Yoshida, 1997). Problematic absenteeism is also researched in European countries. For example, approximately 10% of British youth are absent at any given time (Lansdown, 1990).

Within the United States, school dropout rates but not rates of daily absenteeism are recorded by ethnicity. In 2005, 7.3% of African American, 5% of Hispanic, 2.8% of White, 1.6% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 4.9% of multiracial students dropped out of school (NCES, 2007). In contrast, the cumulative percentage of students who have dropped out of school over time (status dropouts) included Hispanics (22.4%) African Americans (22.4%), Whites (6.0%), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (2.9%) (NCES, 2007).

Problematic absenteeism is a systemic problem that occurs across age groups, genders, ethnicities, and geographic locations. Given the pervasiveness of the problem, it is important to examine the effects of excessive absences from school. A review of individual and community consequences of problematic absenteeism thus follows.

Effects of Problematic Absenteeism

Common short-term consequences of school refusal behavior include difficulty with homework or decreasing grades, increased social alienation, increased risk of legal trouble, and distress. Families might also experience conflict, disrupted routines, increased financial expense, and poor supervision or child maltreatment (Kearney, 2001). Problematic absenteeism has also been linked to psychiatric conditions that are likely to impact daily functioning (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003; Kearney & Albano, 2004; Last & Strauss, 1990; McShane, Walter, & Rey, 2001).

Several researchers have also investigated the long-term consequences of school refusal behavior. Nursten (1963) examined 23 females (median age, 9 years) with school phobia who were treated in a psychiatric inpatient unit and who were re-assessed 10 years later. At follow-up there was considerable variability in level of adjustment. However, these individuals demonstrated a greater rate of phobic reactions compared to a control group. Coolidge, Brodie, and Feeney (1964) evaluated 47 school phobic children with phobic onset 5-10 years after initial contact. Thirteen (27.6%) were not impaired, 20 (47.6%) were moderately impaired with unequal or general stunted growth, and 14 (29.8%) were severely impaired. Males experienced more difficulty than females.

Berg and Jackson (1985) completed a 10-year follow-up study of youth who had been admitted to an adolescent psychiatric unit and who were found to have neurotic disturbance with phobic anxiety leading to school refusal. School refusers (n=143) with a mean age of 23.9 years were assessed. Many (31%) had been seen by a family doctor or psychiatrist at least once after discharge and 0.05% had been in inpatient treatment at least once. Additionally, 14% of former school refusers had outpatient treatment. Adolescents with school refusal severe enough to require inpatient treatment had an increased risk of psychiatric disturbance with a higher prevalence of severe social impairment and minor psychiatric illness than the general population. Treatment before age 14 years and good intelligence predicted better outcomes.

Hibbett and Fogelman (1990) followed 10,640 truant and non-truant youth at ages 7, 11, 16, and 23 years through the National Child Development Study in Great Britain. Truant youth demonstrated more psychological and marital problems than non-truant youth in early adulthood. Truants were more likely than non-truants to marry young, be

separated or divorced, have more children, and have children at a younger age than non-truants. Truants also had an increased risk of depression. These differences remained after controlling for social background, school attendance, prior educational attainment, and qualifications obtained (Hibbett & Fogelman, 1990). Hibbett, Fogelman, and Manor (1990) reported that truants were more likely than non-truants to be unemployed and have more unstable job histories, higher number of jobs, shorter length of jobs, and lower family income.

Flakierska-Praquin, Lindstrom, and Gillberg (1997) completed a 20-29 year follow-up study of 35 school refusers. Individuals had been diagnosed with school phobia and separation anxiety disorder and were aged 32-37 years at follow-up. Subjects were compared to a matched inpatient psychiatric control group and to a matched general population control group. Those with school refusal were significantly more likely than the general population to have seen a psychiatrist for outpatient care in adulthood (43%). School refusers also had significantly fewer children. No significant differences were found between the groups with respect to school career and registration by social authorities. The school refusing group was found to be more similar to the comparison group than to the inpatient group.

These follow-up studies indicate lingering effects of problematic absenteeism later in life (Kearney, 2001). Many with problematic absenteeism experience greater psychiatric disturbance, social impairment, delays in normal achievement, and an increased likelihood of seeking mental health services. Given the pervasiveness, complexity, and long-term impact of problematic absenteeism, it is not surprising that

concurrent psychopathology is common. Psychopathology in this population is thus discussed next.

Psychopathology

School refusing youth often experience significant emotional distress, specifically depression and anxiety (McShane et al., 2001). The most common comorbid psychiatric disorders are specific phobia, separation anxiety, panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, major depressive disorder, and dysthymia (Bernstein, 1991; Kearney & Albano, 2004; Last & Strauss, 1990). Several studies have revealed psychiatric conditions to be common in those with problematic absenteeism.

Last and Strauss (1990) examined 63 anxious school refusers from a specialized clinic. The most common DSM-III-R diagnosis was separation anxiety disorder (38.1%), followed by social phobia (30.2%), simple phobia (22.2%), panic disorder (6.3%), and posttraumatic stress disorder (3.2%). Many youth (71.4%) exhibited comorbid diagnoses. Overanxious disorder (generalized anxiety disorder) was the most common comorbid diagnosis (25.4%), followed by social phobia and simple phobia (12.7%), major depression (12.7%), and avoidant disorder (11.1%).

Egger, Costello, and Angold (2003) evaluated 165 anxiety-based school refusal and 517 truancy-based youth from a community sample. Anxiety-based school refusal, characterized by fear and anxiety, was significantly associated with separation anxiety and depression. Truancy-based absenteeism, characterized by lack of interest and defiance of adult authority, was significantly associated with oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, and depression. Over three-quarters of youth with problematic absenteeism met criteria for a psychiatric diagnosis. Youths with anxiety-based school

refusal commonly displayed depression (13.9%), separation anxiety disorder (10.8%), oppositional defiant disorder (5.6%), and conduct disorder (5%). Youths with truancy commonly displayed conduct disorder (14.8%), oppositional defiant disorder (9.7%), depression (7.5%), and substance abuse (4.9%). Truants were also significantly more likely to have a parent who had been treated for mental health problems and to experience lax parental supervision. Mixed anxiety and truant-based absenteeism was associated with increased rates of behavioral and emotional disturbance and 88.2% of this group was diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.

Egger and colleagues (2003) also found that those with anxiety-based school refusal had significantly more fear and worry, sleep disturbances, and somatic complaints than truants. No significant differences among these two groups were found with respect to social anxiety, fear of separating from parents, and nightmares. All groups experienced varying sleep disturbances. Anxiety-based school refusers experienced insomnia (31.5%), fatigue (12.1%), waking to check on family in the night (25.9%), and difficulty sleeping alone (8.1%). Truancy-based youth experienced insomnia (19.4%) and fatigue (10.4%). Mixed profile youth experienced more nightmares (34.4%) and night-terrors (31.6%). Anxiety-based school refusers had more difficult peer relationships and truants were 2.4 times more likely to have conflict with peers than non-school refusers.

Kearney and Albano (2004) utilized the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children (child and parent versions) to evaluate 143 school refusal youth aged 5-17 years in a specialized clinic. The most common diagnosis was separation anxiety disorder (22.4%) followed by generalized anxiety disorder (10.5%), oppositional defiant

disorder (8.4%), and depression (4.9%). This study exemplified the extent of comorbidity often present in youth with school refusal behavior. In this sample, 30.8% received a second diagnoses, 11.9% received a third diagnosis, 4.2% received a fourth diagnosis, and 2.1% received a fifth diagnosis. In contrast, 32.9% of the sample received no diagnosis.

Kearney and Albano (2004) also assessed for psychiatric conditions with respect to function of school refusal behavior. Youth who exhibited negatively reinforced school refusal behavior were more likely have an anxiety disorder. Those who refused school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity received the most severe diagnoses. Youth with positively reinforced school refusal behavior generally had lower levels of fear, depression, general and social anxiety, and overall distress than youth who refused school for other reasons. Disruptive behavior disorders were more prevalent among those who refused school to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school.

These studies highlight the frequency of psychiatric diagnoses among school refusing youth. Anxiety disorders, conduct disorders, and depression occur frequently in this population. Researchers have suggested that problematic absenteeism can be a symptom of other psychiatric conditions rather than a distinct psychiatric condition itself (Kearney, 2008b). As such, proper assessment of school refusal behavior is critical and is discussed next.

Assessment

Assessment is essential for determining if a youth exhibits school refusal behavior, what function that behavior serves, what comorbid conditions may exist, and what the best treatment may be. Assessment should consist of multiple informants and

methods, which may include pertinent medical, academic, legal, and psychiatric records. Several aspects of school refusal behavior should be assessed, such as cognitive, behavioral, or affective components. Methods to assess school refusal behavior include interviews, questionnaires, monitoring, and functional analysis. A brief description of these methods is provided next.

A pertinent example of an interview is the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children, available in parent and child versions (Silverman & Albano, 1996). This semi-structured, DSM-IV-based interview includes school refusal behavior, anxiety disorders, and other associated conditions such as mood and externalizing disorders. The interview covers important school refusal variables such as number of school days missed in the current and previous year, frequency with which a child sees a nurse or counselor to leave school early, whether a child is nervous at school, and what a child finds scary about school. The interview also provides a list of common school-related fears, and children and parents can rate level of fear and interference on a 0-8 scale.

Questionnaires are another tool for assessing school refusal behavior as well as psychopathology and absenteeism-related behaviors. Questionnaires can be completed by youth, parents, and teachers. The following are often used to examine anxiety in school refusing youth: Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC; March, 1997), Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS; Reynolds & Paget, 1983), and Social Anxiety Scale for Children-Revised (SASC-R; LaGreca & Stone, 1993). Other measures such as the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1992) are useful as well. Other questionnaires have been developed to measure specific school refusal behaviors such as the School Refusal Personality Scale and School Avoidance

Scale (Honjo et al., 2003). Other measures can be used by youth, parents, and teachers to assess a wide range of internalizing and externalizing symptoms such as the Youth Self Report (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), Conners Rating Scale-Parent Version-Revised (CRS-PVR; Conners, 1997), and teacher versions of these scales (TRF; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; CTRS-TVR; Conners, 1997).

Monitoring and observation are important tools for examining the many facets of school refusal behavior and for developing treatment plans. Monitoring can be done by parents or children and can be completed on a daily or weekly basis (Kearney, 2001). Many aspects of school refusal behavior can be assessed in this format, such as frequency of morning misbehaviors, frequency and content of distorted thoughts, or presence of distress. A monitoring system can be developed by a practitioner or researcher, or a standardized system can be used. Examples of standardized monitoring systems are the Daily Diary (Beidel, Neal, & Lederer, 1991), which tracks anxiety-provoking events and occurrences regarding that event, or the Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS; Wolpe, 1969), which measures distress on a 0-100 scale. Observation is also an important component of assessment and can cover morning misbehaviors, time missed from school, and days absent. These types of assessment methods are particularly useful given the fluctuating nature of school refusal and its associated symptoms.

Interviews, questionnaires, monitoring, and observation are useful but do have drawbacks. These methods may not capture the various functions of school refusal, the heterogeneity of symptoms, and the fluctuating nature of school refusal behavior. Functional analysis adds information useful for treatment. The School Refusal

Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R; Kearney, 2002; 2006) can be used to determine the primary function of school refusal behavior. This measure will be utilized in the current study and is detailed in the method section.

Contextual Factors

Proper assessment of school refusal behavior may reveal contextual factors that can indirectly affect the behavior (Kearney, 2008a). On a primary level, problematic absenteeism is influenced by specific child factors. Increased number of absences has been associated with less openness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness (Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gibson, 2004). Youth with school refusal behavior have also been found to have low self-esteem and self-reported academic skills. They also report being less competent in social relationships and are more likely to demonstrate antisocial behavior in the classroom (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Reid, 1982; Southworth, 1992).

School refusing youth often also have various physical illnesses or somatic complaints. Many youth experience school-related stress that leads to problematic eating habits. Sleep difficulties are also common in these youth (Kearney, 2001). Youth also commonly report abdominal pain and gastrointestinal difficulties (Kearney, 2001; Rubenstein & Hastings, 1980). Moreover, those with chronic illness such as asthma are at risk for school refusal behavior (Kearney, 2001).

Teenage pregnancy is another youth factor that can affect school attendance. About one million adolescents aged 15-19 years become pregnant each year (Monahan, 2001). Teenage mothers completed 1.9-2.2 fewer years of school than women who had their first child after age 30 years (Hofferth, Reid, & Mott, 2001). More than one-third of

teen mothers will never earn a general education degree or graduate, and half of teen mothers are not enrolled in school (Monahan, 2001). School dropout and attendance of school-age mothers improves with family support, school-based prenatal services, and alternative education options post-pregnancy (Barnet, Arroyo, Devoe, & Duggan, 2004). Teenage pregnancy also affects the attendance of teenage fathers (Stouthamer-Loeber & Wei, 1998).

Many children are also unable to attend school due to poverty or homelessness. Youth from low-income families are much more likely to miss school (Kearney, 2007). Families with lower incomes may need financial support from youth (Zhang, 2003). Homelessness also poses many difficulties for children. Many school districts require that children have documentation such as permanent home residence, immunization or academic records, or birth certificates that may not be available to those who are homeless. Homelessness poses many other obstacles for youth such as inaccessibility of transportation and inadequate clothing and school supplies (US Department of Education, 2002). Problems caused by frequent relocation and inability to meet financial costs also pose difficulties and can be a significant source of stress. The U.S. Department of Education indicates that approximately 67% of homeless children in grades Pre-K through 12 are enrolled in school; however, only 77% of these youth attend school regularly (US Department of Education, 2000). Students from low-income families were approximately 6 times more likely to leave school (8.9% event dropout rate) than peers from high income families (1.5%) (NCES, 2007). Homelessness and poverty are intricately related to nonattendance and affect individual youth and their families.

School refusal behavior is also impacted by parent involvement (Reynolds, Weissberg, & Kasprow, 1992). Maccoby and Martin (1983) define parent involvement as the degree to which a parent is dedicated to their role as a parent and to fostering their child's development. Parent involvement has also been defined as the dedication of resources by a parent to a child within the home and school environment (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). Parent involvement may include contacting a child's teacher, attending parent-teacher conferences, talking with other parents and one's child about school, reviewing a child's weekly planner, and attending other school activities (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). Parent involvement may also include time management applications such as setting a time for homework completion, limiting television, and balancing school work and school activities. Monitoring attendance is another form of parent involvement.

Parent involvement is a strong predictor of academic success regardless of a child's gender, parental education, ethnicity, or family structure (Bogenschneider, 1997). Students with involved parents with whom they have a good relationship are likely to continue on a positive path toward academic success (Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008). Those with poor parent-child relationships are more likely to drop out of high school despite academic and behavioral success (Englund, et al. 2008). Parent involvement thus plays a central role in school attendance and success in school.

School-based factors can also affect attendance. School climate involves the shared attitudes, values, and beliefs of students, teachers, and administrators that form the parameters of acceptable behaviors and norms for the school (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). School climate can affect student performance and achievement, misconduct, and

social situations in the classroom. School climate may also have an impact on individual qualities such as aggression, behavioral problems, adjustment problems, and social and personal attitudes (Koth et al., 2008). School climate and school connectedness are also used to describe the degree to which students feel connected to their school and feel supported (Kearney, 2008a). The constructs may also include tolerant and flexible disciplinary procedures, student involvement in extracurricular activities, and positive classroom management (Kearney, 2008a). Class size and school size are inversely and significantly related to school climate, and smaller class sizes and schools relate to higher attendance rates. Attendance rates are positively and significantly correlated with school climate (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006). More positive ratings of school climate are also associated with lower rates of victimization by others (Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002).

School violence and student victimization are other contextual factors that affect attendance. Some children may refuse to attend school because they feel unsafe. Violence in schools is quite common according to the US Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences "Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2008" report. Five percent of students aged 12-18 years were reportedly afraid of attack or harm at school and 7% of youth avoided school activities in the past 6 months due to fear of attack or harm (NCES, 2009). In 2006, students aged 12-18 years were victims of 1.7 million nonviolent crimes at school, and from 2006-2007 there were 27 homicides and 8 suicides of school-aged youths at school (NCES, 2009). Bullying is also a growing problem in schools. From 2005-2006, 24% of public schools reported that student bullying was a daily or weekly problem, and by 2007 32% of students aged 12-18 years

were reportedly bullied at school (NCES, 2009). Youths who have been bullied are more likely to refuse school than their peers (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003).

Other contextual factors that influence school absenteeism are community characteristics. Youths from neighborhoods with high levels of distress and poverty are generally at higher risk of dropping out of school and ultimately experience fewer years of education (Crowder & South, 2003). Youth who reside in neighborhoods with others who are poor, unemployed, and have lower levels of education are more likely to have limited educational goals and are more likely to leave school before graduating (Crowder & South, 2003). Regardless of poverty level, neighborhood support (0.24) and neighborhood safety (0.17) are positively and significantly correlated with attendance (Chapman, 2003). Neighborhood support and social disorganization also play a role in educational behavior, as defined by social behavior, grades, and attendance. Neighborhood quality has been found to be more predictive of educational behavior than individual characteristics (Bowen, Bowen, & Ware, 2002). In addition, neighborhood social disorganization has more effect on educational behavior than student perceptions of supportive parenting and educational support (Bowen, Bowen, & Ware, 2002).

Cultural factors may also influence school absenteeism. Youth in all cultures have been known to refuse school. The topic of school absenteeism has traditionally been studied in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia; recent research has included other European counties, India, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and South Africa (Kearney, 2008b). These studies reveal that, across cultures, youth with school refusal behavior exhibit similar characteristics including heterogeneous symptomatology and common comorbid diagnoses, which are often addressed with multi-modal treatment

approaches (Kearney, 2008b). The current study will incorporate youth from many cultures as an ethnically diverse sample is utilized. Cultural factors often intersect with family factors, which are described next and which form the central focus of the current study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Family Environment and School Refusal Behavior

A significant contextual variable that affects school refusal behavior is family environment. Family factors have always played an important role in the conceptualization of school refusal, dating to early psychodynamic ideas about intertwined mother-child relationships (Huffington & Sevitt, 1989). Since these earliest conceptualizations, the focus on specific family relationships has broadened to include the family as a system and concrete factors that affect family relationships, and how these factors affect school refusal. Researchers have focused on demographic or concrete factors of family environment such as birth order, family status, socioeconomic status, and family history of psychiatric disturbance (Huffington & Sevitt, 1989). Broader family environment dynamics also impact the development, maintenance, and treatment of school refusal behavior. However, few systematic evaluations of family environment dynamics have been conducted (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996; Fremont, 2003; Hansen, Sanders, Massaro, & Last, 1998; Kearney & Silverman, 1995).

The following sections are devoted to a historical discussion of family-based research regarding school refusal behavior. Topics will include specific parent-child relationships and parent psychopathology. Research on the differences between truant

and phobic families will also be discussed. Concrete factors associated with family environment such as birth order, marital problems, and socioeconomic status will be covered. Studies of family environment dynamics and problematic absenteeism are detailed, and a synthesis of this literature is presented that relies on classification of general family types. In addition, family types and their relationship to specific functions of school refusal behavior will be discussed. An overarching theme to these sections is that the literature on school refusal behavior and family environment remains somewhat deficient with respect to methodological rigor and sample diversity. The current study is partly designed to address these deficiencies and provide clinicians and researchers with greater and more reliable information about family dynamics in this population.

C*oncrete Family Factors*

Some researchers have examined concrete family factors such as birth order, marital issues, and socioeconomic status. With respect to birth order, the youngest child was once considered to be the most at risk for school refusal (Smith, 1970). One study revealed that 55% of those with school phobia were the youngest or only child (Berg, Butler, & McGuire, 1972). In another sample, 43.8% of school refusers or truants were the youngest or only child in their families (Torma & Halsti, 1975). Other researchers concluded that approximately one-third of youth with school refusal behavior were only children (Makihara et al., 1985). However, others found that the oldest child was most likely to refuse school (Baker & Wills, 1978; Warneke, 1964). The effect of birth order on school refusal behavior thus remains unclear.

Marital problems and family status may be other important familial factors. Marital problems are somewhat common in families of school refusing youth. In one

study, 52.7% of parents of youth with school refusal behavior admitted to significant marital problems. These problems included multiple family stressors (55.4%) and communication problems (79.7%) (Timberlake, 1984). Moreover, 43% of families with a two-parent household reported conflict at home prior to the onset of their child's school refusal (McShane et al., 2001).

The effects of socioeconomic status (SES) on school refusal behavior have also been investigated, but results are inconsistent. Early studies indicated that most school refusing youth came from higher socioeconomic levels (Coolidge, Hahn, & Peck, 1957; Hersov, 1960a). Others reported a preponderance from lower socioeconomic levels (Bernstein & Garfinkel, 1986; Nichols & Berg, 1970). Others have found that school refusers are equally represented in all socioeconomic levels (Barker & Wills, 1978; Hansen et al., 1998).

Parent-Child Relationship

The earliest familial conceptualizations of school refusal centered on the relationship between the child and mother. Psychoneurotic truancy involved refusal to go to school because of a dysfunctional bond between mother and child characterized by maternal rejection or excessive attachment and overprotection (Partridge, 1939). Moreover, initial conceptualizations of school phobia ascribed problematic absenteeism to a child's separation anxiety about her mother (Johnson et al., 1941). A mutually hostile-dependent relationship between mother and child was also cited (Bernstein, Svingen, & Garfinkel, 1990; Johnson et al., 1941; Waldfogel et al., 1957).

These ideas have continued in more recent literature. Youth with anxiety-based school refusal are more dependent on their mothers than control youth, and mothers of

these youth are more overprotective than control mothers (Last & Strauss, 1990). This reflects earlier work regarding overprotective mothers of school phobics (Berg & McGuire, 1974). These mothers have also been found to be dominant within their families (Davidson, 1960).

In contrast, little research has involved the relationship between school refusing youth and their fathers. The majority of studies that examine the family environment of youth with problematic absenteeism have focused on characteristics of mothers and maternal report of family environment (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). This was true in early literature and has continued in more recent studies (Bernstein, Warren, Massie, & Thuras, 1999; Choi, 1961). No consistent findings have been reported, however.

Early work emphasized the inconsistency of the father's role in the family system (Choi, 1961). Fathers were often characterized as passive or controlling and ranged from overly affectionate or dependent to withdrawn (Choi, 1961; Hersov, 1960b). Other researchers have focused on the passive role of fathers, finding them to be absent, lacking authority, or ineffective (Davidson, 1960; Takagi, 1972). A clear picture of the paternal role in these families remains undetermined, though father involvement has not been found to relate significantly to academic and school performance in youth (Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988).

Early literature on the relationship between school refusing children and their families can perhaps be best summed by the work of Hersov (1960b). Hersov identified three types of parent-child relationships within school refusing families from a psychodynamic framework. One type involved a controlling, demanding mother, a passive father, and a child who was obedient at home but fearful and timid outside of

home. Another type was characterized by an overindulgent mother, a passive father, and a child who was demanding at home but timid at school and in other social situations. The final type involved an overindulgent mother, a controlling father with high involvement in familial management, and a child who was friendly and outgoing at school but demanding at home.

These findings on specific parent child relationships are largely unspecific and inconclusive. These shortcomings might largely be attributed to methodological deficiencies. Terms used in these studies such as "excessive attachment" and "maternal overprotection" (Partridge, 1932), separation anxiety (Johnson et al., 1941), and "passive" or "controlling" (Choi, 1961) are both not well defined, and not measured objectively through the use of psychometrically sounds measures or in some cases, no objective measures at all. In addition, these studies had restricted samples with a generally small number of participants and limited ethnic diversity. Moreover, these studies are largely from a psychodynamic framework. The current study intends to partly address these limitations by using psychometrically valid measures, a larger and more diverse sample, and an atheoretical framework.

Parent Psychopathology

The psychological health of parents has also been a familial topic of study because it can affect the parent-child relationship. Parents with a mental disorder may alter practices such as supervision, discipline, or involvement in school. Parent psychopathology is also closely linked to child psychopathology, especially with respect to panic disorder and agoraphobia, social phobia, major depression, disruptive behavior disorders, and separation anxiety (Biederman et al., 2001). Many of these conditions are

present in youths with school refusal behavior. Researchers of problematic absenteeism have thus focused on the psychopathology of parents and especially mothers.

Mothers of school refusers typically have a lifetime history of at least one anxiety disorder, and many mothers have a current anxiety disorder (Last, Francis, Hersen, Kazdin, & Strauss, 1987). Mothers of these youth also have an increased likelihood of having refused school themselves. Mothers of school-refusing children (33.3%) were significantly more likely than mothers of never psychiatrically ill children (10%) to have a history of school refusal when controlling for age and socioeconomic status (Last & Strauss, 1990).

Other researchers have examined psychopathology in mothers and fathers of school refusers. Psychological and medical difficulties in these parents are diverse. Torma and Halsti (1975) found that alcoholism, asocial behavior, and psychosis were exhibited by 15.1% of mothers and 21.9% of fathers. Many school refusing parents, 47.9% of fathers and 80.8% of mothers, had an immature personality or severe forms of neurosis (Torma & Halsti, 1975). In another study, most parents of school phobic children reported phobia or fearfulness, social inactivity, or medical problems (Timberlake, 1984). Parents of school refusing children also report greater agoraphobia and panic than non-school refusing children (Martin, Cabrol, Bouvard, Lipine, & Mouren-Simeoni, 1999). These studies provide evidence that parent psychopathology, particularly anxiety-based difficulties, may be a factor in problematic absenteeism.

Other studies reveal little psychopathology in parents of school refusing children. Bernstein and Borchardt (1996) found that mothers and fathers of anxious-depressed school refusers did not endorse clinically significant psychopathology on the Symptom

Checklist-90-Revised (Derogatis, 1994). The exact role of parent psychopathology regarding problematic absenteeism thus remains unclear. Researchers have also compared families on a broader level and these attempts are described next.

Families of School Phobic Youth and Families of Truants

Researchers have attempted to identify family characteristics that distinguish truants from those with anxiety-based school refusal. Early researchers held that families of truants had social disadvantages and lower socioeconomic status (Hersov, 1960a; Tibbenham, 1977). In addition, truancy has been associated with problematic parenting practices. Families of truants appear to have poor child rearing behavior (Farrington, 1980). This includes excessive use of corporal punishment and inconsistency in discipline (Hersov, 1985; Tyerman, 1968). In contrast, Torma and Halsti (1975) found that families of phobic youth were characterized by anxious overprotectiveness. This included restrictive overinvolvement and indulgence of a child's needs. This family environment was thought to inhibit a child's ego development and lead to a child's inability to become independent and leave home. Families of truants were found to be characterized by emotional poverty, impermanence, and disintegration (Torma & Halsti, 1975). This study, along with others at the time, was characterized by unsound methodology and biased sampling. For instance, participants were solely from inpatient facilities and subject to selection criteria such as IQ and psychiatric symptoms. Additionally, measures of psychopathology or family functioning were often based on the authors' judgment, and terms used in these studies were unspecific. A proposed dichotomy of anxious-overprotective families of youth with school phobia and distant, unstable truant families thus remains questionable.

Others have found little difference in the family environment of truants and phobic school refusers. One study examined 15 phobic and 11 truant families of children aged 12-16 years from an inpatient setting (Huffington & Sevitt, 1989). No significant differences were found between truants and phobics with respect to parental status, age gap between index child and nearest sibling, recent family crises, and family health. Family health was rated in terms of atmosphere, communication, boundaries, alliances, problem solving, parental function, affective status, and relation to the environment. Phobics displayed significantly more passivity and lack of initiative as well as sadness and appearance of having given up. No other significant differences were found (Huffington & Sevitt, 1989). A key problem of this study was that a restricted, small sample of youth from an inpatient setting in a limited age range was studied, thus limiting generalizability.

Empirical Investigations of Family Environment Dynamics

Researchers have also investigated the family dynamics of youth with problematic absenteeism. One study involved 6 youth from a school phobia outpatient clinic selected because of high levels of anxiety and depression (Bernstein & Garfinkel, 1988). Participants were Caucasian and from lower and middle socioeconomic statuses. Families of school phobic youth endorsed poor communication, role performance, control, and affective expression via the Family Assessment Measure (Skinner, Steinhauer, & Santa-Barbara, 1983). Families of severely school phobic youth may experience less understanding between family members caused by ambiguous communication and poor clarity regarding rules and family roles. Families may also be rigid and unable to adapt to change and may be likely to inhibit painful affect. Control

families did not endorse significant family dysfunction (Bernstein & Garfinkel, 1988). Research then expanded to include larger and more diverse samples.

Bernstein, Svingen, and Garfinkel (1990) investigated family functioning of 76 school phobic youth. School phobia was defined as "poor school attendance secondary to psychological difficulties without known medical illness" (p. 24). Youth from a school phobia outpatient clinic, with a mean age of 13.5 years, and their families were evaluated via a family diagnostic interview as well as the Children's Depression Rating Scale, Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale, and Family Assessment Measure. Youths were divided into four diagnostic categories: those with no anxiety or depressive disorder, with both an anxiety and depressive disorder, with a depressive disorder only, and with an anxiety disorder only.

Mothers and fathers reported clinically significant family dysfunction with respect to the dyadic parent-child relationship. Parents indicated dysfunction with respect to role performance and values and norms. Role performance refers to the definition, integration, and adaptation of roles in the family, and values and norms reflects the degree of agreement within the family values system and the degree to which those values match the culture to which the family belongs (Skinner et al., 1983). Children, however, did not endorse clinically significant dysfunction in overall and dyadic subscales (Bernstein et al., 1990). Parents indicated significant dysfunction in several areas but youth did not endorse such dysfunction in the family or within the parent-child relationship.

Youth with an anxiety disorder demonstrated significantly less family dysfunction than youth in other diagnostic categories. In contrast, youth referred from a social agency

and youth whose school had filed a truancy petition belonged to the most dysfunctional families. Oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder were associated most with family dysfunction. The researchers suggested that the difference in family functioning can be attributed to the behavioral manifestations of the youth's diagnosis. Youth with pure anxiety were less likely to demonstrate acting-out behaviors than youth with other diagnoses. These disruptive behaviors are then associated with more family dysfunction (Bernstein et al., 1990).

Bernstein and colleagues (1999) further investigated the family environment of adolescent school refusers with concurrent anxiety and depression. Each of the 46 participants had at least a 20% absence rate from school within a 4-week period, had been diagnosed with at least one anxiety disorder, and had been diagnosed with major depression. Family dimensions were evaluated via the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II (FACES II) (Olson, Bell, & Portner, 1982). Family types were dichotomized into extreme and more balanced family types, family cohesion was dichotomized into disengaged and connected, and adaptability was dichotomized into rigid and flexible. The categorization of family functioning was based on maternal report.

Families of anxious-depressed school refusers were found to be rigid in adaptability and disengaged in cohesion. Specifically, 52% of adolescents and 38% of parents rated their families as rigid and 63% of adolescents and 52% of parents rated their families as disengaged. Members of these families were likely to act independently without commitment or attachment to other family members. Conversely, these families would not be described as enmeshed. Families of anxious-depressed school refusers are

also likely to have strict rules and modes of discipline in addition to a lack of compromise and problem-solving skills. They may also have difficulty adapting to new roles or to a change in family power structure. The researchers suggested that clinicians recognize the maladaptive family functioning of school refusers and work to enhance cohesion and adaptability in treatment (Bernstein et al., 1999).

These studies have several shortcomings. Perhaps most importantly, these studies focused on school refusers with diagnoses of anxiety and/or depression, and few comparisons were made to controls. Additionally, only youth from clinical inpatient or outpatient samples were selected. Moreover, the samples were demographically limited; participants were generally Caucasian or ethnicity was not reported. Samples were also quite small and research findings thus have limited generalizability. No consistent pattern of family environment and family functioning emerged. Families of youth with anxiety-based school refusal generally had significant family dysfunction, but the nature of that dysfunction is unclear and varies widely. Larger and more diverse sample sizes are needed to establish more definitive conclusions about family environment in this population. The current study aims to meet this need by including a large sample of youth with problematic absenteeism from a diverse community sample.

Several researchers have also examined school refusal behavior within different family structures. Kurdek and Sinclair (1988) examined the relationship between family structure and school functioning. The sample consisted of mostly white, middle class, 8th-grade students. Families were divided into mother-only families and families with a biological mother and stepfather. Family process variables were measured via the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1986). Children from two-parent families had

higher grades than mother only or stepfather families, higher quantitative scores then stepfather families, and fewer absences than mother-only families. However, all groups had the same average number of tardies. The researchers also found that family process variables and family structure related significantly to quantitative achievement, grades, and absences from school. More specifically, 18% of the variability in school behavior and academic performance was accounted for by gender, family structure, conflict among family members, and family encouragement of achievement and intellectual pursuits. None of these variables alone, however, accounted for variance in school behavior and academic performance.

A similar study examined the family environment of adolescent school refusers vis-à-vis single parent and intact families (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996). Adolescents (n=134) from an outpatient clinic and their families were administered the Family Assessment Measure that covers task accomplishment, role performance, communication, affective expression, affective involvement, and control (Skinner et al., 1983). Single-parent families were overrepresented with a prevalence rate of 39.6%. Single-parent mothers endorsed Role Performance and Communication in the clinically significant range. Mothers from intact families did not indicate clinical elevations on the FAM subscales (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996). These results suggest that school refusers from single-parent homes are likely to experience difficulties surrounding family roles and communication. Clinically elevated levels of communication suggest "insufficient, displaced, or masked communication" (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996, p. 15). Disagreement among family members regarding role definitions, and difficulty adapting to a change in family roles, are likely. This reflects findings from the earlier Bernstein

study in which parents of youth with school phobia indicated problems with role performance (Bernstein et al., 1990). Role problems in families of school refusers may not be limited to single-parent families as this study suggests, but characteristic of many families of youth with school refusal.

Importantly, the study revealed that primary diagnosis and diagnostic severity do not account for differences in family functioning. No significant differences were found among school refusers in single-parent and intact families with respect to distribution and severity of diagnoses (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996). This study did not investigate the relationship between family functioning as it relates to severity of school refusal or primary diagnoses, but such an analysis would further the understanding of family environment and school refusal.

Problematic absenteeism and family environment have also been examined in terms of school dropout, age, and fear. Lagana (2004) examined various factors contributing to risk for school dropout in African American, inner city youth from a low-income neighborhood. Youth were classified as low risk (those in mainstream classes), medium risk (those in an at-risk day program), and high risk (those who had dropped out of school and had later returned to an alternative education program). Scores on family cohesion, adult support, and peer support predicted group membership. The low risk group endorsed higher levels of family cohesion than the medium risk group. Family adaptability was not related to membership in medium or high risk groups (Lagana, 2004). It should be noted that the study had a limited sample and relied solely on student self-report. The sample was also very small and restricted and thus has limited generalizability to other youth with problematic absenteeism.

Family environment has also been examined with variables such as age and fear. Hansen and colleagues (1998) examined clinic referred school phobic youth and found that certain aspects of family environment, as measured by the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1986), were associated with higher rates of absenteeism. Youth whose families had a lower emphasis on personal development had greater rates of absenteeism. An active-recreational orientation also was found to be a significant predictor of absenteeism, wherein a lower emphasis was associated with higher rates of absenteeism. Lower active-recreational orientation, lower levels of fear, and older age accounted for 38% of the variance in absenteeism (Hansen et al., 1998). A lower family emphasis on personal development and a lower family emphasis on active-recreational were associated with higher rates of absenteeism. Again, this study utilized a restricted sample by only including youth with school phobia who were referred to a specialized clinic. Given the methodological problems of these studies, the exact roles of age, fear, and dropout as they relate to the family environment of youth with problematic absenteeism remain unclear.

The aforementioned studies shed light on the relationship between family environment and problematic absenteeism, but a consistent picture does not emerge of how various family factors influence problematic absenteeism and how they interact. The following section thus outlines the effects of family environment on problematic absenteeism in terms of specific family types. These family types will then be associated with specific functions of school refusal behavior.

Classification of Family Types

Some researchers have focused on specific types of families of youth with school refusal behavior. This approach moves away from the psychodynamic emphasis on the parent-child relationship and incorporates the broader literature on school refusing families. As the aforementioned studies demonstrate, families of school refusers can be very diverse depending on family type, child psychopathology, and sample being studied. These families are often described as enmeshed, conflictive, detached, isolated, healthy, or with some combination (Kearney & Silverman, 1995).

Enmeshed Families. Early family environment literature supported the idea of enmeshed, dependent families. The families of school refusers were characterized as dependent, hostile, and overprotective (Kearney, 2001). The idea of enmeshed school refusing families has received some support in the literature. Earlier studies, especially those from a psychodynamic orientation, emphasized families characterized by dependence and separation issues. Families of children with school phobia have been found to be more likely than those of youth with other neuroses to have separation and dependency problems (Waldron et al., 1975). Youth and their parents were characterized as having pathological dependency and hostility. Parents were also more likely to scapegoat their school phobic child and resent their demands. This interaction usually led to a disrupted family environment that was accompanied by high levels of impairment in communication, boundary maintenance, and parental role functioning (Waldron et al., 1975). These results highlight the emphasis on dysfunctional parent-child relationships that lead to overall family dysfunction. Families of school refusing youth have also been found to score significantly lower on the independence subscale of the Family

Environment Scale (Kearney & Silverman, 1995; Moos & Moos, 1986). More specifically, 32% of families reported independence levels below a standard score of 40, where 50 is the norm and scores above 60 are independent family types (Kearney & Silverman, 1995).

Earlier research on enmeshed family relationships is often criticized because of unsound methodology. For instance, the aforementioned study utilized a questionnaire developed by the researchers for the specific population within a particular theoretical framework, which may have led to a biased view of family dynamics (Waldron et al., 1975). The majority of the criticism stems from the emphasis on the mother-child relationship; namely, that the dynamics of the mother-child relationship may not extend to that of the entire family. These early studies also do not account for the presence of separation anxiety (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). This has been remedied in more recent studies through the use of empirically sound measures and more diverse samples (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). However, in recent years empirical evidence has been gathered against the stereotypically enmeshed family type. For instance, families of anxious-depressed school refusers may be significantly disengaged in terms of family cohesion (Bernstein et al., 1999). An enmeshed family type likely exists but the prevalence is unclear.

Conflictive Families. Families of youth with school refusal have also been found to have significant levels of conflict. Physical and verbal conflict and hostility are key characteristics of these families (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Initial support for this family type stemmed from the psychodynamic conceptualizations of school refusal as resulting from an ambivalent, conflictive relationship between mother and child. School

phobic youth were also found to have more hostile families than those of youth with other neuroses, and a portion of these youth (20%) belonged to a family with a "threatening home situation" (Waldron et al., 1975, p. 805). Several researchers thus supported a conflictive family type.

This concept has also been supported by empirical research. Families of school refusing youth reported high levels of conflict. Specifically, 23.4% of school refusers from an outpatient clinic were found to be in a conflict-oriented family as measured by the Family Environment Scale (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Within single-parent families, conflictive relationships were also common in 54% of mother-child dyads (Makihara et al., 1985). School refusing families have also been classified with respect to family violence. Among 140 families of youth demonstrating school refusal behavior, almost one-third (27.9%) displayed "some" violence and almost one-fifth (18.6%) displayed "severe" violence (beyond the family's control) (Mihara & Ichikawa, 1986).

Detached Families. Also stemming from early psychodynamic conceptualizations of school refusal is the notion that family environment is associated with withdrawal and detachment. Not only were fathers viewed as withdrawn (Choi, 1961), but also entire families (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Some mothers were thought to desire independence from their families and this led children to fear their mother's departure and thus refuse school (Weiss & Cain, 1964). More recent empirical research has demonstrated similar findings. For instance, some families of anxious-depressed school refusers have been characterized as disengaged. Mothers of these youth also reported poor familial communication (Bernstein et al., 1999). Therefore, detached family types may be found among some youth with school refusal.

Isolated Families. Family isolation has also been linked to school refusal. Isolated families have little contact outside their family and are likely to have difficulty integrating into their communities and schools. Few empirical studies have investigated isolation and school refusal (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). One indicated that families of school refusing youth were significantly more isolated than normal families (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). These families were less likely to engage in extrafamilial activities as indicated by Family Environment Scale subscales of intellectual-cultural and active-recreational orientation (Moos & Moos, 1986). Isolated families may be naturally underrepresented in research and treatment, however, so drawing conclusions about the prevalence of isolated families and the effects the family type has on school refusal behavior can be difficult.

Healthy Families. Some youth with school refusal may come from healthy families. Healthy families are characterized by lower levels of conflict, normal levels of expressiveness and cohesion, and effective problem-solving strategies (Kearney & Silverman, 1995; Moos & Moos, 1986). Kearney and Silverman (1995) found that 39.1% of families were considered healthy because they had high levels of cohesion or expressiveness compared to levels of conflict. In healthy families, problematic absenteeism may be an isolated event not directly tied to family environment.

Specific Family Types and Function of School Refusal Behavior

A key next step in absenteeism research is to examine various family types and how they relate to functions of school refusal behavior. A description of extant research in this area follows here, but most of this work has been done with clinical and not community samples. The current project will address this need by including youth from

a large community sample referred to the Clark County Truancy Court and Truancy Diversion programs.

Families of Youth with Negatively Reinforced School Refusal Behavior. Youth with negatively reinforced school refusal behavior are likely to have healthy or isolated families. Youth who refuse school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity are likely to come from healthy families (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). These youth may fear a specific stimulus or have a general feeling of misery at school, and as such are likely to have individualized pathology within a healthy family environment (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Given the nature of their refusal, youth in this category are likely to present with an anxiety disorder only (Kearney & Albano, 2004). These youth may have the most severe diagnoses but their pathology is unlikely to be related to their overall family environment (Kearney & Albano, 2004). Families of youth with an anxiety disorder only demonstrate less family dysfunction than those in other diagnostic categories (Bernstein et al., 1990). Families of youth with an anxiety disorder only scored significantly lower on the Family Environment Scale Conflict subscale and significantly higher than families of youth refusing school for a different purpose on the Active-Recreational Orientation, Expressiveness, and Cohesion subscales (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Several studies thus indicate that youth who primarily refuse school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity are likely to be a part of healthy families.

Youth who refuse school to escape aversive social or evaluative situations, also within the negatively reinforced dimension of school refusal behavior, are likely to come from isolated families (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). These youth are likely to present

with an anxiety disorder, but the nature of their anxiety is such that it leads to less social contact such as fewer friends and less engagement in cultural activities. In addition, they may come from families who do not value social contact outside of the family or certain social-cultural events. Or, the youth themselves may have more difficulty forming social relationships. In a study of school refusing youth from an outpatient anxiety disorders clinic, families of youth who refuse school to escape social or evaluative situations scored significantly lower on the Family Environment Scale Intellectual-Cultural Orientation and Active-Recreational Orientation subscales than youth who refused school for other reasons (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Hansen and colleagues also found that, for school phobic youth, higher rates of absenteeism were associated with low levels of active-recreational orientation (Hansen et al., 1998).

Families of Youth with Positively Reinforced School Refusal Behavior. Families of youth whose school refusal is positively reinforced may be enmeshed or detached (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Many youth refuse school to pursue attention from significant others such as a parent (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). Youth in this category are likely to experience difficulties associated with separation anxiety and are likely to come from a family that values close relationships. These youth may also exhibit characteristics similar to youth described in the earlier literature who have dependent, dysfunctional relationships with the mother. This has been somewhat supported in the literature. Families of children in this category have been found to demonstrate significantly lower levels of independence than families of youth who refuse school for other reasons (Kearney & Silverman, 1995).

Many youth refuse school to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school (Kearney & Silverman, 1996). Families of these youth have been found to be less cohesive than families of youth who refuse school for other reasons (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). They are therefore thought to be more detached. Families of youth who refuse school to seek outside tangible reinforcement also demonstrate slightly higher levels of conflict than families of those who refuse for other reasons (Kearney & Silverman, 1995).

The Current Study

Findings regarding school refusal behavior and family environment remain inconsistent and limited due to problems with restricted samples and methodology. Research regarding some concrete family factors indicates that birth order and socioeconomic economic status are not good predictors of school refusal. This literature also suggests that marital problems may play a role in problematic absenteeism, but the exact relationship between these factors is unclear. Specific parent-child relationships have also been investigated with respect to problematic absenteeism, but little conclusive evidence has been found. Similarly, the role of parent psychopathology in school refusal is unclear. The research in this particular area lacks methodological rigor due to restricted samples, few psychometrically validated measures, and a focus on a particular, largely psychodynamic theoretical framework.

Similar deficiencies exist within empirical investigations of school refusal behavior and family environment. Researchers often utilize restricted samples by examining youth from a limited range of demographic backgrounds, youth with concurrent psychiatric diagnoses, and youth from strictly inpatient or outpatient settings.

Studies in this area point to general family dysfunction for those with anxiety-based school refusal, but the nature of that dysfunction remains unclear. Family environment has also been examined with respect to function of school refusal behavior. These studies are more methodologically sound, with psychometrically valid instruments, but are limited in number and have involved clinical inpatient or outpatient samples. The ability to generalize these findings to more diverse, community-based samples of youth with school refusal behavior remains unclear.

The current study sought to further investigate and elaborate upon the relationship between school refusal behavior and family environment. Specifically, the relationship between functions of school refusal behavior and family environment characteristics was investigated in a community sample. Previously, a relationship between family environment and school refusal has only been cited in clinical samples (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996; Fremont, 2003; Kearney & Silverman, 1995). The primary aim of this study was to determine the family environment characteristics most strongly associated with each function of school refusal behavior in an ethnically diverse, community-based sample of youths referred to legal processes for absenteeism. If family types found in this community-based sample generally match those identified previously in clinical samples, then assessment and treatment strategies designed for clinically referred youth may be extended to more youths with problematic school absenteeism.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses for the current study were based on the premise that family environment characteristics of the community sample of youths with problematic absenteeism would generally resemble those identified in previous clinical samples. The

atheoretical framework espoused by Kearney and colleagues (Kearney, 2001, 2007; Kearney & Albano, 2004; Kearney & Silverman, 1996) was used to categorize the maintaining functions of school refusal behavior. Function of school refusal behavior was measured via the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (child and parent versions) (Kearney, 2002, 2006) and family environment was measured via subscales on the Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos & Moos, 1986).

The first hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity would exhibit a healthy family dynamic. Parents of youth exhibiting this function of school refusal behavior were thus expected to rate their families as more expressive, cohesive, and active, and less conflictive than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior as indicated by higher scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Active-Recreational Orientation Subscales, and lower scores on the FES Conflict subscale. The second hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to escape social or evaluative situations would exhibit an isolated family dynamic. Parents of youth exhibiting this function of school refusal behavior were thus expected to rate their families as less involved in extrafamilial activities than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior as evidenced by lower scores on FES Intellectual-Cultural Orientation and Active-Recreational Orientation subscales.

The third hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to pursue attention from significant others would exhibit an enmeshed family dynamic. Parents of youth exhibiting this function of school refusal behavior were thus expected to rate their families as less independent than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of

school refusal behavior as indicated by lower scores on the FES Independence subscale. The fourth hypothesis was that youth who refuse school primarily to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school would exhibit a conflictive and detached family dynamic. Parents of youth exhibiting this function of school refusal behavior were thus expected to rate their families as more conflictive than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior as evidenced by higher scores on the FES Conflict subscale and less cohesive as evidenced by lower scores on the FES Cohesion subscale.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

Overall Sample

Participants included 215 middle and high school youth aged 11-17 years (*M*=14.5; *SD*=1.6) in the Clark County School District. Youth were recruited from the Clark County School District Truancy Diversion Program (n=51) and the Clark County Truancy Court (n=164). The sample was 53% male (n= 114) and 47% female (n=101). Youth were Hispanic (59.5%), European American (12.6%), African American (10.2%), other (6.5%), multiracial/biracial (5.6%), Native American (2.3%), or Asian American (1.9%); (unreported: 1.4%). Administrative constraints prevented data collection regarding socioeconomic status, but referrals to truancy court settings generally involve families of lower income (Hendricks, Sale, Evans, McKinley, & Carter, 2010). Families were dual-parent (34.4%), divorced (22.8%), single parent/never married (20.5%), separated (19.5%), or not reported (2.8%).

English Speakers

One hundred and thirty five packets were completed by English-speaking parents. Children of English-speaking parents were aged 11-17 years (*M*=14.5*; SD*=1.7). Youth were recruited from the Clark County School District Truancy Diversion Program (n=30) and Clark County Truancy Court (n=105). The sample was 61.5% male (n=83) and 38.5% female (n=52). Youth were Hispanic (35.6%), European-American (20.0%), African American (16.3%), other (10.4%), multiracial/biracial (8.9%), Native American (3.7%), or Asian American (3.0%) (unreported: 2.2%).

Spanish Speakers

Eighty packets were completed by Spanish-speaking parents. Children of Spanish-speaking parents were aged 11-17 years (*M*=14.4; *SD*=1.4). Youth were recruited from the Clark County School District Truancy Diversion Program (n=21) and Clark County Truancy Court (n=59). The sample was 38.8% male (n=31) and 61.3% female (n=49). Youth were Hispanic (100%).

Measures

Youth Measures

School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised-Child (SRAS-R-C) (Kearney, 2002, 2006). The SRAS-R-C is a 24-item scale that measures the relative strength of four functional conditions of school refusal behavior: (1) avoidance of school-related stimuli that provoke negative affectivity, (2) escape from school-related aversive social and/or evaluative situations, (3) attention from significant others, and (4) tangible reinforcement outside of school (Kearney, 2002; Kearney & Silverman, 1996). The scale includes a 7-point (0-6) Likert scale where 0 =never and 6 =always. A mean item score is calculated

for each function based on youth responses and the highest item mean represents the primary function of a youth's school refusal behavior (Kearney, 2002). The primary function of school refusal behavior for this study was in part determined by child report. Mean item scores within 0.25 points of one another were considered equivalent (function 5). Function 5 indicates a mixed functional profile.

The SRAS-R-C has adequate reliability and validity. The scale has significant 7-14 day test-retest reliability (mean r= 0.68). Concurrent validity has also been established with the SRAS-C and SRAS-R-C (mean r=0.68) for each functional condition. There has also been support for the construct validity of the SRAS-R-C as demonstrated by confirmatory factor analysis. Support was found for the four-factor model with the exception of two items (items 20 and 24) that should be used with caution (Kearney, 2006). Confirmatory factor analysis also supported the four-factor model of the SRAS-R-C in a community sample (Haight, Kearney, Gauger, & Schafer, 2011).

Parent Measures

School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised-Parent. (SRAS-R-P) (Kearney, 2002, 2006). The SRAS-R-P is a 24 item scale that measures the relative strength of four functional conditions of school refusal behavior: (1) avoidance of school-related stimuli that provoke negative affectivity, (2) escape from school-related aversive social and/or evaluative situations, (3) attention from significant others, and (4) tangible reinforcement outside of school (Kearney, 2002; Kearney & Silverman, 1996). The scale includes 24 items, six per function, and is available in English and Spanish. The scale includes a 7-point (0-6) Likert scale where 0 =never and 6 =always. A mean item score is calculated for each function. The function with the highest item mean is considered to be the

primary function of the youth's school refusal behavior (Kearney, 2002). The primary function of school refusal behavior for hypotheses 1-4 was determined in part by parent report using the highest reported mean item score on the SRAS-R-P. Mean item scores within 0.25 points of one another were considered equivalent (function 5). Function 5 indicates a mixed functional profile.

The SRAS-R-P has adequate reliability and validity. The scale has shown significant 7-14 day test-retest reliability (mean r=0.67) and parent inter-rater reliability (mean r=0.54) (Kearney, 2002). Kearney (2006) examined the structure of the SRAS-R-P regarding 138 parents of children with school refusal behavior and conducted confirmatory factor analysis. Support was found for the four-factor structure of the SRAS-R-P with the exception of three items (18, 20, and 24) which should be used with caution (Kearney, 2006). Confirmatory factor analysis also supported the four-factor model of the SRAS-R-P in a community sample (Haight, Kearney, Gauger, & Schafer, 2011).

Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos & Moos, 2009). The FES consists of 90 true/false questions that assess personal growth, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structure within families. The FES has 10 subscales: Achievement Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, Cohesion, Conflict, Control, Expressiveness, Independence, Intellectual -Cultural Orientation, Moral-Religious Emphasis, and Organization. The following table provides a description of each subscale:

Table 1.

Relationship Dimensions		
	Cohesion	The degree of commitment, help, and support family members provide for one another
	Expressiveness	The extent to which family members are encouraged to express their feelings directly
	Conflict	The amount of openly expressed anger and conflict among family members
Personal Growth Dimensions		
	Independence	The extent to which family members are assertive, are self-sufficient, and make their own decisions
	Achievement Orientation	How much activities (such as school and work) are cast into an achievement-oriented or competitive framework
	Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	The level of interest in political, intellectual, and cultural activities
	Active-Recreational Orientation	The amount of participation in social and recreational activities

	Moral-Religious Emphasis	The emphasis on ethical and religious issues and values
System Maintenance Dimensions		
	Organization	The degree of importance of clear organization and structure in planning family activities and responsibilities
	Control	How much set rules and procedure are used to run family lives

The FES has distinguished 7 main family types: independence oriented (14.2% of families), achievement oriented (11.2%), intellectual-cultural oriented (13.1%), moral-religious oriented both structured (17.6%) and unstructured (6%), support oriented (15.3%), conflict oriented (5.2%), and disorganized (7.5%). The remaining families do not fit into a specific category. The FES has a Real (R), Ideal (I), and Expected (E) form. The FES Form R was used in this study. FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscales were examined to evaluate hypotheses. Internal consistency is adequate for each subscale with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.61-0.78. Additionally, 2- and 4-month test-retest reliabilities for each subscale ranged from 0.70-0.91 (Moos, 1990).

Procedure

The study was conducted at two locations. The first location was the Clark County Truancy Court held at the Clark County Family Court and Services Center in Las Vegas, Nevada. The court was designed to address Clark County School District students who had been cited for truancy. According to school district policy, three unexcused absences from an entire day of school or a single class results in a letter sent home to parents. After each additional absence or truancy, another letter is sent to parents. After three truancy notices, a youth is issued a truancy citation and ordered to report to truancy court.

Truancy Court was held two afternoons a week, during which time data collection occurred. Youth appeared before a judge with their parent/guardian to plead "guilty" or "not guilty" to the charge of truancy. If a student pled guilty or was proven to be guilty, then they were ordered to partake in a program that required a weekly appearance at court. Students were required to keep attendance logs with teacher signatures for each class attended. Students may also have been ordered to keep a daily planner or attend tutoring, counseling, or other court-mandated programs. Students earned points for attendance, good attitude, and compliance with court orders. Students graduated from the truancy program after earning 100 points, which typically lasted 10 weeks.

Community service was occasionally assigned if a student continued to have significant absences, acted disruptively in school, acted disrespectfully in court, or violated court orders. When sentenced to community service, the judge gave parents and youth the option to substitute 2 hours of community service for participation in this

project. This substitution did not enable youths to fulfill all community service hours and youth were required to fulfill the rest of their service hours at other facilities.

If a youth and parents agreed to participate in the study, then they were directed to a private room outside the courtroom. A trained undergraduate research assistant and a graduate student then explained the purpose of the study to the youth and parent. Both were asked to sign informed consent and assent forms, respectively, to participate. Parents and youth then completed a de-identified packet of measures regarding the youth's school refusal behavior and family environment. The process lasted 60-90 minutes. Spanish translated versions of the informed consent and measures were available. In addition, research assistants spoke Spanish to answer questions. Participation was voluntary and participants were free to discontinue at any time. The remaining hours of community service assigned by the judge then had to be completed. After completion of the packet, participants were thanked and the required signature on the community service forms was given to indicate participation. All data were coded anonymously and stored in a secure location.

The second location for data collection involved a community program designed to address truancy in middle and high school students who were at risk for truancy citations based on prior absences. The Truancy Diversion Program is conducted by the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program. The program was administered in eight at-risk middle schools in the Clark County School District. Approximately 10-20 students at each school were selected for the program due to poor attendance records. The program was voluntary and parents and guardians were encouraged to attend on a weekly basis.

Each youth met with their parent or guardian, a CASA worker, a school official (usually an attendance clerk or counselor), and a judge. Judges were volunteer legal professionals such as family court judges or attorneys. The court was similar to Truancy Court, primarily addressing attendance. However, the diversion program placed more emphasis on contextual factors such as difficulties at home, lack of resources, need for counseling, and academic achievement. Accordingly, many students were required to attend two tutoring sessions and one group counseling session per week.

At the beginning of the program, the parent or guardian and youth were given the opportunity to participate in the current study. Participation in the study was voluntary. Each parent and child dyad was given an explanation of the informed consent and assent. Spanish translation and Spanish forms of the measures were available to parents as necessary. The assessment process lasted 60-90 minutes. Data were coded anonymously and stored in a secure location. Chi-square tests for independence across the two data collection sites revealed no differences with respect to gender and ethnicity. Independent sample t-tests across the two data collection sites revealed no differences with respect to FES subscale scores.

Hypotheses were further examined via combined parent-child report of function of school refusal behavior from SRAS-R-C and SRAS-R-P scores. In addition, because function 4 youth were disproportionately represented, more detailed functional profiles were calculated. The primary function of school refusal behavior was calculated and then secondary functional profiles were obtained by utilizing the next highest mean functional score. If a child primarily refused school for function 4 and secondarily for function 1, for example, then the child was considered to have a 4-1 profile. A youth with a 4-1

profile thus misses school primarily to seek tangible reinforcement outside of school and secondarily to miss school to avoid school-based stimuli that provoke negative affectivity. Secondary functional profiles were also calculated for parent and combined parent-child report.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Family Environment Scale

A one-sample t-test with Bonferroni correction was conducted to determine if FES subscale scores differed from normative values (50). The overall sample scored significantly lower than the norm on the Cohesion ($p<.001$), Independence ($p<.001$), Active-Recreational Orientation ($p<.001$), and Intellectual-Cultural Orientation ($p<.001$) subscales. The sample also scored lower than the norm on the Expressiveness subscale ($p<.05$) and higher than the norm on the Conflict ($p<.01$) subscale, but these differences were not robust following Bonferroni correction (Table 2).

Function of School Refusal Behavior

Parent-reported primary functions of school refusal behavior included function 1 (9.3%; n=20), function 2 (4.2%; n=9), function 3 (18.6%; n=40), function 4 (47.9%; n= 103), and function 5 (20%; n=43). Child-reported primary functions of school refusal behavior included function 1 (5.1%; n=11), function 2 (2.8%; n=6), function 3 (12.6%; n=27), function 4 (65.1%; n=140), and function 5 (14.4%; n=31). Parent-child combined reported primary function of school refusal behavior included function 1 (5.1%; n=11), function 2 (1.4%; n=3), function 3 (12.6%; n=27), function 4 (60.9%; n=131), and function 5 (20%; n=43) (see table 3). Family Environment Scale standard scores across

parent, child, and combined parent-child reported of function of school refusal behavior are included in Tables 4-6.

A disproportionately high number of youths in the overall sample refused school for tangible reinforcement (function 4). Data were thus examined categorically and dimensionally. Categorical analyses included multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) and subsequent one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA). Secondary functional profiles for youth exhibiting primary function 4 were also examined via ANOVA. Data were also examined dimensionally via stepwise regression analyses.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis was that parents of youth who refuse school primarily to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (function 1) would rate their families as more expressive, cohesive, and active, and less conflictive than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior (i.e., higher scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, and Active-Recreational Orientation subscales and lower scores on the FES Conflict subscale). MANOVAs utilizing parent, child, and parent-child combined reported function of school refusal behavior were conducted to evaluate this hypothesis but were not significant. Subsequent ANOVAs were also conducted to examine parent, child, and parent-child reported function of school refusal behavior across FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Active-Recreational Orientation and Conflict subscales. No significant differences were found.

A stepwise regression was conducted to investigate whether child reported (SRAS-R-C) functional scores predicted scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and

Independence subscales. A significant amount of variance in Cohesion was explained by scores on function 1 (R^2=.027; F(1, 213)=5.82, p<.05). Higher function 1 scores related to lower Cohesion scores (β=-.163). Function 1 and 2 scores together also predicted a significant amount of variance on the Cohesion subscale (R^2=.055; R^2 change= -.028; F(2, 212)=6.21, p<.005). Higher function 1 related to lower Cohesion scores (β=-.328), and higher function 2 scores related to higher Cohesion scores (β=.237). Additionally, a significant amount of variance in Conflict was explained by child reported scores on function 1 (R^2=.03; F(1, 213)=6.59, p<.05). Higher function 1 scores related to higher Conflict scores (β=.173). These results did not support Hypothesis 1.

A stepwise regression was conducted to investigate whether parent reported (SRAS-R-P) functional scores predicted scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscales. A significant amount of variance in Cohesion was explained by scores on function 1(R^2 =.076; F(1, 213)= 17.58, p<.001). However, this relationship was not in the expected direction. As scores on function 1 increased, Cohesion scores decreased (β=-.276). This did not support Hypothesis 1.

Another stepwise regression was conducted to investigate whether combined (parent-child) functional scores predicted scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscales. A significant amount of variance on the Cohesion subscale was explained by scores on function 1 (R^2=.081; F(1, 213)=18.71; p<.001). Higher function 1 scores related to lower Cohesion scores (β=-.284). Functions 1 and 2 scores together also predicted a significant amount of variance on the Cohesion subscale (R^2=.099; R^2

change=-.018; $F(1, 212)=11.64$; $p<.001$). Higher function 1 scores related to lower Cohesion scores (β=-.419) and higher function 2 scores related to higher Cohesion scores (β=.190). Hypothesis 1 with respect to Cohesion was not supported.

A stepwise regression was also conducted to determine if FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscale scores predicted parent-child combined reported scores on function 1. A significant amount of variance in function 1 scores was explained by Cohesion subscale scores (R^2=.081; $F(1, 213=18.71$; $p<.001$). Higher Cohesion scores related to lower function 1 scores (β=-.284). Refer to Table 7 for results of stepwise regressions related to hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was that parents of youth who refuse school primarily to escape social or evaluative situations (function 2) were expected to rate their families as more isolated than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior (i.e., lower scores on the FES Intellectual–Cultural Orientation and Active-Recreational Orientation subscales). MANOVAs to evaluate this hypothesis were not significant. ANOVAs to evaluate parent, child, and parent-child reported primary functions of school refusal behavior across standard scores on the FES Intellectual-Cultural Orientation and Active-Recreational Orientation subscales revealed no significant differences.

Stepwise regression analysis revealed no significant predictors for scores on the Intellectual-Cultural Orientation or Active-Recreational Orientation subscales. In addition, scores on the Intellectual-Cultural Orientation and Active-Recreational

Orientation subscales did not predict combined reported scores on function 2. Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis was that parents of youth who refuse school primarily to pursue attention from significant others (function 3) would rate their families as less independent than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior (i.e., lower scores on the FES Independence subscale). MANOVAs to evaluate this hypothesis were not significant. ANOVAs to evaluate parent, child, and parent-child reported primary functions of school refusal behavior across standard scores on the FES Independence subscale revealed no significant differences. Stepwise regression analysis revealed no significant predictors for the Independence subscale. In addition, scores on the Independence subscale did not predict combined reported scores on function 3. Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis was that parents of youth who refuse school primarily to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school (function 4) were expected to rate their families as more conflictive and less cohesive than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior (i.e., higher scores on the FES Conflict subscale and lower scores on the FES Cohesion subscale). MANOVAs conducted to evaluate this hypothesis were not significant. Separate one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to compare parent, child, and combined parent-child reported primary function of school refusal behavior across standard scores on the Conflict and Cohesion subscales. No significant differences were found.

Stepwise regression analyses did provide some support for hypothesis 4 (see table 8). A stepwise regression was conducted to investigate whether parent-reported functional scores predicted scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscales. A significant amount of variance in Conflict scores was explained by parent reported scores on function 4 (R^2=.058; $F(1, 213) = 13.21$, $p<.001$). Higher function 4 scores related to higher Conflict scores (β=.242). In addition, function 1 and 4 scores together predicted a significant amount of variance on the FES Conflict subscale (R^2=.076; R^2 change=-.018; $F(2, 212) = 8.71$, $p<.001$). Higher function 4 scores (β=.193) and higher function 1 scores (β=.141) scores related to higher Conflict scores.

A stepwise regression was then conducted to investigate whether combined parent-child reported functional scores predicted scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscales. Function 1 and 4 scores together predicted a significant amount of variance on the FES Conflict subscale (R^2=.088; $F(2, 212)=10.26$, $p<.001$). Higher function 1 scores (β=.196) and higher function 4 scores (β=.177) related to higher Conflict scores. Child and combined reported functional scores did not predict significant variance in FES Cohesion subscale scores.

A stepwise regression was also conducted to examine whether FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscale scores predicted combined reported scores on function 4. A significant amount of variance in combined reported function 4 scores was explained by Cohesion subscale scores (R^2=.023; $F(1, 213)=5.13$; $p<.05$).

Higher Cohesion scores related to lower function 4 scores (β=-.153). Additionally, scores on the Cohesion and Conflict subscales together explained a significant amount of variance in function 4 scores (R^2=.054; R^2 change= -.031; $F(2, 212)=6.08$; $p<.005$). Higher Cohesion subscale scores related to lower function 4 scores (β=-.049) and higher Conflict subscale scores related to higher function 4 scores (β=.204), thus providing support for hypothesis 4. Refer to Table 8 for stepwise regressions related to hypothesis 4.

Function 4 Profiles

Given the predominance of youth who refused school to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school (function 4), a MANOVA was conducted and revealed significant differences in FES subscale scores with respect to secondary function of school refusal behavior (Wilks' Lambda=.739; $p<.05$). Subsequent ANOVAs revealed significant differences between child-reported secondary function of school refusal behavior and scores on the FES Conflict subscale ($F(2, 101) = 3.27$, $p<.05$). Youth exhibiting function 4-1 scored significantly higher on this subscale than youth exhibiting function 4-3.

Significant differences were also found between parent-reported secondary functions of school refusal behavior and scores on the FES Independence ($F(2, 55) = 5.41$, $p<.01$) and Cohesion ($F(2, 55)=7.84$, $p<.001$) subscales. Youth exhibiting function 4-1 scored significantly lower on these subscales than youth exhibiting functions 4-2 and 4-3.

Significant differences were also found between combined reported secondary function of school refusal behavior and scores on the FES Cohesion ($F(2, 75) = 9.04$,

$p<.001$) and Conflict ($F(2, 75) = 4.49$, $p<.05$). Youth exhibiting function 4-1 scored significantly lower on the Cohesion subscale than youth exhibiting function 4-3. Youth exhibiting function 4-1 scored significantly higher on the Conflict subscale than youth exhibiting function 4-3.

The relationship between combined parent-child reported secondary function of school refusal and family environment was also examined dimensionally via regression analyses (see Table 9). A stepwise regression was conducted to investigate whether combined reported secondary functional scores predicted scores on the FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscales. A significant amount of variance in Cohesion was explained by scores on function 4-1($R^2=0.107$; $F(1, 129) = 15.44$, $p<.001$). Higher function 4-1 scores were associated with lower Cohesion scores ($\beta=-.327$). Similarly, a significant amount of variance in Conflict was also explained by scores on function 4-1 ($R^2=.054$; $F(1, 129) = 7.37$, $p<.01$). Higher function 4-1 scores were associated with higher Conflict scores ($\beta=.232$). In addition, a significant amount of variance in Expressiveness was explained by scores on function 4-2 ($R^2=0.078$; $F(1, 129) = 10.93$, $p<.001$). Higher function 4-2 scores were associated with higher Expressiveness scores ($\beta=.28$).

A stepwise regression was conducted to determine if FES Expressiveness, Cohesion, Conflict, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, and Independence subscale scores predicted combined reported scores on secondary functions 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3. A significant amount of variance on secondary function 4-1 was explained by standard scores on the FES Cohesion subscale ($R^2=.107$; $F(1, 129)$

=15.44, p<.001). Higher Cohesion scores related to lower function 4-1 scores (β=-.33). FES Cohesion and Active-Recreational Orientation subscale scores together also explained a significant amount of variance in function 4-1 scores (R^2=.144; R^2change=.037; F(2, 128) =10.75, p<.001). Higher Cohesion scores related to lower 4-1 scores (β=-.39), and higher Active-Recreational Orientation scores related to higher function 4-1 scores (β=.20).

Post Hoc Analyses

Demographic

Additional MANOVAs regarding primary function of school refusal behavior, as indicated by combined report, and family environment characteristics were conducted according to gender, age, and ethnicity. No significant differences were found with respect to FES subscale scores and function of school refusal behavior for males and females. No significant differences were found with respect to FES subscale scores and function of school refusal behavior for youth aged 14 years and younger and youth aged 15 years and older. No significant differences were found with respect to Asian American, African American, European American, Hispanic, and multiracial/biracial youth and FES subscale scores across function of school refusal behavior.

Language

Overall sample characteristics and hypotheses were further evaluated according to whether parents spoke English (n=135) or Spanish (n=80). One-sample t-tests with Bonferroni correction were conducted to determine if FES subscale scores differed from normative values (50). English-speaking parents rated their families as significantly lower than the norm on the Cohesion (p<.001), Independence (p<.001), Active-

Recreational Orientation (p<.001), and Intellectual-Cultural Orientation (p<.01) subscales. English-speaking parents also rated their families as higher in Conflict than the norm but this result was not robust following Bonferroni correction (Table 10).

Spanish-speaking parents rated their families as significantly lower than the norm on the Expressiveness (p<.001), Independence (p<.001), Intellectual-Cultural Orientation (p<.001), and Active-Recreational Orientation (p<.001) subscales. Spanish-speaking parents also rated their families as lower in Cohesion than the norm but this result was not robust following Bonferroni correction (Table 11).

Hypothesis 1. For English-speaking parents, a stepwise regression indicated that a significant amount of variance in function 1 scores was explained by scores on the Cohesion subscale (R^2=.080; F(1, 133)= 11.55, p<.001). As function 1 scores increased, Cohesion scores decreased (β=-.283). A significant amount of variance in Conflict subscale scores was explained by scores on function 1 (R^2=.109; F(1, 133)=8.48, p<.005). As Conflict scores increased, function 1 scores increased (β=.187) (see Table 12).

For Spanish-speaking parents, a stepwise regression indicated that a significant amount of variance in function1 scores was explained by scores on Cohesion and Active-Recreational Orientation together (R^2=.132; F(2, 77)=5.85, p<.005). As function 1 scores increased, Cohesion scores decreased (β=-.358). This reflects overall analyses but does not support hypothesis 1. As function 1 scores increased, Active-Recreational Orientation scores increased (β=.301). This does support hypothesis 1. Furthermore, a significant amount of variance in Cohesion subscale scores was explained by scores on function1 (R^2=.056; F(1, 78)=4.62, p<.05). As Cohesion scores increased, function 1

scores decreased (β=-.237). Hypothesis 1 predictions for Cohesion and Conflict were not supported regardless of parent language. However, predictions for Active-Recreational Orientation were supported for Spanish-speaking parents (see Table 13).

Hypotheses 2 and 3. English-Spanish comparisons for hypothesis 2 revealed no significant findings regarding function of school refusal behavior or family environment characteristics. English-Spanish comparisons regarding hypothesis 3 revealed that, for English-speaking parents, a significant amount of variance in function 3 scores was explained by scores on the Independence subscale (R^2=.035; F(1, 133)= 4.87, p<.05). As function 3 scores increased, Independence scores decreased (β=-.188). Further evaluation of hypothesis 3 for Spanish-speaking parents revealed no significant findings. Hypothesis 3 was supported for English-speakers only (see Table 12).

Hypothesis 4. For English-speaking parents, a significant amount of variance in function 4 scores was explained by scores on the Cohesion and Conflict subscales together (R=.093; F(2, 132)= 6.75, p<.005). As function 4 scores increased, Cohesion scores decreased (β=-.148). As function 4 scores increased, Conflict scores increased (β=.200). A significant amount of variance in Cohesion scores was also explained by scores on functions 1 and 4 together (R^2=.115; F(2, 132)=8.55, p<.001). As Cohesion scores increased, function 1 scores decreased (β=-.234). As Cohesion scores increased, function 4 scores decreased (β=-.193). In addition, a significant amount of variance in Conflict scores was explained by scores on functions 1 and 4 together (R^2=.109; F(2, 132)= 8.11, p<.001). As Conflict scores increased, function 1 scores increased (β=.187). As Conflict scores increased, function 4 scores increased (β=.230). Analyses regarding

Spanish-speaking parents revealed no significant findings. Hypothesis 4 was supported for English-speakers only (see table 12).

Additional FES Subscales

English- and Spanish-speaking parents rated their families significantly higher than the norm on the FES Moral-Religious Emphasis ($p<.001$) and Control ($p<.001$) subscales.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The present study involved an investigation of the relationship between functions of school refusal behavior and family environment in a community sample of 215 youth and their parent or guardian. The following sections discuss how the key findings of this investigation relate to the existing literature. The clinical implications of these findings, along with study limitations and suggests for future research, are also discussed.

Overall Family Environment Characteristics

The present study is one of the first to examine family environment characteristics for school refusing youth in a community setting. The sample is less cohesive and expressive than the norm, meaning that families overall are likely to have a lower degree of commitment, help, and support for one another and are not likely to encourage family members to express their feelings directly. The families also demonstrated a lower level of participation in social and recreational activities and a lower level of interest in political, intellectual, and cultural activities. Lower than normative values regarding independence were also found, meaning that family members were less likely to be assertive, self-sufficient, or decisive. Families of school refusers in this community

setting were also more conflictive and controlling than the norm. This finding indicates a higher level of openly expressed anger and conflict among family members. Families were also more likely to emphasize set rules and procedures to conduct family life compared to normative values. Families also were more likely to place an emphasis on ethical and religious issues and values than the norm.

Family Characteristics of Youth with Negatively Reinforced School Refusal Behavior

The first predicted result was that parents of youth who refused school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (function 1) would rate their families as more expressive, cohesive, and active, and less conflictive than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior. No significant differences were found across function and family environment characteristics. However, regression analyses did reveal significant relationships between function 1 scores and Cohesion and Conflict scores. Support for a relationship between function 4-1 scores and Active-Recreational Orientation scores was also demonstrated.

Results revealed a significant relationship between youth who refuse school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (function 1) and low levels of familial cohesion. Additional support was demonstrated by a relationship between function 4-1 and Cohesion. This relationship was the same for English- and Spanish-speaking parents. Youth exhibiting this function are likely to come from families with a low degree of commitment, implying that there may not be as much interest in supporting other family members.

A similar relationship between youth with school refusal and disengaged (or low cohesive) families has been cited previously. Bernstein and colleagues (1999) examined

the family dimensions, as indicated by maternal report, of 46 adolescent school refusers. These youth met diagnostic criteria for both anxiety and depressive disorders, thereby providing a comparison to youth exhibiting negatively reinforced school refusal behavior. Negatively reinforced school refusal behavior has been associated with internalizing disorders in clinical samples (Kearney & Albano, 2004). Families in the Bernstein study were characterized by low cohesion, attachment, and commitment to family. Families of function 1 youth thus appear to be similar to families of anxious-depressed school refusers. Youth in these families may experience distress stemming from anxiety and/or depression, and this distress may not be addressed by family members due to low levels of support. This may exacerbate existing psychopathology in these youth and lead to further disengagement and conflict in families. Therefore, low cohesion families may contribute to psychopathology in these youth.

Results also revealed a significant relationship between youth who refuse school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (function 1) and high levels of conflict. Additional support was demonstrated by a relationship between function 4-1 and conflict. An increased amount of openly expressed anger and conflict among family members appears to characterize youth in this group. This relationship was evidenced by the overall sample and by English-speaking parents, but not by Spanish-speaking parents.

Others have also demonstrated a connection between anxiety-based school refusal and conflictive family environments in clinical samples. This relationship was noted decades earlier when Waldron and colleagues (1975) noted that a portion of school refusing youth came from a threatening home environment. More recent empirical studies have also demonstrated that a portion of school refusers are a part of conflict-

oriented families (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). However, the specific function of the youth's refusal in these studies is unclear. An investigation of family environment in a clinical outpatient setting revealed that youth who refuse school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity had a healthy family type. Parents of these youth rated their families as more cohesive, expressive, and active and less conflictive than parents of youth whose school refusal was maintained by other functions (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). The connection between function 1 and high conflict was therefore unexpected in the present study, but may partly reflect chronic absenteeism in this sample and poor understanding of a child's anxiety-based condition.

A relationship between function1 and 4-1 youth and higher scores on the Active-Recreational Orientation subscale was supported. This relationship between function 1 and this subscale was evidenced by Spanish-speaking parents only. This suggests that function 1 youth of Spanish-speaking parents may have families that are likely to participate in social and recreational activities. Families of these youth are also lower in cohesion. The involvement in these activities might imply that some families utilize these activities to pursue positive interactions. These outings may be a family's attempt to cultivate a healthy, more cohesive family environment or it may be that these families prioritize social and recreational activities above school attendance.

The distinction between families of function 1 youth in a clinical setting, characterized by high cohesion and low conflict, and families of function 1 youth in this setting, characterized by low cohesion and high conflict, is an important one (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). These differences may reflect the fact that a large portion of youth in the current sample demonstrated severe and chronic absenteeism. Participants had been

assigned to community service in Truancy Court because they failed to respond to initial remediation techniques. Youth from the Truancy Diversion Program were also identified by the school district to be at risk for severe attendance problems. Given the extensiveness of the absenteeism, the youth's refusal to attend school may have strained family cohesion. These families were perhaps once supportive of one another but, after failed efforts to remediate attendance problems, cohesion may have decreased. Severe absenteeism may also have led to considerable family conflict. Youth in clinical samples may present earlier for treatment and have accumulated fewer absences. Moreover, families that present for clinical treatment may be more involved in the therapy process, which demonstrates commitment and help to other family members.

Other differences between clinical and community samples may have an impact on family environment characteristics. Youth in this community sample were generally of lower socioeconomic status. Previous research indicates that referrals to truancy court settings generally involve families of lower income (Hendricks et al., 2010). In addition, the Truancy Diversion schools were considered to be at-risk and were typically in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Many parents in the program worked long hours or were recently unemployed and actively trying to regain employment. Families also had to address stressors such as lack of transportation, healthcare, and childcare. Cohesion in these families is likely strained, and conflict may arise due to the amount of existing stress. In contrast, families from a clinical setting are likely to be more affluent (with less transportation and other financial issues), medically insured, and better educated (Olfson, Marcus, Druss, & Pincus, 2002; Wang et al., 2005). Families from a clinical setting may

thus have fewer stressors than those in the community sample. Therefore a youth's school refusal may have a different impact on these families.

The second predicted result was that was that parents of youth who refuse school to escape social or evaluative situations (function 2) would rate their families as more isolated than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior. No significant differences were found across function and family environment characteristics. No significant relationships were found regarding function 2 scores and Intellectual-Cultural Orientation or Active-Recreational Orientation scores. In addition, no other family environment characteristics related significantly to function 2. These relationships were the same for English- and Spanish-speaking parents.

These results are inconsistent with previous research regarding anxiety-based school refusal and family environment characteristics. Kearney and Silverman (1995) speculated that youth refusing school to avoid social or evaluative situations may have isolated families. Retrospective studies of adults with social anxiety disorder have also demonstrated that parents of these youth tend to socially isolate the family and underemphasize family sociability (Bruch & Heimberg, 1994; Rapee & Melville, 1997). The lack of relationship between families of function 2 youth and any distinct family environment characteristics may be attributed to a low number of youths in this category (*n*=3 by combined report). A larger sample may provide better insight into the family environment characteristics of youth who refuse school to avoid social or evaluative situations.

Differences between family characteristics of function 2 youth in this sample and in the aforementioned clinical samples may also be attributed to symptom severity.

Individuals in the clinical samples may be more likely to meet criteria for social anxiety disorder, whereas youth in the current sample may be more socially engaged. Families in clinical samples may exhibit isolated characteristics as indicated in the literature, but families in the current sample may not be as clearly defined.

Family Characteristics of Youth with Positively Reinforced School Refusal Behavior

The third predicted result was that parents of youth who refuse school primarily to pursue attention from significant others (function 3) would rate their families as less independent than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior. No significant relationships were found in this regard for the overall sample and for Spanish-speaking parents. However, a significant relationship between function 3 scores and low levels of independence was found for English-speaking parents.

Results for English-speaking parents are consistent with literature regarding school refusal and family environment characteristics. Early psychodynamic models of school refusal emphasized a dependent and overprotective relationship between the child and mother (Hersov, 1960a; Waldron et al., 1975). More recent literature also indicates a connection between youth who refuse school to pursue attention from significant others and low levels of independence (Kearney & Silverman, 1995).

The lack of findings regarding Spanish-speaking parents may be attributed to language and overall family environment characteristics. Literature regarding this relationship in clinical samples involves participants who are predominantly Caucasian and almost always English-speaking (Bernstein et al., 1999; Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Moreover, measures used in the current study were validated on English-speakers and were translated into Spanish (Kearney 2002, 2006; Moos & Moos, 1986). Spanish-

speakers may have interpreted items differently than English-speakers. Spanish-speaking parents did, however, endorse lower than normative levels of independence regardless of function. This provides qualified support for hypothesis 3.

The fourth predicted result was that parents of youth who refuse school to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school (function 4) would rate their families as more conflictive and less cohesive than parents of youth exhibiting other primary functions of school refusal behavior. For the overall sample and for English-speaking parents, a significant positive relationship was found between function 4 scores and Conflict subscale scores, and a significant negative relationship was found between function 4 scores and Cohesion subscale scores. These youths may be likely to be in families with openly expressed anger and conflict. Families of these youth are also likely to exhibit a lower degree of commitment, help, and support for family members. No significant relationships were found regarding function 4 and family environment characteristics for Spanish-speaking parents.

The findings for the overall sample and English-speaking parents are consistent with existing literature regarding non-anxiety-based school refusal and family environment. Kearney and Silverman (1995) indicated that families of youth who refuse school to pursue tangible reinforcement were low in cohesion and high in conflict. Similarities between clinical and community samples may be due to a strong connection between non-anxiety-based school refusal and problematic family environments characterized by low cohesion and high levels of conflict. This connection may in part be attributed to youth who refuse school for tangible reinforcement and who exhibit other externalizing behaviors. Truant youth, for example, commonly engage in fighting,

vandalism, and increased smoking and alcohol use (Charlton & Blair, 1989; Pritchard, Cotton, & Cox, 1992). Youth who refuse school have also been found to meet criteria for conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder (Berg et al., 1993; Bernstein & Garfinkel, 1986; Kearney & Silverman, 1996). These and other related behaviors are likely to strain family cohesion and lead to significant family conflict.

Observational evidence from the courts suggested that many parents in the community sample were unaware of the nature and extent of their youth's absenteeism. This implies poor communication between the family and the school, as well as among family members. Lax parental supervision and low levels of support were also evidenced by the fact that parents did not notice their child's failure to complete school work or engage in conversations about school. Given the lax supervision, these youth may have engaged in other disruptive behaviors. Given the low degree of support and help in these families, externalizing behaviors are likely to lead to family conflict.

The lack of relationship between function 4 youth and any family environment characteristics for Spanish-speaking parents may be accounted for by several factors. Spanish-speaking parents of function 4 youth were expected to rate their families as higher in conflict and lower in cohesion. The Spanish-speaking sample did not, however, endorse levels of conflict and cohesion different from the norm. This may be attributed to socially desirable responding. Certain items on the Conflict subscale (i.e., "We fight a lot in our family," "Family members sometimes get so angry they throw things," and "Family members sometimes hit each other") might be considered stigmatizing. Parents might have also been hesitant to endorse these items given the courtroom setting. In addition, some Cohesion subscale items might have been misinterpreted, leading to

inconsistent responding. Examples include "We often seem to be killing time at home" and "Family members really back each other up." These factors may account for differences in family environment characteristics for English- and Spanish-speakers.

Clinical Implications

The present study is one of the first to examine the relationship between school refusal behavior and family environment characteristics in a diverse community setting. The study provides a comprehensive picture of the family characteristics a clinician is likely to encounter in this type of setting. This highlights the importance of examining family environment characteristics in youth referred to the legal system for truancy. The present study thus has implications for assessment and treatment.

The present study provided support for the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised and the viability of linking functions of school refusal behavior to family environment characteristics. This measure can be used in community settings to quickly provide a basic indicator of a youth's family environment. A clinician could determine the primary function of a youth's school refusal behavior based on child, parent, or combined parent-child report. Such data may then help determine which family environment characteristics are likely for that youth.

If the assessment process reveals that a youth refuses school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (function 1) or refuses school to pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school (function 4), then a clinician could preliminarily hypothesize that the youth's family environment is marked by low cohesion and high conflict. The family environment of youth refusing school to avoid social or evaluative situations (function 2) and youth who refuse school to pursue attention from significant

others (function 3) is not well defined in this community sample. No specific characteristics were found to be associated with these functions, but the family characteristics of the sample as a whole still suggest that a closer individual evaluation is warranted.

The present study also has implications for treatment, especially family-based treatment. Several treatment strategies for school refusing youth have been cited in the literature (Kearney, 2001; Kearney & Silverman, 1999; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Tolin et al., 2009). Many studies include families as part of treatment (Heyne, King, & Tonge, 2004; King et al., 1998). Most youth in the present study refused school to seek outside tangible reinforcement, so family treatment strategies geared toward these youth can be used. Research suggests that current therapies for function 4 youth rely heavily on family members. These therapies often emphasize enhancing problem solving skills, reducing conflict, rewarding school attendance, and punishing school absence (Kearny & Albano, 1999). Therapeutic interventions for these youth should also aim to enhance cohesion. Communication skills training and enhancing problems solving skills may be useful in this regard. This type of therapy may also be helpful for youth who refuse school to avoid stimuli that provoke negative affectivity given that the groups have similar family environments.

Study Limitations

One of the main limitations of the present study was reliance on parent report of family functioning. This may have provided a biased view of family environment characteristics and limited the ability to generalize findings. Different relationships between function of school refusal and family environment may have been found if youth

report of family functioning was examined. The present study also involved only one measure of family environment. Reliance on one measure may have limited the results and therefore the ability to generalize findings. The use of multiple assessments of family functioning may be advantageous and provide a more comprehensive picture of family characteristics.

Another limitation of the study was sampling bias toward youth who refuse school to pursue tangible reinforcement. The hypotheses focused on exploring differences across four functions of school refusal behavior. However, youth exhibiting functions 1, 2, and 3 were underrepresented in this sample. The current study could have benefited from a larger number of youth in functions 2 and 3 in particular. Future research would benefit from larger sample sizes so that more youth exhibiting these functions can be examined more closely.

Sample recruitment was also biased by the fact that the study included only youth who did not comply with the court's directives and were thus issued community service and the opportunity to participate in this study. Other families declined to participate in the study. Future studies may therefore benefit by allowing all youths in the community setting to participate to obtain a more comprehensive view of family environment characteristics.

Another limitation was that mixed profile youth (function 5) were excluded from categorical analyses. These youth were included in dimensional analyses and the overall assessment of family environment characteristics. Future research may benefit from examining families of these youth more closely.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research can expand upon the findings of the present study. The present study utilized parent report of family functioning, so obtaining youth report of family functioning can provide a more complete picture of family environment characteristics. Other methods such as behavioral observations or clinician rating forms can also be used to obtain more comprehensive information. The Family Assessment Measure (FAM; Skinner, Steinhauer, & Santa-Barbara, 1983), the Beavers-Timberlawn Family Evaluation Scale (BT; Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips, 1976), and the McMaster Clinical Rating Scale (CRS; Miller et al., 1994) represent pertinent examples. Researchers can then examine these data with the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised to evaluate the relationship between family environment and functions of school refusal behavior.

Future researchers may also wish to consider other important youth and family characteristics. Severity of absenteeism, as indicated by number of absences, was not directly assessed in this study. Future research might benefit from examining the relationship between severity of absenteeism and family environment characteristics. In particular, family characteristics such as income, parent employment status, number of hours a week worked by parents, or frequency of parent contact with school officials could be examined. Further evaluation of these factors and their effect on family environment may yield useful information.

Future researchers should also obtain a measure of family environment before and after the onset of school refusal. This can allow researchers to see if certain family

environment characteristics predict the occurrence or severity of school refusal behavior. Likewise, researchers can investigate how a youth's school refusal may impact family environment. Future researchers can also investigate how current treatment plans impact family environment characteristics. Furthermore, future treatment plans can be developed prescriptively to account for various types of family functioning.

This study highlights the importance of evaluating the family environment characteristics of youth referred to the legal process for problematic absenteeism. This research also supports the use of the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R; Kearney 2002; 2006) for determining the primary function of a youth's school refusal behavior and for providing clinicians with some family environment characteristics of youth depending on the maintaining factors of their behavior. This study also supports the incorporation of family into treatment strategies for school refusing youth.

Tables

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of FES Standard Scores across Entire Sample

Scale	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cohesion	215	44.40***	14.49
Expressiveness	215	48.40*	9.61
Conflict	215	52.04**	11.41
Independence	215	41.30***	12.22
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	215	46.37***	9.17
Active-Recreational Orientation	215	44.29	10.08
Moral-Religious Emphasis	215	52.65***	8.41
Control	215	54.77***	8.84
Achievement Orientation	215	49.88	9.84
Organization	215	49.47	10.47

*Note.**p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 from normative value (50).

Table 3

Primary Function of School Refusal Behavior by Reporter

Reporter	Function	N	Percent
Parent	1	20	9.3
	2	9	4.2
	3	40	18.6
	4	103	47.9
	5	43	20.0
Child	1	11	5.1
	2	6	2.8
	3	27	12.6
	4	140	65.1
	5	31	14.4
Parent-Child	1	11	5.1
	2	3	1.4
	3	27	12.6
	4	131	60.9
	5	43	20.0

Table 4

FES Standard Scores across Parent Reported Function of School Refusal Behavior

Scale	Function	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cohesion				
	1	20	40.20	12.71
	2	9	39.00	13.36
	3	40	46.63	15.82
	4	103	44.65	14.26
Expressiveness				
	1	20	45.35	11.71
	2	9	47.33	10.11
	3	40	49.08	8.79
	4	103	48.09	9.82
Conflict				
	1	20	52.00	11.66
	2	9	54.89	11.69
	3	40	48.90	10.31
	4	103	52.22	11.89
Independence				
	1	20	40.20	11.13
	2	9	35.22	10.41
	3	40	40.82	16.04
	4	103	41.78	11.25
Intellectual Cultural Orientation				

	1	20	44.80	8.09
	2	9	41.89	8.10
	3	40	47.20	9.19
	4	103	46.24	9.56
Active-Recreational Orientation				
	1	20	45.40	8.89
	2	9	42.22	8.97
	3	40	44.18	10.35
	4	103	43.85	10.29

Table 5

FES Standard Scores across Child Reported Function of School Refusal Behavior

Scale	Function	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cohesion				
	1	11	43.18	14.30
	2	6	55.33	9.44
	3	27	47.04	14.99
	4	140	44.21	14.46
Expressiveness				
	1	11	48.36	10.13
	2	6	53.83	8.31
	3	27	50.48	8.12
	4	140	48.35	9.57
Conflict				
	1	11	48.27	8.92
	2	6	54.17	3.49
	3	27	51.74	11.54
	4	140	51.96	11.58
Independence				
	1	11	39.91	14.43
	2	6	34.33	12.04
	3	27	42.04	13.15
	4	140	41.70	11.39
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation				

	1	11	44.27	9.78
	2	6	50.33	5.75
	3	27	47.19	8.64
	4	140	46.21	9.14
Active-Recreational Orientation				
	1	11	41.27	10.29
	2	6	45.50	4.18
	3	27	42.67	11.80
	4	140	44.84	9.73

Table 6

FES Standard Scores across Combined Report of Function of School Refusal Behavior

Subscale	Function	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cohesion				
	1	11	43.73	15.69
	2	3	56.33	10.26
	3	27	43.81	14.10
	4	131	44.26	14.03
Expressiveness				
	1	11	46.64	12.16
	2	3	52.67	12.50
	3	27	50.22	8.86
	4	131	48.18	9.57
Conflict				
	1	11	50.64	10.67
	2	3	58.00	3.46
	3	27	51.74	10.92
	4	131	52.41	11.46
Independence				
	1	11	37.00	12.39
	2	3	45.00	0.00
	3	27	41.48	16.27
	4	131	41.49	11.56
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation				
	1	11	47.27	10.02

	2	3	48.67	8.62
	3	27	47.19	9.65
	4	131	45.92	9.03
Active-Recreational Orientation				
	1	11	42.64	10.07
	2	3	44.67	5.77
	3	27	44.26	11.65
	4	131	44.56	9.95

Table 7

Stepwise Regressions for Hypothesis 1

Reporter	Predictor (β)	Predicted Variable	R^2
Child	Function 1 (-.16)	Cohesion	.03
Child	Function1 (-.33)	Cohesion	.06
	Function 2 (.24)		
Child	Function 1 (.17)	Conflict	.03
Parent	Function 1 (-.28)	Cohesion	.08
Parent-Child	Function 1 (-.28)	Cohesion	.08
Parent-Child	Function 1 (-.42)	Cohesion	.10
	Function 2 (.19)		
Parent-Child	Cohesion (-.28)	Function 1	.08

Table 8

Stepwise Regressions for Hypothesis 4

Reporter	Predictor (β)	Predicted Variable	R^2
Parent	Function 4 (.24)	Conflict	.06
Parent	Function 1 (.14)	Conflict	.08
	Function 4 (.19)		
Parent-Child	Function 1 (.20)	Conflict	.09
	Function 4 (.18)		
Parent-Child	Cohesion (-.15)	Function 4	.02
Parent-Child	Cohesion (-.05)	Function 4	.05
	Conflict (.20)		

Table 9

Stepwise Regressions for Secondary Function 4

Reporter	Predictor (β)	Predicted Variable	R^2
Parent-Child	Function 4-1 (-.33)	Cohesion	.11
Parent-Child	Function 4-1 (.23)	Conflict	.05
Parent-Child	Function 4-2 (.28)	Expressiveness	.08
Parent-Child	Cohesion (-.33)	Function 4-1	.11
Parent-Child	Cohesion (-.39)	Function 4-1	.14
	Active-Recreational Orientation (.20)		

Table 10

Means and Standard Deviations of FES Standard Scores across English-speaking Sample

Scale	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cohesion	135	43.61***	14.93
Expressiveness	135	49.46	9.81
Conflict	135	52.42*	12.37
Independence	135	41.62***	11.87
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	135	47.87**	8.99
Active-Recreational Orientation	135	44.79***	10.75
Moral-Religious Emphasis	135	52.50***	8.84
Control	135	55.16***	9.11
Achievement Orientation	135	50.40	9.96
Organization	135	48.99	11.07

*Note.**p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 from normative value (50).

Table 11

Means and Standard Deviations of FES Standard Scores across Spanish-speaking Sample

Scale	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cohesion	80	45.74**	13.72
Expressiveness	80	46.60***	9.02
Conflict	80	51.40	9.62
Independence	80	40.76***	12.84
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	80	43.83***	8.95
Active-Recreational Orientation	80	43.46***	8.85
Moral-Religious Emphasis	80	52.91***	7.67
Control	80	54.11***	8.39
Achievement Orientation	80	49.01	9.64
Organization	80	50.29	9.36

*Note.**p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 from normative value (50).

Table 12

Stepwise Regressions for English-Speaking Parents

Hypothesis	Predictor (β)		Predicted Variable	R^2
1	Cohesion	(-.28)	Function 1	.08
	Function 1	(.19)	Conflict	.11
3	Independence	(-.19)	Function 3	.04
4	Cohesion	(-.15)	Function 4	.09
	Conflict	(.20)		
	Function 1	(-.23)	Cohesion	.11
	Function 4	(-.19)		
	Function 1	(.18)	Conflict	.11
	Function 4	(.23)		

Table 13

Stepwise Regressions for Spanish-Speaking Parents

Hypothesis	Predictor (β)		Predicted Variable	R^2
1	Cohesion	(-.36)	Function 1	.13
	Active-Recreational Orientation	(.30)		
	Cohesion	(-.24)	Cohesion	.06

Appendix A: Family Environment Scale

There are 90 statements. They are statements about families. You are to decide which of these statements are true of your family and which are false. If you think the statement is *True* or mostly *True* of your family, make an X in the box labeled true. If you think the statement is *False* or mostly *False* of your family, make and X in the box labeled false.

You may feel that some of the statements are true for some family members and false for others. Mark True if the statement is true for most members. Mark False if the statement is false for most family members. If the members are evenly divided, decide what is the stronger overall impression and answer accordingly.

Remember, we would like to know what your family seems like to you. So *do not* try to figure out how other members see your family, but *do* give us your general impression of your family for each statement.

1. Family members really help and support one another.	☐ True	☐ False
2. Family members often keep their feelings to themselves.	☐ True	☐ False
3. We fight a lot in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
4. We don't do things on our own very often in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
5. We feel it is important to be best as whatever you do.	☐ True	☐ False
6. We often talk about political and social problems.	☐ True	☐ False
7. We spend most weekends and evenings at home.	☐ True	☐ False
8. Family members attend church, synagogue, or Sunday school fairly often.	☐ True	☐ False
9. Activities in our family are pretty carefully planned.	☐ True	☐ False
10. Family members are rarely ordered around.	☐ True	☐ False
11. We often seem to be killing time at home.	☐ True	☐ False

12. We say anything we want to around home.	☐ True	☐ False
13. Family members rarely become openly angry.	☐ True	☐ False
14. In our family, we are strongly encouraged to be independent.	☐ True	☐ False
15. Getting ahead in life is very important in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
16. We rarely go to lectures, plays or concerts.	☐ True	☐ False
17. Friends often come over for dinner or to visit.	☐ True	☐ False
18. We don't say prayers in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
19. We are generally very neat and orderly.	☐ True	☐ False
20. There are very few rules to follow in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
21. We put a lot of energy into what we do at home.	☐ True	☐ False
22. It's hard to "blow off steam" at home without upsetting somebody.	☐ True	☐ False
23. Family members sometimes get so angry they throw things.	☐ True	☐ False
24. We think things out for ourselves in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
25. How much money a person makes is not very important to us.	☐ True	☐ False
26. Learning about new and different things is very important in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
27. Nobody in our family is active in sports, Little League, bowling, etc.	☐ True	☐ False
28. We often talk about the religious meaning of Christmas, Passover, or other holidays.	☐ True	☐ False
29. It's often hard to find things when you need them in our household.	☐ True	☐ False
30. There is one family member who makes most of the decisions.	☐ True	☐ False
31. There is a feeling of togetherness in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
32. We tell each other about our personal problems.	☐ True	☐ False

33. Family members hardly ever lose their tempers.	☐ True	☐ False
34. We come and go as we want to in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
35. We believe in competition and "may the best man win."	☐ True	☐ False
36. We are not that interested in cultural activities.	☐ True	☐ False
37. We often go to movies, sports events, camping, etc.	☐ True	☐ False
38. We don't believe in heaven or hell.	☐ True	☐ False
39. Being on time is very important in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
40. There are set ways of doing things at home.	☐ True	☐ False
41. We rarely volunteer when something has to be done at home.	☐ True	☐ False
42. If we feel like doing something on the spur of the moment we often just pick up and go.	☐ True	☐ False
43. Family members often criticize each other.	☐ True	☐ False
44. There is very little privacy in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
45. We always strive to do things just a little better the next time.	☐ True	☐ False
46. We rarely have intellectual discussions.	☐ True	☐ False
47. Everyone in our family has a hobby or two.	☐ True	☐ False
48. Family members have strict ideas about what is right and wrong.	☐ True	☐ False
49. People change their minds often in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
50. There is a strong emphasis on following rules in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
51. Family members really back each other up.	☐ True	☐ False
52. Someone usually gets upset if you complain in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
53. Family members sometimes hit each other.	☐ True	☐ False
54. Family members almost always rely on themselves when a problem comes up.	☐ True	☐ False

55. Family members rarely worry about job promotions, school grades, etc.	☐ True	☐ False
56. Someone in our family plays a musical instrument.	☐ True	☐ False
57. Family members are not very involved in recreational activities outside work and school.	☐ True	☐ False
58. We believe there are some things you just have to take on faith.	☐ True	☐ False
59. Family members make sure their rooms are neat.	☐ True	☐ False
60. Everyone has an equal say in family decisions.	☐ True	☐ False
61. There is very little group spirit in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
62. Money and paying bills is openly talked about in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
63. If there's a disagreement in our family, we try hard to smooth things over and keep the peace.	☐ True	☐ False
64. Family members strongly encourage each other to stand up for their rights.	☐ True	☐ False
65. In our family, we don't try that hard to succeed.	☐ True	☐ False
66. Family members often go to the library.	☐ True	☐ False
67. Family members sometimes attend courses or take lessons for some hobby or interest (outside of school).	☐ True	☐ False
68. In our family each person has different ideas about what is right and wrong.	☐ True	☐ False
69. Each person's duties are clearly defined in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
70. We can do whatever we want to in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
71. We really get along well with each other.	☐ True	☐ False
72. We are usually careful about what we say to each other.	☐ True	☐ False
73. Family members often try to one-up or out-do each other.	☐ True	☐ False
74. It's hard to be by yourself without hurting someone's feelings in our household.	☐ True	☐ False

75. “Work before play” is the rule in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
76. Watching T.V. is more important then reading in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
77. Family members go out a lot.	☐ True	☐ False
78. The Bible is a very important book in our home.	☐ True	☐ False
79. Money is not handled very carefully in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
80. Rules are pretty inflexible in our household.	☐ True	☐ False
81. There is plenty of time and attention for everyone in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
82. There are a lot of spontaneous discussions in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
83. In our family, we believe you don’t ever get anywhere by raising your voice.	☐ True	☐ False
84. We are not really encouraged to speak up for ourselves in our family.	☐ True	☐ False
85. Family members are often compared with others as to how well they are doing at work or school.	☐ True	☐ False
86. Family members really like music, art and literature.	☐ True	☐ False
87. Our main form of entertainment is watching T.V. or listening to the radio.	☐ True	☐ False
88. Family members believe that if you sin you will be punished.	☐ True	☐ False
89. Dishes are usually done immediately after eating.	☐ True	☐ False
90. You can’ get way with much in our family.	☐ True	☐ False

Appendix B: School Refusal Assessment Scale- Revised- Parent

School Refusal Assessment Scale-revised-PARENT

1. How often does your child have bad feelings about going to school because he/she is afraid of something related to school (for example, tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

2. How often does your child stay away from school because it is hard for him/her to speak with the other kids at school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

3. How often does your child feel he/she would rather be home with you or your spouse than go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

4. When your child is not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often does he/she leave the house and do something fun?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

5. How often does your child stay away from school because he/she will feel sad or depressed if he/she goes to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

6. How often does your child stay away from school because he/she feels embarrassed in front of other people at school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

7. How often does your child think about you or your spouse or family when in school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

8. When your child is not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often does he/she talk to or see other people (other than your family)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

9. How often does your child feel worse at school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to how he/she feels at home with friends?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

10. How often does your child stay away from school because he/she does not have many friends there?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

11. How much would your child rather be with his/her family than go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

12. When your child is not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how much does he/she enjoy doing different things (for example, being with friends, going places)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

13. How often does your child have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) when he/she thinks about school on Saturday and Sunday?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

14. How often does your child stay away from certain places in school (e.g., hallways, places where certain groups of people are) where he/she would have to talk to someone?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

15. How much would your child rather be taught by you or your spouse at home than by his/her teacher at school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

16. How often does your child refuse to go to school because he/she wants to have fun outside of school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

17. If your child had less bad feelings (for example, scared, nervous, sad) about school, would it be easier for him/her to go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

18. If it were easier for your child to make new friends, would it be easier for him/her to go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

19. Would it be easier for your child to go to school if you or your spouse went with him/her?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

20. Would it be easier for your child to go to school if he/she could do more things he/she liked to do after school hours (for example, being with friends)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

21. How much more does your child have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to other kids his/her age?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

22. How often does your child stay away from people at school compared to other kids his/her age?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half	Usually	Almost	Always

			The Time		Always	

23. Would your child like to be home with you or your spouse more than other kids his/her age would?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

24. Would your child rather be doing fun things outside of school more than most kids his/her age?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

Appendix C: School Refusal Assessment Scale- Revised- Child

School Refusal Assessment Scale-REVISED-**CHILD**

1. How often do you have bad feelings about going to school because you are afraid of something related to school (for example, tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

2. How often do you stay away from school because it is hard to speak with the other kids at school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

3. How often do you feel you would rather be with your parents than go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

4. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you leave the house and do something fun?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

5. How often do you stay away from school because you will feel sad or depressed if you go?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

6. How often do you stay away from school because you feel embarrassed in front of other people at school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

7. How often do you think about your parents or family when in school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

8. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you talk to or see other people (other than your family)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

9. How often do you feel worse at school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to how you feel at home with friends?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

10. How often do you stay away from school because you do not have many friends there?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

11. How much would you rather be with your family than go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

12. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how much do you enjoy doing different things (for example, being with friends, going places)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

13. How often do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) when you think about school on Saturday and Sunday?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

14. How often do you stay away from certain places in school (e.g., hallways, places where certain groups of people are) where you would have to talk to someone?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

15. How much would you rather be taught by your parents at home than by your teacher at school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

16. How often do you refuse to go to school because you want to have fun outside of school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

17. If you had less bad feelings (for example, scared, nervous, sad) about school, would it be easier for you to go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

18. If it were easier for you to make new friends, would it be easier to go to school?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

19. Would it be easier for you to go to school if your parents went with you?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

20. Would it be easier for you to go to school if you could do more things you like to do after school hours (for example, being with friends)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

21. How much more do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to other kids your age?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

22. How often do you stay away from people at school compared to other kids your age?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

23. Would you like to be home with your parents more than other kids your age would?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

24. Would you rather be doing fun things outside of school more than most kids your age?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half The Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always

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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Rachel M. Schafer

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, 2008
Saint Louis University, Missouri

Publications:
Schafer, R.M., Handal, P.J., Brawer, P.A., & Ubinger, M. (2009). Training and Education in Religion/Spirituality Within APA-Accredited Clinical Psychology Programs: 8 Years Later. *Journal of Religion and Health, 50*, 232-239.

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Kearney, C.A., Haight, C., Gauger, M., & Schafer, R. (in press). School refusal behavior. In R.J.R. Levesque (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of adolescence*. New York: Springer.

Thesis Title: The Relationship between the Functions of School Refusal Behavior and Family Environment

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Christopher A. Kearney, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Michelle Carro, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Jennifer Rennels, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Lori Olafson, Ph.D.